



Thriving by Design

One Minnesota Equity Blueprint Policy Priorities

For the 2019-20 Legislature

For Rural and Metro Together

For Racial and Regional Equity

For an Equitable and Clean Economy

Introducing the “One Minnesota Equity Blueprint Policy Agenda”

Minnesota is at a crossroads. If we go in one direction, we can arrive at a future where each and every Minnesotan, regardless of race or geography or gender or ability, has access to the opportunity to succeed and to share their success. This is a future where prosperity reaches all households, and where our climate and natural resources are protected by clean energy, and state of the art buildings and transportation systems. If we choose a different direction, we will continue to rely on old economic and governmental systems that were built to benefit some Minnesotans while they keep others in conditions of intergenerational poverty and illness, and while our economy shrinks due to the impacts of sustained racial and regional exclusion, environmental degradation and climate change.

The members of the Thriving by Design Network know that we face an urgent and important choice. Many of us have spent decades working to build “One Minnesota,” a place that works for every person, regardless of where or to whom they were born. We know that the old system of exclusion and opportunity for a few is extremely costly and that “equity is the superior growth model” (Policy Link, 2014). Our work also has made clear that Minnesota’s challenges are interconnected, as are the best solutions. For instance, some specific priorities

in this document pertaining to racial equity in education intersect with priorities associated with economic development and criminal justice reform.

On the pages that follow, Growth & Justice, OneMN.org and our Thriving by Design Network present legislative policy priorities for the 2019-20 biennium. During our shared “Thriving by Design” process, begun last June, more than 300 individuals and dozens of organizations – from across rural, small-town, suburban and urban Minnesota - described their concerns and offered their recommendations for improvement. This process involved smaller community meetings around the state and larger convenings in Greater Minnesota, hosted by the Upper Sioux Community in Granite Falls, with another large gathering in Hinckley at the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Casino. Our legislative priorities have been further informed by issue briefs written for us by many of Minnesota’s most experienced professionals and community leaders working on the front lines of each issue.

The 2019-2020 legislative priorities are only a start. In coming months, we will elaborate and expand on these initial legislative priorities with a phased roll-out of the more detailed “One Minnesota Equity Blueprint.” This comprehensive document will describe our long-term vision and serve as a guidebook over the next decade for policies and practices that people, businesses, communities and governments can implement to achieve a more equitable Minnesota.

Three key themes distinguish this initial set of legislative priorities and our ultimate One Minnesota Equity Blueprint: a persistent concern and focus on rural and urban interdependence, a high priority on racial equity and other aspects of social justice, and a stronger integration of climate action with equity in all aspects of policy-making.

We urge legislators to join us as we drive more democratic engagement in our shared civic space and frame these challenges, viewing them as positive opportunities rather than crises to avoid. Innovative investments in human potential, equitable economic growth, physical infrastructure, civic engagement, and climate action present enormous and exciting new opportunities to build a Minnesota that is more prosperous and more fair than ever before.

Included below each issue category are links to research reports and policy organizations that are in alignment with our solutions, or that we have found useful or relevant in preparing these priorities. The linked organizations are not necessarily formal supporters of all our priorities.

Finally, we are grateful for the support and encouragement of the Blandin Foundation, the McKnight Foundation, and generous individual donors to Growth & Justice and OneMN.org.

2019-2020 One Minnesota Equity Blueprint Policy Agenda

Democracy and Civic Health

Problems:

Despite Minnesota's high rankings on voter participation compared with other states, about 40 percent of our eligible voters do not vote in mid-term elections and about 25 percent do not vote in presidential elections. Fewer people are stepping up to be candidates, particularly in local rural elections, and people of color are under-represented in elected office statewide. Meanwhile, citizen dissatisfaction is growing over the influence of wealthy individuals and powerful special interests in both election outcomes and policy-making process. Disenfranchisement rates for African-Americans, American Indians and Latinos are many times higher than for the general population. A potential undercount in the 2020 Census puts Minnesota at greater risk of losing one of its eight congressional seats.

Solutions:

- Ensure non-partisan redistricting and a permanent bulwark against gerrymandering through creation of a Citizens Independent Redistricting Commission which has the authority to draw boundaries that result in proportional representation for people of color and low-income communities, and without regard to partisan advantage.
- Ensure an accurate and complete count for Census 2020, by increasing state investment in organizing a successful count of all Minnesotans in this Census, future Censuses, and American Community Survey data collection.
- Support "Restore the Vote" movement and efforts to restore voting rights for formerly incarcerated women and men who are still on parole. Consider also making voting truly an inalienable right by restoring the vote for those currently incarcerated, as in Vermont and Maine.
- Expand registration by automatically registering eligible Minnesota voters who interact with government agencies.

