

Community Conversations: Minnesota's Changing Demographics

Understanding Our Population Trends



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Understanding Our Population Trends

part of **Community Conversations: Minnesota’s Changing Demographics**

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Understanding Our Population Trends

Trends

Unlike its neighbors in the Midwest and most other cold weather states, Minnesota continues to grow. The Minnesota state demographer forecasts steady population growth through 2060. One million more people will call Minnesota home by 2030, and the state will add 2 million by 2060.¹ These are statewide projections, and the experiences of differing regions and of individual cities over the next 50 years will vary widely, just as they have varied up to this point.

Most of the state's recent growth has been in the suburban and exurban counties of the Twin Cities metro area. In fact, state demographer data show that seven of the 13 metro counties are among the fastest 100 growing counties in the country. In 2005, about 40 percent of the state's total population lived in the suburbs of Minneapolis-St. Paul. From 2000 to 2005, however, growth in those suburbs accounted for 57 percent of the state's population increase. Greater Minnesota, excluding regional centers, was home

Growth Projections

MINNESOTA WILL ADD
1 MILLION
PEOPLE BY 2030
AND 2 MILLION
BY 2060.

to 34 percent of the state's population in 2005, but accounted for only 13 percent of the 2000-2005 growth. The north Central Lakes region of the state has seen strong growth. The western regions of the state have seen the slowest growth or population declines.

Looking ahead, three-quarters of the projected population growth between now and 2030 will occur in the corridor between St. Cloud and Rochester, but all regions of the state will see some growth:

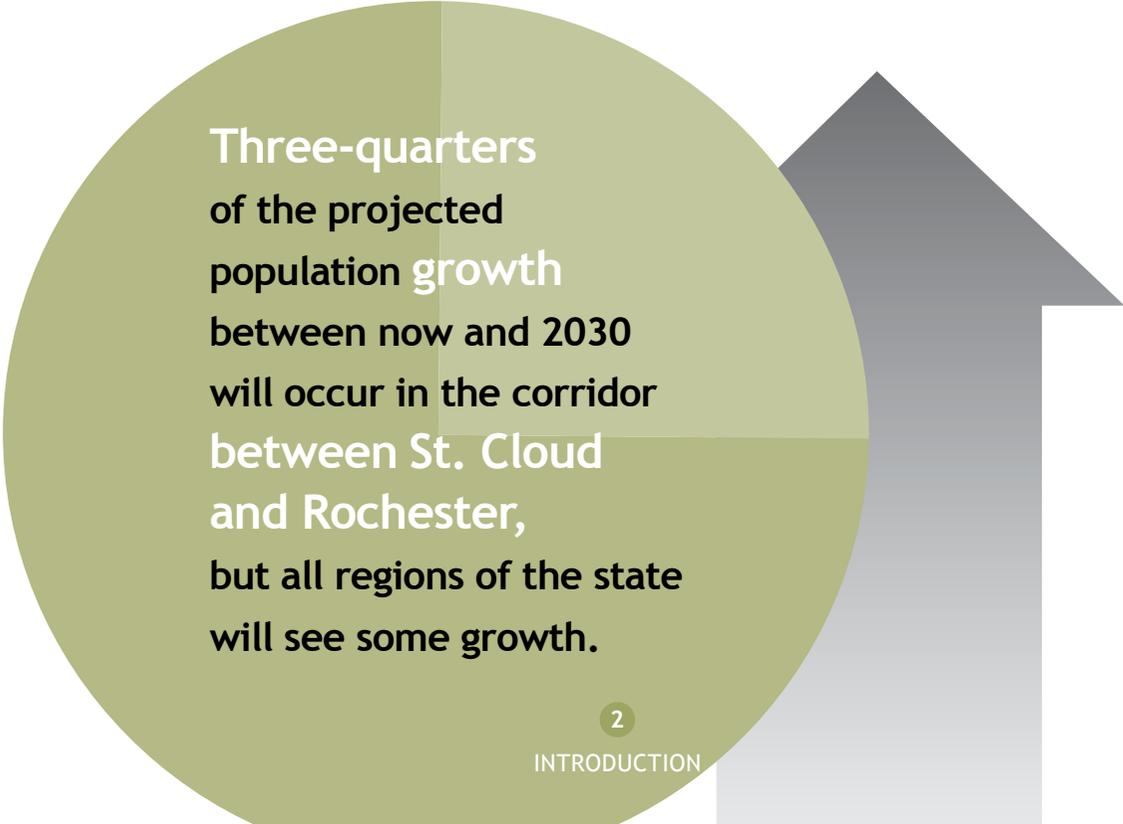
- The Twin Cities region will grow by 800,000, but its share of the state's total population will not change significantly.
- Thirty-two percent more people (mostly older adults relocating from other parts of the state) will live in the Central Lakes region by 2030. In addition to those relocating older adults, the Central Lakes will also see significant growth among those under age 19. It will be the only region in the state to have growth in that age group.

