The Target Foundation, a leading philanthropy that draws its wealth from one of Minnesota’s most successful Fortune 500 companies, recently declared that it would strategically shift its giving toward “promoting equity.”

In a blogpost expanding on this new equity emphasis, Target explained that its grants would “help to strengthen the systems and organizations that drive shared prosperity for all.” The underlying reason for the shift, according to the foundation website, is a concern that “as the demographics of our region continue to shift, the costs of inequality will continue to grow.” (italics added)

That framing is nearly identical to our long-standing essential theme at Growth & Justice. And equity has been our watchword as we research and engage across the entire state to premiere and disseminate “The Minnesota Equity Blueprint” in early 2020. The Blueprint will provide a comprehensive guidebook with practical solutions to advance equity and justice. And equity has been our watchword as we research and engage across the entire state to premiere and disseminate “The Minnesota Equity Blueprint” in early 2020. The Blueprint will provide a comprehensive guidebook with practical solutions to advance equity and justice.

innPost reporter Gregg Aamot — a teacher at Ridgewater College in Hutchinson and one of the state’s more knowledgeable observers on Greater Minnesota — accurately summarized the roll-out of our first chapter of the Minnesota Equity Blueprint with this description:

“The (first Blueprint section) focused on ‘Human Capital’ — the idea that communities can thrive if their residents have what they need to live meaningful lives: jobs that pay enough, the confidence to take part in civic life, access to quality health care, a good education.”

Aamot, who attended that April roll-out in Olivia (pop. 2,350, known as Minnesota’s “Corn Capital” because of its seed research industry) took note of our special inflection on rural perspective and on our statement of purpose when we held the Blueprint kickoff convening, called “Thriving by Design Rural and Urban Together,” in the Upper Sioux Community in 2018 near Granite Falls.

THE MINNESOTA EQUITY BLUEPRINT: A PREVIEW

The Minnesota Equity Blueprint, to be released by Growth & Justice in its final form in early 2020, will provide both practical immediate solutions and long-term aspirational goals in response to our state’s most pressing challenges, for the new decade of the 20s and beyond.

The Blueprint is designed to give direction to individuals and community groups and businesses, along with a policy framework for local and state governments seeking to build a more inclusive long-term prosperity. Our foundational premise is that real prosperity can only happen when all Minnesotans are included, when all our untapped human potential is fully realized and fairly compensated, and
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Last summer in Central Minnesota, we unveiled the second chapter of our Minnesota Equity Blueprint, focusing on economic development. It’s a part of our great state that I know very well.

I spent much of my childhood there with my grandparents on our family farm, near Lake Mille Lacs. It’s a region full of good people in beautiful places striving to thrive against market forces and rural decline, amid increasing economic inequality, and climate change.

Our local partners warned us there might be protesters at this event: a small but increasingly aggressive group of misguided folks who denigrate immigrants, object to community planning of any kind, deny climate science and oppose installation of technologies like solar energy and broadband. Sure enough, we saw people and picket signs as we approached the meeting entrance, which was open to anyone. I had never experienced this in my 35 years of community development work in Minnesota. But our partners — long-time planning and economic investment organizations — increasingly encounter this hostility and warned me a year earlier that anything with the word “equity” in it would infuriate these zealots.

One hundred years earlier, “equity” was a good word in the region. My great-grandfather, a Swedish immigrant in the 1880s and founder with my great-grandmother of said family farm 30 miles east of Lake Mille Lacs, started a chapter of the American Society of Equity in 1908. With other immigrant neighbors, he hoped to pool harvests for better crop prices and fairer access and pricing for rail transport. In 1934, the national group merged into the National Farmers’ Union. Equity — the idea of share-holding by workers and farmers in their enterprise — inspired the creation of many cooperatives still in existence, including where I worked early in my career, at Farmers Union Central Exchange (CENEX) in the Twin Cities.

My grandparents and great-grandparents extended hospitality to any and all in their community, and following their lead, I invited the protesters inside to get ice water and other refreshments (it was a hot June day!) and join the meeting if they wished. Many were the age of grandparents and said they weren’t sure they should go in. They said they needed to “wait to see” what their leader wanted them to do. That response told me they were nervous about all the changes happening around them but not inherently prejudiced people. They were following someone who stoked fear and anxiety of “otherness” and promised a comfortable certainty to shelter them from a complex and ambiguous world.

