

Minnesota Region 5 Community Profile

P.1 Community Description:

a. Community Environment (P.1a)

(1) Community Definition and Identity (P.1a1)

What geographic area is included in our community?

Our community is comprised of Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd, and Wadena Counties in north central Minnesota. It includes 65 cities, 155 townships, one sovereign Tribal Nation and a National Guard training facility (one of the largest in the country). Of the 65 cities, the majority have less than 1,000 residents.

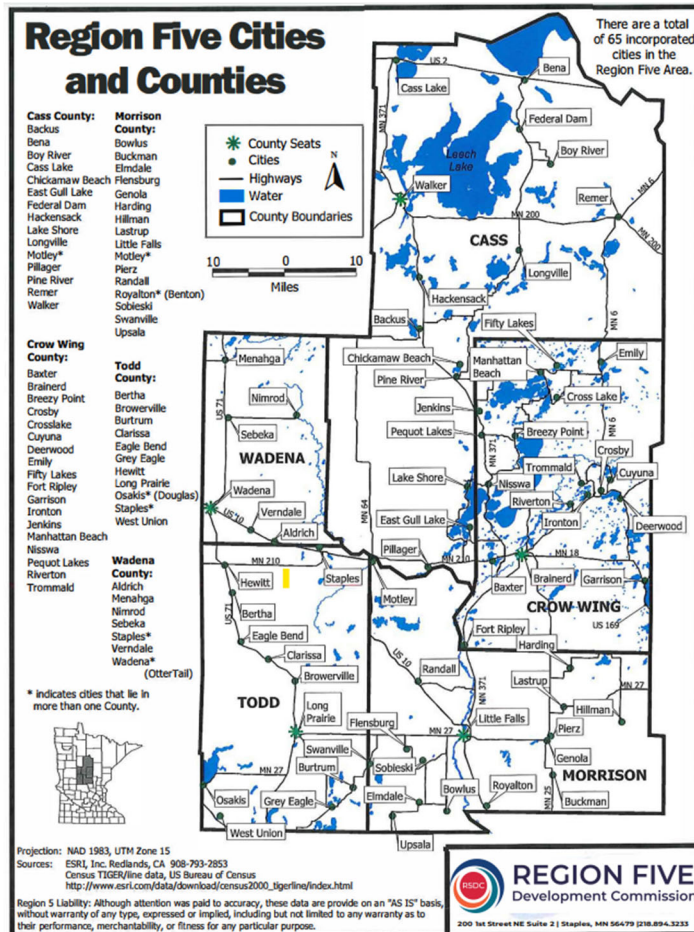
What is our community's population and growth compared with that of other communities locally, regionally, or nationally?

The regional population totals 169,529. Regional population grew about 4% between 2010 and 2020, not as much as the Twin Cities metro area, but more than some other rural areas in the state. Overall, the state grew by about 7.6%. The United States experienced overall growth of 7.4% during the same time period. It ranks as one of the fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions in the state from 2010-2020. The region is the largest rural Minnesota statistical area within it).

Our regional population has had significant changes since the turn of the century but remains less diverse than the state overall. In 2020, over 90% of the region's residents reported white alone as their race, compared to 76% of the residents statewide. Unlike the state as a whole, the regional white population grew slightly while the state's white population dropped significantly. However, like the state, most of the region's population growth is attributable to black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) groups (nearly 96%). Most of the regional diversity in our five-county region is due to the sizable American Indian population. An estimated 4,307 residents in the region are American Indian or Alaskan Native. This was 2.8% of the regional population, nearly triple the statewide proportion.

Additionally, parts of the region with natural amenities often experience tripling of population during the summer months due to seasonal residents. (Data from 2020 U.S. Census)

What is our community identity?



Our region is a diverse area that is primarily rural. It includes both high proportions of residents living in poverty, as well as a high concentration of wealthy vacation homeowners. Due to colonization, the population is largely white and Christian. There are pockets of historically marginalized identities, including the Ojibwe indigenous community and recent immigrant communities from Latin America and East Africa. The population generally is socially and politically conservative. Residents take pride in their communities and traditions and are protective of them. They work hard and play hard. Outdoor activities are highly valued both in summer and winter. There is a strong tradition of taking care of your neighbors. There is a sense of resilience as evidenced by how the population has adjusted to the weather extremes of the seasons.