Links:

[Restore the Vote](#), [Common Cause](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#)

Economic Development

Problem:

Minnesota's economic indicators point to stalled, or declining, conditions in many parts of Greater Minnesota, as well as in lower-income neighborhoods across regional centers and the urban core. Barriers to economic growth include limited access to capital, a shortage of skilled and unskilled workers (due to retirement of older workers, low wages and benefits, exclusion of workers with disabilities and historical tolerance of disparities in employment and income by race, gender and disability status), and an environment in which stagnant wages cannot match rising housing, health care and childcare costs.

Solutions:

- Improve access to capital, including initial study of creating a new state bank that provides capital to local entrepreneurs and innovative enterprises with broad public benefit. And invest in business incubators and cross sector partnerships that support emerging commercial enterprises.
- Increase investment in widening access to quality child care for (working or studying) families, by increasing funding for CCAP and assisting communities in Greater Minnesota to develop more robust child care solutions for working families.
- Enact policies that lift wages and benefits for low-pay workers and provide an insurance program that ensures paid family and medical leave, while protecting the right of local communities to opt for higher wage minimums.
- Invest more development dollars through DEED and other state resources into agriculture, renewable energy and tourism for Greater MN.
- Expand Career Pathways programs for under-employed adults, including wraparound social services and personal navigators in training courses that produce credentials for careers in demand.
- Support new markets for agriculture products and farmers who seek to diversify their crops.
- Strengthen Minnesota's farm economy and expand equitable access to farming as a way of life, maintaining sensible balance between climate action, equity and current economic reality. Fund programs that assist with succession planning, and encourage ownership by Latinos, Hmong and other people of color interested in farming. Offer a MinnesotaCare buy-In option to all farmers.
- Expand investment that connects people with disabilities with mainstream jobs that respect their dignity and provide living wages. Improve transportation services and explore the potential of autonomous vehicles for the disabled.
- Enact policies that tap the full potential and advance the economic status of women and LGBTQ communities.

Links:

[Minnesota Association of Development Organizations](#), [Greater MSP](#), [Main Street Alliance](#), [Institute for Agriculture and Trade](#), [Minnesota Food Association](#), [Minnesota State Council on Disability](#), [Center on Women, Gender and Public Policy](#), [Womens March MN](#), [OutFront MN](#)

Climate Action and Environment

Problem:

The federal government's latest climate report (NCA4) warns of a host of immediate and long-term climate change threats to Minnesota and the Midwest, including increased flooding, the spread of pollution and invasive species in our precious waters, new forms of blight and disease on our crops, and degradation of forests and wilderness treasures. Some experts predict that agricultural output in the Midwest could revert to levels of the late 1970s. Simultaneous with these environmental threats, corporate and state interests are permitted to override tribal sovereignty, threatening nationhood and valued ways of life. Many studies show that low-income households and people of color suffer disproportionately from the effects of climate change, declining water quality and other environmental damage.

Solutions:

- Require consideration of greenhouse gas reduction and climate resiliency in all private development and public infrastructure investments. All public facilities must be LEED certified.
- Honor the sovereign rights of Native American nations to protect their environments and subsist from natural resources.
- Increase the Minnesota Renewable Energy Standard and pursue every available policy option to transition to 100 percent renewable energy.
- Enact policies and invest more to protect and restore the quality of Minnesota's lakes, rivers and groundwater.

Links:

[Minnesota's 100% Campaign](#) , [RE-AMP](#), [Fresh Energy](#), [Great Plains Institute](#), [Rural Renewable Energy Alliance](#), [Indigenous Environmental Network](#), [Minnesota Environmental Partnership](#), [Clean Water Action](#), [Minnesota Indian Affairs Council](#)

Infrastructure, Transportation and Transit

Problems:

Minnesota's infrastructure is in trouble. The latest report from the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave Minnesota a 'C' for the overall condition of the state's infrastructure. Roads, drinking water and transit each scored lower than C grades. Most of our systems were built in the mid to late 20th century, before innovations in materials and technology were developed, and expanded environmental awareness resulted in regulation that require upgrades to wastewater and drinking water treatment plants. Failing infrastructure is more prevalent in our state's oldest neighborhoods in both small towns and the urban core, disproportionately affecting rural communities, lower income people and people of color.