This is what that local leader sent to his followers in an email inviting them to the June Blueprint meeting:

“You may not be allowed to speak or ask questions, depending on their state of mind at this time. Since we have exposed them publicly, they are likely to be very careful what they say. HOWEVER, they will be handing out reading materials PLUS their websites are full of damaging material. Check out ONEMN.ORG, The MN Equity Blueprint, Growth and Justice, and Thriving by Design. All these designs are Anti Christian, Unconstitutional, UnAmerican, uneconomical and just plain destructive to our way of life. Show up to tell them NO, or contact your local elected officials and tell them you are closely watching the choices they make, esp Grants they take.”

The protesters did join us and heard highlights of local practices and ideas for helping the local economy and communities thrive. They did ask questions. They pushed back on ideas, especially those involving the welcoming of immigrants. In response, local organizations running programs to help improve economic conditions explained that businesses and communities came to them for help in welcoming immigrants — this wasn’t something imposed upon people.

Other local presenters talked about the benefits of renewable energy — solar energy panels on school rooftops, for example. The decreased energy costs could be reprioritized to help pay for additional teachers and books for students — hardly an un-American or uneconomical practice.

continued on page 3
Several folks wearing “Make America Great Again” baseball caps came up to me at the close of the meeting and said they agreed with a lot of what we presented. Their responses and others from that June meeting convinced me we were on the right track, at the right time, with the creation and dissemination of the Blueprint.

It reinforced our work, too, as allies to people and organizations on the front lines every day, fighting misinformation, prejudice, and outright hatred. Growth & Justice must be there, and with your continued support, we can be. We work across Minnesota and strive always to avoid ridiculing or tut-tutting the misguided and uninformed. Instead, we work constructively side by side with our most conscientious neighbors advancing community-based policies and practices that change hearts and minds to again embrace equity as a social and economic game-changer, as my immigrant great-grandparents did in early 20th Century Minnesota.

Over a century later, I’m energized to continue expanding a renewed vision of full inclusion, breaking down barriers and resetting a blueprint for equity and vitality. We need all of us in, for all of us to do better.

Jane Leonard
HUMAN CAPITAL

The diverse congress of Minnesotans in our Thriving by Design Network (TBDN) are deeply concerned about the condition of our most vulnerable people, many of whom would succeed if not held back by discrimination, exclusion and neglect. Disproportionately, these are our communities of color, low-income people of every race, our elderly and disabled, our women, and our families in rural areas who haven’t shared in economic growth.

Business leaders in our network affirmed that our competitiveness depends primarily on realizing our full human potential, improving educational and skills attainment, especially among young people of color (including children of refugees and immigrants) and youth in families living on very low incomes. These are the children who continue to be the least likely to acquire credentials and training and who suffer multiple consequences from stubbornly persistent and growing inequality.

Citing research showing that children succeed with teachers from their own communities and cultures, the Blueprint recommends that state and local government and non-profits fully fund scholarships and loan forgiveness programs for prospective teachers of color and expand alternative pathways to obtaining teaching credentials.

Among dozens of specific policies and practices that improve human capital, TBDN members recommended that the state fully fund cradle-to-career educational equity programs – especially scholarship and career pathway programs, giving preference for locally developed initiatives that include employer input.

Also recommended to improve both human capital and economic security: expansion of Earned Income Tax Credits; indexing the state’s minimum wage for inflation and allowing local governments to establish higher “livable wage” requirements; expansion of MinnesotaCare to include more middle- and low-income families; more investments in community-based health programs aimed at outreach and prevention; and major reforms in a criminal justice system, including more investment in community-based alternatives to policing such as youth engagement and non-governmental social service programs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In partnership with business-minded and community-minded partners such as the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations and Greater MSP, our Blueprint process produced a promising new paradigm for economic development based on equity and inclusion, local place-making with arts and cultural amenities, rethinking regulatory models and attitudes, welcoming immigrants, and improving access to more affordable child care and housing.

Our listening and research focused on strengthening economic development initiatives that bolster entrepreneurship and small businesses, assist farmers, and broaden workforce readiness through programs that train for jobs of the future, with a special emphasis on communities of color, immigrants and refugees and formerly incarcerated individuals.