(2) **Community Offerings** (P.1a2)

What are our community's key offerings to our residents and other customer groups (see P.1a3) in the areas of health, education, the economy, and quality of life?

Economic Stability

There is a strong small business climate and (our region?) is a leader in post-COVID job creation. Manufacturing (including food manufacturing), government, and healthcare are the primary sources of living-wage employment, and a military base in our region also provides stable jobs. The economy is boosted by natural resources, including abundant waterways and agricultural land. There are pockets of the region equipped with strong broadband access. The area has a rural feel while providing access to many big-box stores in Brainerd and driving distance to broader shopping, recreation, and amenities in cities such as St. Cloud and Minneapolis.

Education Access & Quality

Students have access to 23 public school districts, as well as other charter and private options, usually within a manageable distance from their homes. There are also three community colleges (M-State, Central Lakes College, and Leech Lake Tribal College) with four total campuses that provide strong career and technical training.

Healthcare Access & Quality

With three independent health systems (Astera Health, Lakewood Health, and Cuyuna Regional Medical System), and presence from three large health systems (Sanford, CentraCare, and Essentia), communities often have access to multiple choices for healthcare.

Neighborhood & Built Environment

There is broad access to recreational activities, including hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, hiking, biking, camping, boating, cross-country skiing, etc. This also creates a draw for tourism and seasonal residents. It's often known as an area where "Minnesota goes to play." High school sports often draw together residents. There is a large artist community and support for the arts.

What is the relative importance of these offerings to our community's well-being?

These offerings provide stability, shared traditions, and a quality of life that makes the region attractive. Some areas of the region have experienced increased growth of telecommuting residents longing for small-town culture and life. The many lakes and access to recreational activities attract seasonal residents and tourists. At the same time, there are variabilities in community member access to these offerings depending on geography and socio-economic status.

What major facilities, infrastructure, and resources (e.g., technology, housing, transportation and natural resources) support our community's key offerings?

Facilities

Community schools are mostly in good condition, and often serve as gathering places in the community. There are numerous resorts and event spaces, particularly in the Brainerd Lakes area. The Maslowski Wellness and Research Center in Wadena, the CentraCare Vitality Wellness Center in Long Prairie, and the YMCA in Brainerd provide residents with fitness facilities. Camp Ripley in Little Falls is a 53,000-acre regional training center which hosts numerous ranges and state-of-the-art facilities to support training requirements of military and civilian agencies. Additionally, Sourcewell in Staples provides conference rooms for regional training and meetings.

Infrastructure

Residents have access to dependable utilities. Broadband access is expanding. Communities are linked by well-maintained state highways. All five counties have adopted a local transit tax to help fund road infrastructure. Brainerd is also home to a small international airport.

Resources

The area has abundant waterways, including numerous lakes and the Mississippi River. There is also access to agricultural and forest land. Minerals include iron and manganese.

(3) **Residents, Other Customers, and Stakeholders** (P.1a3)

What are our community's key resident groups, other customer groups, and stakeholder groups?

Our regional population has an older median age than the state, and a larger percentage of people aged 65 years and older. Additionally, of the estimated 369,149 veterans in Minnesota, our region is home to approximately 13,229 veterans which is 3.58% of the state's population of veterans.

Over ½ (38.4%) of the regional population is over the age of 55, compared to 29% statewide. In contrast, our region had a smaller percentage of people in the 25-to-54-year age group, typically considered the "prime working years." A large portion of the population is part of the Baby Boom generation, which is creating a significant shift in regional demographics over time. Between 2000 and 2019, the region gained over 21,000 residents 55 years of age or older. Still, 18.6% of the population is under 15 years of age, a similar rate to the statewide percentage.

Our region remains less diverse than the state overall. Since 2010, the white population decreased, and the number of people of other races have increased. In 2019, over 93% of the region's residents reported white alone as their race, compared to 82.8% of the residents statewide. However, every minority race increased faster than the white population from 2000-2019. The number of black or African American residents have tripled since 2000, and those of Hispanic or Latino origin and two or more races increased by more than 130%.

Most of the regional diversity in our five-county region is due to the sizable American Indian population. An estimated 4,392 residents in the region are American Indian or Alaskan Native. This was 2.7% of the regional population, nearly triple the statewide proportion.