- The North and Northwest regions had no net growth over the last 25 years but will see 14 percent growth in the next 25 years.
- Due to the steady out-migration of young adults in the past, resulting in a large proportion of older residents, the Southwest region will see slower growth in the share of the population over age 65. Current demographic projections for Minnesota show that in the South and Southwest regions of the state, the only overall population growth will be among residents over 65.

It is important to keep in mind that the broad regional trends described here may or may not hold true for individual cities; local circumstances may differ from regional trends.

Trend Effect: City Services

Population growth is often closely related to economic growth, creating different levels of prosperity in those areas with high growth and those with low growth or decline. In areas with stagnant growth or population loss, schools may be forced to close, jobs may be lost as businesses close or relocate, and



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investments in infrastructure and amenities may decline as the tax base shrinks. Cities that are losing population may face tough decisions centering on reducing services and/or the city workforce. They may face more pressure to find ways to collaborate with other local governments to deliver services more efficiently. These communities may struggle to fill vacant elected, appointed, and volunteer positions.

In high-growth areas, however, the concerns are quite different. Population growth attracts new and/or expanded businesses that create jobs, leads to reinvestment in older infrastructure and the development of new infrastructure, and creates demand for new or expanded public services. The specific

services sought may vary depending on the characteristics of the new residents. For example, if older Minnesotans account for most of the growth in a particular city, the need for street lighting, sidewalks, and benches in public spaces is likely to increase. In a city that sees growth among its immigrant populations, translation services may become necessary. Growth can also bring new people seeking elected office and volunteering for city commissions.

Another issue related to population trends is density. As population shifts between different regions of the state, issues related to density arise. Recently, there has been a trend of more people moving to areas rich in natural amenities (e.g., the Central Lakes region),

Population Growth

Population growth will attract new businesses that create jobs, lead to investment and development, and create demand for new public services.

Stagnant Growth

May force schools to close, result in lost jobs, and cause investments in public infrastructure to decline as the tax base shrinks.

Population Loss

Population loss may cause a reduction in services, create a need to deliver services more efficiently, and make it difficult to fill vacant city positions.

where density is low. In low-density areas, the marginal cost of service delivery can be higher than it is in higher-density areas. One reason is that the cost of many services, including school transportation, law enforcement, and fire and ambulance services, are all significantly higher per capita when residential development is less dense and harder to reach because of lakes or other natural barriers. Another trend is urban-style development in formerly low-density areas, including townships. This increases pressure for expanded infrastructure and other services, which creates zoning challenges.

Trend Effect: City Employment

City employment will similarly be affected by whether a region and a particular city is growing, remaining stable, or losing population. All cities will face replacement of significant numbers of retiring employees in the next few years. Competition for employees could be tight in all areas. In stable or declining areas, especially where a significant

portion of the population is over age 65, it may be difficult to find younger employees. These cities may need to consider ways to encourage older employees to continue in part-time status. On the other hand, cities in declining areas with access to significant amounts of intergovernmental aid may become attractive employers in their area. Cities in growing areas, where demand for public services is also growing, are likely to face competition from private-sector employers also recruiting new employees.