Minnesota’s regulatory structures create unnecessarily high costs for farmers and new and small businesses. Proposed solutions include creating a one-stop regulatory interface, rationalizing and simplifying regulations and other customer focused structures that would assist the state in moving towards an assistance role, rather than a “gotcha” mentality.

“Placemaking” is a term used to describe efforts to increase the attractiveness of a particular by improving cultural and natural amenities. The Blueprint recommends maximum efforts in state bonding bills and from other funds for placemaking efforts, particularly in Greater Minnesota and for communities of color.

Everywhere that TBDN members gathered to discuss community needs, shortages and quality of child-care emerged as an economic development obstacle. The Blueprint proposes to greatly expand the CCAP program and the refundable Minnesota Child Care Tax Credit and to encourage more public-private partnerships in providing child care.

Support for farmers and more sustainable agricultural development came through strongly in our listening sessions. The Blueprint recommends a MinnesotaCare buy-in, land-use tax incentives, and investments in cultivating new markets and methods to help farmers weather the current perfect storm of climate-related weather disasters, farm consolidations and federal trade policy. Policies that help immigrants and people of color to become farmers and land owners also were strongly recommended.
The 2018 Report Card on Infrastructure, produced by the American Public Works Association and civil engineers and experts in the “MN2050” organization, gave Minnesota mostly Cs and Ds in nine categories of public works and public-private systems, each of which are part of the physical foundation for economic health and quality of life.

Concern about neglect of transit and transportation systems came through strongly in the process. Almost $40 billion dollars are needed to maintain the state’s more than 143,000 miles of roads over the next 20 years, but only $21 billion can be anticipated through existing revenue sources. TBDN members recommended a major new funding package to fill that need and urged the Minnesota Legislature work with public and private local partners to develop long range transportation policies. These should include congestion pricing for private vehicles, investment in rapid transit and other local bus systems, and employer participation in development of transit systems for getting workers to their jobs.

TBDN participants prioritized out-of-date waste and drinking water treatment systems, noting a disproportionate burden on households and businesses in older, low-income, rural and urban neighborhoods. The Blueprint urges increased funding for Local Government Aid, maximizing state bonding bill efforts and allocating $200 million in funding for the Minnesota Public Facilities Authority (MPFA).

Broadband and digital inclusion represent newer additions to the infrastructure portfolio. Too many low-income and rural Minnesotans still lack affordable access to the state’s minimum level of high-speed internet service. TBDN stakeholders recommend that the state increase broadband grants to provide affordable service in rural and low-income urban areas.

Homelessness and increasingly severe shortages of affordable housing are creating a drag on the economy, exacerbating racial and regional disparities, as well as workforce supply and readiness. TBDN participants recommend that 10,000 more homes per year be built or converted to affordable housing for the next five years.

Minnesota’s climate is warming and changing at a faster rate than in much of the nation and world. In the Land of 10,000 Lakes, the portion of our precious and iconic surface waters that are now officially classified as “impaired” stands at 56 percent. Unsustainable agricultural methods and unwise land use are polluting our landscapes and contributing to both climate change and deteriorating water quality.

Environmental and climate concerns emerged strongly among TBDN participants and all the groups we consulted for Blueprint research, regardless of whether those concerns had been previously central to their organizational mission. Consensus reigns that environmental degradation has now become an existential challenge.

General policy directions emerged: more sustainable land management practices in agriculture and on all private and public lands; decarbonizing transportation; shifting power plants and energy production from fossil fuels (especially coal) to renewable power sources; invest in energy conservation in the built environment; move toward zero-waste principles and away from landfills and incinerators, and move aggressively to clean up impaired lakes, streams and groundwater.

In each area, TBDN partners reinforced the interconnectedness of racial and social justice with environmental sustainability, along with special awareness of Greater Minnesota’s needs. Subsidies for energy conversion or conservation that benefit low-income households and small businesses were recommended, along with local ownership and cooperative shareholding of clean energy enterprises.