Approximately 92% of residents graduated from high school and about 20% of residents hold a Bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income in our region is approximately \$57,500.00.

The population generally is socially and politically conservative.

What are their key requirements and expectations of our community?

Economy/Workforce

Our five-county region has a lower workforce participation rate than the state. The workforce is less racially diverse than the state, but is becoming more diverse. In the workforce, there is low participation of BIPOC, women, veterans, and other untapped populations. There are lower than average wages, resulting in an increased number of families living in poverty. With 11,187 jobs, healthcare and social assistance remain the largest employment industries in the region, accounting

for 17.8% of the total jobs in the region. 13.8% were in the retail trade, and 12.3% in the accommodation & food services.

Health

According to www.countyhealthfindings.org, Cass and Wadena Counties have low health outcomes, which represent how healthy a county is in terms of length and quality of life. Out of the 87 Minnesota counties, Cass County ranks 85th, and Wadena ranks 83rd in health outcomes. Crow Wing ranks 39th, Morrison ranks 52nd, and Todd County ranks 64th. The percentage of adult smoking, adult obesity, physical inactivity, and access to exercise opportunities is higher throughout the region than it is in Minnesota and the United States. In the State of Minnesota, the average ratio of mental health providers to residents is 320:1. In our region, the average of mental health providers to residents is 994:1. The average ratio of primary care physicians to residents is 1,110:1 in Minnesota, and 1,790:1 in our region. There are several hospitals within the five-county region, including Cuyuna Regional Medical Center, Essentia Health-St. Joseph's Medical Center, CHI St. Gabriel's Health, CentraCare-Long Prairie, and the Lakewood Health System.

Education

Our region has a lower percentage of adults (18 and over) with at least a high school diploma than the state (92.4%), and a lower percentage of people with at least some college experience. Our region also has a higher percentage of people with an associate degree and a lower percentage of people with a bachelor's degree or higher. The contributing factor to the lower level of educational attainment is the historic unavailability of advanced degree programs in the region. Currently, only two-year in-person degree options are available through the two MN State schools within the region, MN State Community and Technical College in Wadena and Central Lakes College, with campuses in Brainerd and Staples. However, students who complete their degree, diploma, or certificate with CLC can enroll in specific online Bachelor's degree programs while continuing to maintain CLC as their home campus. Colleges participating in this partnership are St. Cloud State University, Bemidji State University, Southwest Minnesota State University, Minnesota State University- Moorhead, The College of St. Scholastica, and University of Minnesota- Crookston. According to 2018 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 31.9% of residents aged 18 years and over within the region had a college degree, compared to 43.7% statewide.

Quality of Life

- **Broadband:** An average of 76.82% of households have broadband access in our region, compared to 82.7% in the United States.
- **Housing:** There are 105,876 housing units in the region. 78.86% is the owner-occupied housing unit rate from 2015-2019. 71% of the housing units were built between 1960 and 2009. 3.8% of structures were built in 2010 or later.
- **Transportation:** The region is well served by roads with Minnesota State Highway 371, US Route 10 and/or US Route 71 running through each county. Few communities are well served by public transportation, as the majority available are located in the larger communities, and not available evenings or weekends, which affects student and aging population workforces. Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport serves as a key transportation hub for both commercial and personal aircraft.

(4) **People Resources** (P.1a4)

What key community organizations, groups, and segments are involved in delivering our community's key offerings?

Sourcewell

Sourcewell is one of nine Minnesota Service Cooperatives serving Region 5 counties by partnering with education, government, and nonprofit agencies to boost student and community success. Sourcewell provides training and contracted services to help other public agencies do more with less. Sourcewell supports educators and leaders in local government and nonprofit organizations by providing professional development, contracted services, funding, internship reimbursement, facility construction, and other needs identified in collaboration. Many of their services are highly subsidized to make them accessible for members.

Region Five Development Commission

Region Five Development Commission provides community development, economic development, and transportation initiatives in central Minnesota. Their programs are strategic and resilient in nature, and contain an inclusive and collaborative approach, with an emphasis on local foods/agricultural, and renewable energy economy.