Solutions:

- A comprehensive statewide transportation investment package, with increased revenues from the gas tax or other sources, for maintenance and improvement of roads, bridges, rail, Metro and Greater MN transit, and bike/pedestrian paths.
- Increase state funding for repairing and improving wastewater and drinking water systems, particularly in rural areas and smaller towns in Greater Minnesota
- Fund new transportation initiatives to improve mobility services across Minnesota, particularly in small town, rural and suburban areas of Minnesota where the population is increasingly elderly, disabled and underserved.
- Incentivize business to fund employee transit. Work with state and local partners to evaluate funding and service options to meet mobility and access needs of individuals
- Take advantage of state-of-the-art advances in asset management, materials and technology.

Links

[The American Society of Civil Engineers - Minnesota Chapter](#), [Move Minnesota](#), [Transportation Forward](#), [Minnesota Transportation Alliance](#).

Health Care

Problem:

High-quality affordable health care remains elusive for many low-income workers in rural and urban Minnesota. Farmers, immigrants and small business owners are also less likely to have access to health care. Meanwhile wide racial inequalities persist in health outcomes, particularly for Latino, African-American and Native American people. The lack of preventive care and resulting health problems are a strain on both employers and taxpayers.

Solutions:

- Ensure all Minnesotans are covered for basic health, dental, mental, and vision services via state collected funds. Expand MinnesotaCare, MNSure, Medicaid coverage and other federal, state and local health programs, as a step toward eventual single system of public financing of universal health care coverage.
- Provide paid sick leave and family leave to all workers in Minnesota.
- Increase funding for Minnesota's Good Food Access Program which addresses the lack of access to healthy and culturally appropriate food in many rural and urban neighborhoods.
- Resolve access to services which disproportionately burden rural households by adjusting reimbursements to accurately reflect the relatively higher costs of delivering service in rural areas, increasing grants to ensure the survival of rural hospitals and by preserving public health programs that focus on rural health research, emergency preparedness, chronic disease prevention and disease monitoring.

Links:

[Minnesota Department of Health Equity reports](#), [Health Care for All Minnesota](#), [Minnesota Public Health Association \(2019 Legislative Priorities\)](#), [Minnesota Rural Health Association](#), [Minnesota Doctors for Health Equity](#)

Education, Early Childhood Through Post-Secondary

Problems:

Minnesota's long-term economic health is threatened by the wide and persistent racial and regional disparities in education outcomes, from early childhood development through kindergarten readiness, competence in reading and math in K-12, and post-secondary completion. Barriers to educational attainment and workforce training are higher for rural populations in general, and for communities of color statewide.

Solutions:

- The major biennial omnibus funding bills for both our K-12 and higher education systems must be increased substantially, to catch up with declines in recent decades, increased service needs from rising percentages of disadvantaged students and unsustainable tuition costs.
- Reinforce Minnesota Statute Section 135A.01 which sets out the Minnesota Legislature's policy to fund 67% of the cost of public post-secondary education.

- More investment in targeted early learning scholarship programs for low-income parents and children, in keeping with MinneMinds policy priorities, as well as universal access to early childhood development services, provided through public school and other systems in regions with the highest need.
- Increase funding for proven “two-generation” models, which educate children and parents together and expand home visiting programs by health and social service professionals for infants and toddlers and their parents.
- Create and expand Career Academy and other trade skills-based education as an alternative to college.
- Increase funding and incentives for local community-based education partnership models in Greater Minnesota and urban Minnesota, in connection with the Promise Neighborhoods and Strive Together network.
- Provide student debt reduction/forgiveness to health care professionals and teachers in return for their commitment to practice in underserved communities throughout Minnesota and on tribal lands.

Links:

[MinneMinds](#), [Minnesota Office of Higher Education Educational Attainment Goal 2025 Report](#), [Minnesota Education Equity Partnership](#), [Center for School Change](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Students United](#), [Education Partnerships Coalition](#),

Broadband & Digital Inclusion

Problems:

More than a half-million Minnesotans still lack access to a wired connection capable of very minimal upload and download speeds. They are located primarily in rural Minnesota but low-income people in metro areas are underserved as well. The lack of optimum connectivity to the national and global economy is a major barrier to equal opportunity and economic development in an increasingly digital world.