For agriculture and land use, the TBDN partners urged that every means available should be applied to reduce the use of harmful pesticides and fertilizers and to stop further loss of forests, wetlands, and prairies. For decarbonizing transportation and electric power generation, Blueprint drafters urged rapid adoption and implementation of 100% renewable energy and “Clean Cars” goals. Waste reduction also emerged as a priority and incentives and regulatory actions were proposed to encourage re-use, recycling and composting.
“Equity” Rising As Top Minnesota Policy Principle

continued from page 1

racial and economic justice, to shift Minnesota’s economy to environmental sustainability, to realize all our human potential, and to rebuild cohesion and common purpose between rural and metro Minnesotans. The Blueprint is intended for community members, elected officials, businesses owners, local governments, community organizations and all individuals who value diversity, inclusion, sustainability and a more shared prosperity.

Target and Growth & Justice are by no means alone in elevating the equity principle as the guide-star for public policy and community endeavor. Offering numerous examples, a recent front-page Star Tribune article reveals

*Thrusting By Design Network members unveil legislative priorities at State Capitol.*

“renewed attention that Minnesota foundations and nonprofits are putting on delving into equity issues.”

Among organizations cited for shifting thematically toward equity are the McKnight Foundation, Wells Fargo, the Greater Twin Cities United Way, and the YWCA and the YMCA. The leader of the latter, Hedy Lemar Walls, told the Star Tribune: “There is heightened awareness now around equity and inclusion that I’ve never seen before.”

Growth & Justice was one of Minnesota’s earliest adopters of the constructive, non-partisan and non-ideological paradigm that seizes on “equity” as a unifying principle. In 2015, Dane Smith, then president and now a Senior Fellow at Growth & Justice, authored a Star Tribune Opinion Exchange essay that embraced the word itself and explored its larger meaning and connotation.

Smith explained in that commentary: “In fact, ‘equity’ is a more broadly appealing word than its close kin ‘equality,’ in part because of its place in the language of business and home ownership...It is this connotation — that equity is really about every person or household having a reasonable share of property and assets, an ownership stake in society and the economy — that makes it the ideal word for describing all our various efforts to reduce inequality and invest in human capital.”

Another thoughtful take is offered by the McKnight Foundation, in recent statements about its shift toward philanthropy that advances racial, economic, regional and environmental equity:

“In all we do, we seek to be conscious of and address the deeply entrenched practices, cultural norms, and decision-making structures that perpetuate inequities. Racial discrimination is a legacy of our nation’s painful history, and institutional racism and unconscious bias persist. Equity means receiving what one needs to succeed, as we are not all born with the same opportunities.”

And from the Blandin Foundation, the leading philanthropy serving rural Minnesota: “What we’ve learned is that real communities are built on hard work. On the hard work of leadership, of genuine inclusion, of reaching across boundaries and building lasting connections. On commitments—families facing hardship together, individuals prepared to make a stand when it matters most. And on belonging—that indelible sense of place that we call home.”

The Target Foundation’s language is similarly wise about how all Minnesotans fortunes are bound up with the success of those who are suffering from exclusion and disadvantage.

“We know that the health of our business depends on a vibrant and growing economy, and that’s only possible when economic opportunities are available to all our neighbors.”

**KEEP UP TO DATE WITH**
**GROWTH & JUSTICE**

[www.facebook.com/GrowthandJustice](http://www.facebook.com/GrowthandJustice)

[www.twitter.com/GrowthandJust](http://www.twitter.com/GrowthandJust)
Those key themes: “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.”

Media attention to both our Thriving by Design convenings and our emerging Minnesota Equity Blueprint has been generally positive and perceptive. Coverage has ranged from front-page stories in the the West Central Tribune and Renville County Herald, to feature articles in the Minnesota Women’s Press, to op-eds in the St. Cloud Times and the Star Tribune, to favorable mentions on Facebook and Twitter and shout-outs on the websites of our many partners.

Early in the year, the Star Tribune published a Growth & Justice op-ed that opened by praising recent commentary by conservatives who acknowledged that growing inequalities and stagnating incomes for workers needed to be addressed.

Our op-ed, headlined “Right and left can find common ground in the pursuit of equity,” went on to describe the emerging Minnesota Equity Blueprint and immediate 2019 legislative priorities.

“We are committed to a practical and business-minded equity imperative, writ large, strongly integrated with climate action and rebuilding our physical infrastructure,” we said in the op-ed. “We believe that our damaging disparities are deeply interrelated, that these inequalities are limiting our human potential in rural regions, which also are becoming more racially diverse, and in metro Minnesota, too. All our regions can benefit from the jobs and private-sector growth stimulated by new investments in human capital, climate action and infrastructure renewal.”