Initiative Foundation

The Initiative Foundation is one of six Minnesota Initiative Foundations serving Greater Minnesota. The Initiative Foundation works daily to strengthen the economy and communities of central Minnesota. Through loans and financing, they invest in businesses that create quality jobs. Through grants and programs, they invest in organizations that make our economy strong. Through donor services and charitable funds, they help people invest in their communities.

Our region has an extremely high level of historical collaboration amongst private, public, and nonprofit sectors. We work closely with county governments, regional cities, public schools, higher education, nonprofits, local chambers of commerce, economic development organizations, the Regional Workforce Investment Board, and the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

What recent changes has the community experienced in its needs for these organizations, groups, and segments?

The three organizations in our Communities of Excellence group serve a variety of members, with a bit of overlap. It is important that we work together to ensure our work is all encompassing, equitable, and impactful to the communities we each serve. The COVID pandemic has had a great impact on how each of us serve our members. There have been many changes in leadership throughout the region since the pandemic. We must work together with all of the organizations, groups, and segments mentioned above so that the programs and services each of us provide are relevant and meet their ever-changing needs.

Who are the formal and informal community leaders that represent key organizations, groups, and segments?

- Cheryal Hills, Executive Director of Region Five Development Commission and North Central Economic Development Association
- Chad Coquette, Executive Director and CEO of Sourcewell
- Hara Charlier, President of Central Lakes College
- Carrie Brimhall, President of Minnesota State and Technical College
- Area school superintendents
- Elected officials
- Business chamber leaders

- County Health and Human Services directors

(5) **Regulatory Environment** (P.1a5)

What are the key aspects of the regulatory environment under which our community operates?

The organizations in our community of excellence have differing governance and regulatory guidelines. All three entities have a defined service area that overlaps with the five counties often referred to as Minnesota Region 5.

Sourcewell is a public entity governed by a board of elected officials and is bound to the parameters outlined in Minnesota statute 123A.21. Their services are limited to other public entities and non-profit organizations.

Similarly, R5DC is also governed by a board of elected officials and serves local units of government. They are guided by Minnesota statutes 462.381-462.398, also known as the Regional Development Act.

The Initiative Foundation is a nonprofit and one of six foundations in a network called the Minnesota Initiative Foundation. It is supported by donations and grant funding and governed by a board of trustees which ensures alignment with the organization’s mission and purpose.

b. Community Excellence Group (P.1b)

(1) **Mission, Vision, and Values** (P.1b1)

Why have we formed our community excellence group and collaborative community effort?

We formed our community excellence group in order to bring our collective experience and expertise together to be even more intentional, effective, and efficient with our limited resources. We plan to work closely to identify priority areas where we plan to invest our time and resources to make a difference in the lives of those in our community, and to ensure our efforts have an impact within the region.

What is our stated mission and vision?

Vision

We will be a regional community with broad availability to diverse opportunities that enable each resident to thrive and be well.

Mission

Through an impactful, collaborative approach, we will remove barriers and advance regional opportunities.

What values have all agreed to uphold in our community excellence group’s work together?

Collaboration

- Each voice matters and is respected for what it brings to the table
- We will honor the contributions and expertise of each member

Commitment

- We will remain invested in the work and prioritize it
- We will evolve with the community needs to sustain the mission and outcomes

Inclusivity

- We will consider all community groups in our planning, particularly those that have historically been marginalized.

(2) **Composition** (P.1b2)

What key people, organizations, and groups are involved in our community excellence group?

- Region Five Development Commission
- Initiative Foundation
- Sourcewell Regional Programs Team

What are the key drivers that engage these people in achieving our group's mission and vision?

Equity & inclusion

- Reduce poverty
- Disrupt patriarchal, colonial systems
- Respecting differences

Collective mindset

- Decrease polarization
- Move beyond individualism; think of the greater good
- We are better together

Improved quality of life

- Community members are happier, kinder, more self-confident, and healthier (physically and mentally)
- Improving the region for future generations, providing high quality of life in a sustainable way
- Vital local economy
- Strong education that has excellent outcomes for students as they prepare for life beyond school

What is the backbone organization of our efforts?

Sourcewell

(3) Leadership System (P.1b3)

What leadership system does our community excellence group use to lead the efforts of our community excellence and collaborative efforts?