Solutions:

- Align public policies with the principle that internet connectivity has become essential to individual and economic competitiveness and should be considered a public necessity, regulated and provided in same manner as electricity, energy and transportation and health care.
- Provide on-going biennial funding of the Border-to-Border Broadband Development Grant Program until the state achieves its broadband speed goals. Extend grant period to multi-year grants for improved planning and deployment.

- Provide direct funding for broadband mapping. Add data collection and mapping related to home broadband affordability, the broadband adoption rates of low-income households, and the digital redlining of urban neighborhoods. Develop an inventory for best management practices (BMP) for broadband and deployment of broadband service in rural, sparsely populated areas, in high-cost regions, and in under-resourced urban neighborhoods.

Links:

[Minnesota Office of Broadband Development](#), [Minnesota Governor’s Broadband Task Force](#),

Housing

Problems:

Minnesota’s shortage of quality affordable housing is creating instability due to costs among low-and middle-income households, as well as forming barriers to business expansion in Greater Minnesota. Home ownership is the greatest asset most families in Minnesota have, providing personal and financial stability and supporting income mobility. Minnesota’s racial disparity in homeownership is the nation’s 3rd largest (76 percent of whites compared to only 41 percent people of color owning their own homes). Among Minnesota’s rental households, people of color are much more likely to live in rental housing they cannot afford than is true among white renters. In Minnesota, only a fourth of white renters pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent, compared to more than half of African Americans. In addition, taxpayers are footing the bill for shelters and social services costs associated with serving people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in urban, suburban, small town and rural Minnesota. People of color account for 20 percent of our state’s population, but they are 65 percent of the state’s homeless.

Solutions:

- Increase the number of housing units rehabilitated or preserved across the state through Minnesota Housing Finance Agency funding
- Take steps to prevent the loss of project-based Section 8 and naturally occurring affordable rental units due to contract expirations, sales to “upmarket” developers, and demolitions.
- Create new sustainable options for workforce housing expansion across Greater Minnesota, attracting newcomers and immigrant workers to sustain and revitalize existing and new businesses. Issue additional congregate rural housing permits.
- Expand Minnesota Housing Finance Agency access and education related to alternative interest-free Murabaha financing, for Muslim home-buyers.

- Increase access to funding among lower-and middle-income families wanting to buy a house, reserving significant dollars for household of color.
- Create easy access to having unlawful detainers expunged from rental history,
- Conduct a thorough regulatory review of residency requirements, building standards, and land use and environmental protections that impact the profitability and viability of affordable housing.
- Increase support for first-time homeless individuals and families.

Links:

[Minnesota Housing Partnership](#), [Homes for All](#), [Minnesota Housing Measures Report \(HousingLink/McKnight Foundation\)](#), [Minnesota Council for Affordable and Rural Housing](#)

Immigration

Problems:

Expressions of resentment and federal or state anti-immigrant policies and attitudes are damaging to local economies and quality of life. Even though Minnesota’s immigrant population wields annual purchasing power of more than \$5 billion and pays more than \$800 million in taxes, our region has been slow to tap the full workforce and civic engagement potential of our growing immigrant population, particularly among immigrants of color from Africa, Latin America and Asia. Business leaders are increasingly adamant about the need for more immigrants joining the state’s labor force, to sustain both immediate and long-term economic growth.

Solutions:

- Extend eligibility for driver’s licenses or residence IDs to all workers, regardless of immigration status, to ensure access to employment and community involvement.
- Reform post-secondary systems’ admission standards to recognize higher education credentials from immigrants’ home country institutions.
- Provide incentives for communities to implement the priorities of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce’s “Growing Minnesota” initiative, including building respect for cultural differences in schools, businesses and communities, and finding ways to celebrate diversity and to defuse local social tensions.