The op-ed also specified policy recommendations for the 2019 legislative session, including: more flexibility in the regulatory and tax obligations for farmers and rural child-care providers and affordable housing developers; tax credits and deductions for all lower-income families; redoubled efforts at racial equity in education attainment and employment and economic outcomes; acceleration of renewable energy conversion; expanding health care coverage with a MinnesotaCare buy-in option; more investment in physical infrastructure that includes highways in greater Minnesota and transit and mobility needs in all regions; welcoming immigrants and helping them realize their full potential, and reinforcing the basic-needs safety net, along with boosting wages and benefits for all low-income workers.

After we introduced those 2019 priorities at a press conference in St. Cloud, we were thrilled to see a particularly eloquent St. Cloud Times op-ed from Patrick Henry, retired executive director of the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research.

“The One Minnesota Equity Blueprint is coming into focus,” Henry wrote. “It does not lay out a scattered collection of silos where the caretakers say ‘Here I stand, I can do no other.’ The feature of the blueprint that most encourages me…is its recognition that everything is connected to everything else. It’s a blueprint for the house we all live in, together.”

To see complete preliminary drafts of the Blueprint chapters, go to our website, www.growthandjustice.org
Feel free to contact staff for comments and suggestions.

THE MINNESOTA EQUITY BLUEPRINT: A PREVIEW

when a greener, cleaner and more sustainable environment is achieved.

Both the challenges and solutions were identified through a deliberative process of community listening sessions organized as the Thriving by Design Network (TBDN). Two large statewide conferences were held, along with more than a dozen community meetings over a year and a half. The Growth & Justice Blueprint project team also sought input from many other non-partisan organizations involved in equity work, digging deep into available research and conducting our own original research, when needed.

Throughout the Blueprint drafting process we stressed the importance of equity and inclusion. We found that Minnesotans living in the bottom half of the economy and those who have historically been excluded from centers of power — including tribal nations, communities of color, refugees and immigrants, people living in rural regions — are organized, optimistic, knowledgeable and ready to determine and improve their own destinies.

Inside Progress Report 2019 is a brief summary and preview of the four chapters of the Blueprint: Human Capital, Economic Development, Physical Infrastructure, and Environmental Resilience. Full preliminary drafts of the chapters are available on our website (www.growthandjustice.org and www.thrivingbydesignmn.org)
GROWTH & JUSTICE PROGRESS REPORT

GROWTH & JUSTICE
970 Raymond Avenue
Suite 201
Saint Paul, MN 55114

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
PAUL ANDERSON
FAWN BERNHARDT-NORVELL, Treasurer
TANE DANGER, Vice Chair
DAVID FISHER, Chair
LINDA FISHER
VERNAE HASBARGEN
H.B. “BUD” HAYDEN JR.
MARIO HERNANDEZ
HUBERT H. “BUCK” HUMPHREY IV
VIVIAN JENKINS NELSEN
KEVIN LINDSEY
LEE LYNCH
ERIK PETERSON
STEVE PETERSON
LOUIS PORTER II
CRAIG SWAGGERT
PETE SWENSON
LAURA ZIEGLER

STAFF
JANE LEONARD
President

KATE SEARLS
Policy & Research Director

MATT BYRNE
Program Manager

MONICA SEGURA-SCHWARTZ
Community Outreach & Public Policy Adviser

ELLIO T MOHLER
Geospatial Information Systems (GIS) Specialist

DANE SMITH
Senior Fellow & President Emeritus

FELLOWS
PAUL ANTON
Policy Fellow on Economics

CHUCK BROWN
Policy Fellow on Rural Issues

MIKE CHRISTENSON
Policy Fellow on Workforce

JAY COGGINS
Policy Fellow on Economics

GARY CUNNINGHAM
Policy Fellow on Business Development

JACK DITMORE
Policy Fellow on Environment

LOUIS JOHNSTON
Policy Fellow on Economics

AMY LANGE
Policy Fellow on Health Care

TOM LEGG
Policy Fellow on Rural Issues and Economics

PIA LOPEZ
Policy Fellow on Transportation

LOUIS PORTER
Policy Fellow on Racial Equity

JEFF VAN WYCHEN
Policy Fellow on Taxes and Public Finance