Backbone Organization

- Seed funding
- Coordination
- Note-taking/Record-keeping
- Convening

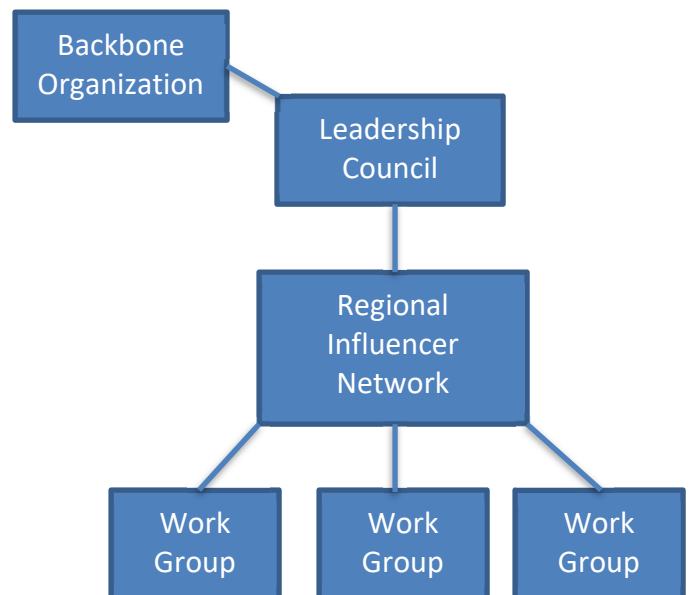
Regional Influencer Network (Future state)

- Inform priorities
- Provide expertise and diverse perspectives

Leadership Council

- Governance
- Expertise
- Relationship-building; connection
- Historical perspective
- Resourcing & budgeting
- Procuring technical assistance
- Develop strategy

Work Groups (Future state)



- Develop & execute action plans for specific areas of focus
- Participants with best expertise in the focus area

(4) **Programs and Services** (P.1b4)

What programs and services are offered through the efforts of our community excellence group?

Our Community of Excellence group will bring the community together by being the facilitator, guide setting of priorities, partnering, and collaborating. We will coordinate tasks, assist in planning, and execute action plans for our identified priorities.

(5) **Suppliers, Partners, and Collaborators** (P.1b5)

What key suppliers, partners, and collaborators support our community excellence group?

We have yet to identify these entities. We plan to establish work groups next year which will draw in relevant partners and collaborators. As they determine potential collaborative solutions, we may need to access suppliers.

What role do they play in our governance and work systems, especially in producing and delivering our programs and services?

We have not determined the roles of our suppliers, partners, or collaborators at this time.

P.2 Community Strategic Situation:

a. Competitive Environment (P.2a)

(1) **Competitive Position** (P.2a1)

With regard to our key offerings, what is our community’s competitive position relative to similar or nearby communities?

In addition to our community offerings noted in P1a2, our location is advantageous. There is proximity to abundant natural resources which support industry and tourism. It also has a rural feel while still within driving distance to metropolitan cities. Communities are close-knit with strong family ties and young couples are attracted to raising their families close to where they grew up. Additionally, the region is home to one of the fastest growing micropolitan areas in the country and is particularly attractive to the retirement community due to lake home real estate.

The presence of R5DC, Sourcewell, and the Initiative Foundation is also advantageous as these organizations are often seen as leaders and exemplars amongst their peer organizations in the state and country. These organizations contribute greatly to increased educational, economic, and community offerings. Additionally, they collaborate well together to maximize their strengths.

What other communities are our community’s key competitors?

Some of our residents are drawn away from the community. Some are attracted to warmer climates and others are attracted to larger economies with more job opportunities such as the Greater Twin Cities/St. Cloud metropolitan area or micropolitan areas such as Alexandria, Bemidji, and Moorhead. Additionally, because our region lacks a four-year university, sometimes students attend college, make connections in those communities, and don’t return to the area.

(2) **Competitiveness Changes** (P.2a2)

What key changes, if any, are affecting our community’s competitive situation, including changes that create opportunities for innovation and collaboration for our community collaboration efforts, as appropriate?

There are several demographic shifts occurring. First of all, the region (along with the state) anticipates an aging population. This provides unique workforce challenges as well as a potential impact on the tax base. We will have a smaller workforce to draw from and may have growing needs in healthcare and long-term care.