Links:

[Grow Minnesota!](#), [Immigrant Law Center of Minnesota](#), [Minnesota Immigrant Rights Action Committee](#), [Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en la Lucha](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Minnesota Council on Latino Affairs](#), [Council on Asian Pacific Minnesotans](#)

Criminal Justice Reform

Problems:

Minnesota's criminal justice system disproportionately burdens low-income households and people of color. If convicted of a felony, people become even further burdened by collateral consequences that form barriers to housing, employment and family reunification. By reducing income disparities, we can also reduce the state's arrest, incarceration, probation, parole and recidivism rates. Furthermore, the state's approach to corrections currently emphasizes punishment at the expense of rehabilitation and return to community. African American, Native American and Latino Minnesotans suffer the most in this overly punitive and biased public safety system. This needlessly deprives households, communities and our economy of human achievements and contributions while imposing exorbitant taxpayer-funded costs. African-Americans account for 7 percent of the state's general population, but 16 percent of those on probation, 26 percent of those on parole, and 34 percent of the prison population. Minnesota's record-setting racial disparities include racially biased school discipline, racial profiling and too frequent brutality by police, lack of access to quality legal assistance for low-income people accused of crimes, lengthier sentences and higher incarceration rates, overly long and restrictive parole policies, and collateral consequences from arrests and convictions that often last a lifetime.

Solutions:

- Continue the progress achieved by sentencing reforms in recent years, framing the response to drug abuse and mental illness as primarily a health issue rather than as a criminal justice issue.
- Enact reforms in housing and employment law to support full return to community for formerly incarcerated persons, and provision of wrap-around services that assist with the transition from jail/prison to community. Relax background check requirements to expand opportunity for individuals to participate in the workforce.
- Enable faster and easier expungement of criminal records.
- Encourage further reforms in state and local law enforcement practices that reduce instances of racial profiling, police brutality and shooting and killing of suspects.
- Adopt the Uniform Collateral Consequences of Conviction Act, requiring full disclosure of the more than 500 Minnesota statutes and regulations that penalize ex-offenders. Require that defendants be informed of the possible application of the collateral consequences when charged, before sentencing, and upon release from custody. Provide methods for a court to grant relief from collateral consequences for purposes of employment, education, housing, public benefits and occupational licensing.

Links:

[Council for Minnesotans of African Heritage](#), [Voices for Racial Justice](#), [Minnesota Urban League](#), [Minnesota Neighborhoods Organizing for Change](#), [#Justice for All \(Take Action Minnesota\)](#), [Minnesota Second Chance Coalition](#),

Taxes, Budgets and Investments

Problems:

Taxes are the price we pay for a safe, healthy, equitable and civilized society. Minnesota's official Price of Government (total costs of all government services as a percentage of personal income) is stable or declining. However, to achieve equitable and greater prosperity, the state must make new investments in basic needs, human capital, infrastructure, climate action, and in more equitable education and safety net systems. Local governments are vital partners in Minnesota's economic growth and quality of life, but local revenues depend on highly variable property wealth, leaving less affluent areas with unequal burdens. Minnesota's overall tax system remains mildly regressive, with lowest-income households paying a higher percentage in total state-local taxes than those at the top.

Solutions:

- Substantially increase the Minnesota Family Investment Program's (MFIP) cash assistance grant, which hasn't been increased since 1986.
- A comprehensive transportation funding package that improves rural roads and bridges as well as improving climate resilient transit and mobility options will require substantial new revenues, at least \$1 billion annually over the next decade. Gas tax increases, user fees, and general fund revenues must be considered. Offsets and credits for low- and moderate-income households must be part of any plan, in order to reduce the regressive impact of fees and sales taxes for transportation.
- Increase and expand the Working Family Credit, look for other ways to extend child-care credits and deductions to low-income families, and protect the Renter's Credit.
- Increase Local Government Aid by about \$30 million annually (to 2002 levels, before large cuts during a budget crisis).
- Provide tax relief for farmers who are losing production acreage and being penalized as they comply with clean water legislation and other environmental laws.
- Preserve or replace the 2 percent Health Care Provider Tax, which produces about \$700 million for vital public health services from Minnesota Care to disability services and child protection.

- Protect or increase state contributions to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – aka food stamps), healthcare, and MN Family Investment Program (MFIP) benefits; invest more in subsidized housing, food shelf and local-food programs.

Links:

[Minnesota Budget Project](#), [Coalition of Greater Minnesota Cities](#), [Greater Minnesota Partnership](#), [Minnesota Department of Revenue 2017 Tax Incidence Study](#), [Minnesota Management and Budget 2016 Forecast Price of Government Report](#)

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For more information on the Thriving by Design process to create the One Minnesota Equity Blueprint, please go to www.thrivingbydesignmn.org

www.growthandjustice.org www.onemn.org