Additionally, we are seeing a growing immigrant population responding to workforce needs. This provides an opportunity to diversify our communities. This can also be a challenge for some as it changes community dynamics and impacts educational services.

Another change is the presence or polarizing political viewpoints which has created animosity in public meetings and impacted psychological safety of residents.

(3) **Comparative Data** (P.2a3)

What key sources of comparative and competitive data about our community are available to our community excellence group?

We have pulled data for our area specifically on the social determinants of health around economic stability, education access and quality, healthcare access and quality, and neighborhood and built environment. We have used some of these data points already to set our priority focus areas and to examine other data points we plan to collect.

What limitations, if any, affect the ability to obtain or use these data?

The continued challenges will lie in how we engage additional partners in order to create change or improve the data points and outcomes. This is a big goal of ours, and ties into the next steps we have planned.

b. Strategic Context (P.2b)

(1) **Core Competencies** (P.2b1)

What are our community's core competencies?

We have strong resources and support in the areas of education, childcare, economic development, workforce development, and nonprofit development.

See P.1a2 and P.2a1. for details on the assets of our community. Of these, our geographical location particularly stands out and is fairly unique in the state.

What are the core competencies of our community excellence group, and what each members' relationship is to the mission?

The three member organizations of our group, and their respective representatives, all support the five counties of our community. As public and nonprofit entities, they are not in it for personal gain, but to give back to their communities. Each organization brings unique expertise to the table for a holistic approach to community development. All three organizations are also strongly committed to equity and inclusion.

Sourcewell contributes programming and services for public schools, local government units, and nonprofits. Sourcewell provides professional development opportunities, student programs, career readiness programs, leadership development, systems and continuous improvement opportunities, shared services, and funding opportunities to its members.

Region Five Development Commission enhances the vitality and quality of life in the region through resilient, inclusive, and collaborative approaches to regional community development, economic development, and transportation initiatives.

The Initiative Foundation contributes programming and initiatives in support of entrepreneurship, workforce development, disaster response, childcare, nonprofit development, and grants and funding.

(2) **Challenges and Advantages** (P.2b2)

What are our community's key strategic challenges and advantages?

Human Capital

- Advantages: Low crime, quality healthcare, two higher education institutions, diversifying demographics.
- Challenges: Lack of entry level housing options, access to childcare, lack of a four-year college to attract a diverse population to the region, aging population, and lower participation in the workforce.

Economic Competitiveness

- Advantages: Low crime, quality healthcare, two higher education institutions, diversifying demographics, rising number of remote workers.
- Challenges: Lack of entry level housing options, access to childcare, lack of a four-year college to attract a diverse population to the region.

Community Resources

- Advantages: Lakes and rivers, tourism, farming, work ethic, educational support, quantity of resources, community-based agriculture, parks and trail system, cultural programs and arts programs, younger workforce, healthcare, and regional coordination.
- Challenges: Lack of diverse populations, disconnected state politician representation, lack of volunteers, tourism can lead to longer commute times for homeowners, tension between the "haves and have-nots" and between longtime community members and newcomers, lack of employees and wages, fear of change.

Foundational Assets

- Advantages: Lakes and rivers, tourism, farming, work ethic, educational support, quantity of resources, community-based agriculture, parks and trail system, cultural programs and arts programs, younger workforce, healthcare, and regional coordination.
- Challenges: Lack of diverse populations, disconnected state politician representation, lack of volunteers, tourism can lead to longer commute times for homeowners, tension between the "haves and have-nots" and between longtime community members and newcomers, lack of employees and wages, fear of change.

How do these challenges and advantages relate to our Guiding Coalition's mission and vision?

The identified challenges help us understand our current state and desired future state in order to create diverse opportunities, and to eliminate barriers to attain our desired outcomes.

c. **Performance Improvement System** (P.2c)

What are the key elements of our performance improvement system used by our community excellence group, including its processes for evaluating and improving key projects and processes?

We will follow the Community of Excellence framework to define ourselves, align partners, set priorities, and will bring in additional partners to meet the needs of achieving positive change within our priorities. We have committed to identifying processes and metrics to assist us in attaining our goals, and are dedicated to identifying and utilizing a continuous improvement process as we evaluate our work.