These issues are made more complex by two other significant demographic trends: the aging of Minnesota's population and the increasing diversity of the population. As retirements increase, the pressure to replace workers and to implement knowledge-transfer processes will grow. Also, it will become increasingly common in many areas for new workers to be from immigrant populations, creating challenges such as increasing cultural awareness and sensitivity in the workplace.

City employment issues are made more **complex** by two other significant **demographic** trends: the **aging** of Minnesota's population and the increasing **diversity** of the population.

Putting the Power of Dialogue to Work for your Community

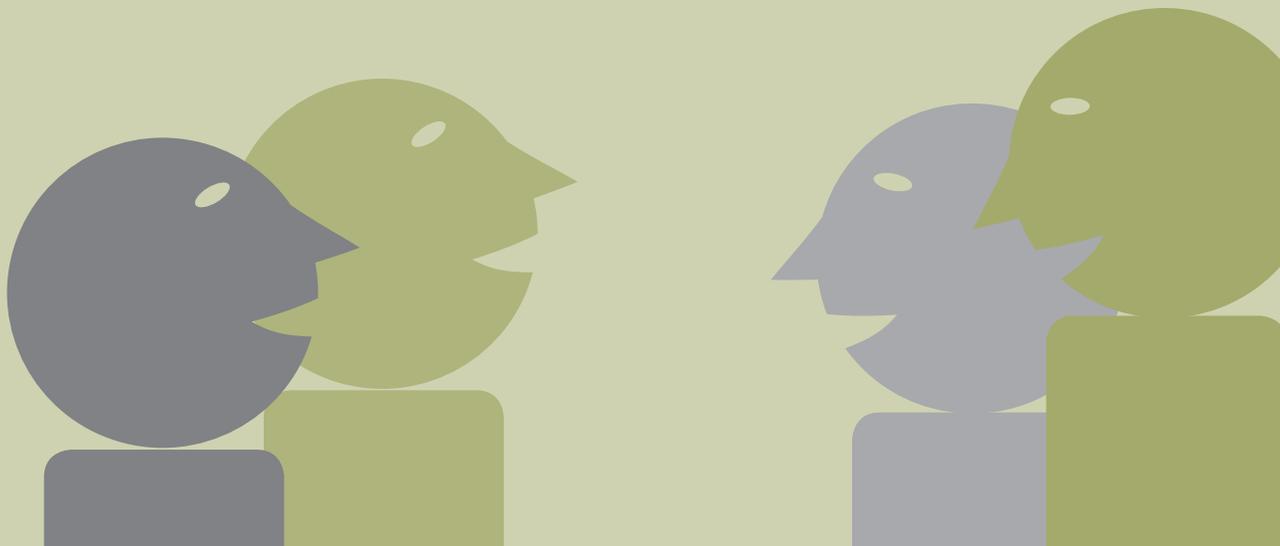
Increasingly, public officials are learning that one of the most effective ways to address challenging community issues is through citizen and stakeholder dialogue. Conducting such dialogues is part of the growing citizen engagement—or “democratic governance”—movement that seeks to tap the insights, energy, understanding, and experiences of “everyday citizens” to address public issues.

Those involved in the democratic governance movement have found that by talking in groups people are more easily able to balance individual needs with the common good. They relearn the civic skills many have lost—the ability to talk, debate, persuade, negotiate, be creative, and find compromise. When

citizens with different viewpoints talk to each other to develop policy recommendations that are rooted in the common ground among them, the participants:

- Learn more about the issues.
- Connect their personal experiences to the policy debate.
- Develop detailed plans and policy recommendations.
- Devote their own time and energy to implementing those action ideas.
- Forge effective working relationships with others, including city elected officials and staff.

This type of dialogue may be very effective when dealing with demographic issues, including meeting the needs of immigrants.



6 Steps to Conducting a Stakeholder Dialogue

Taking a democratic dialogue approach to addressing issues can be made as simple, or as sophisticated, as you like and as makes sense for the issue and the relevant individuals and groups with which you are working. While democratic engagement can take place in a number of different forums, the type of dialogues we are suggesting here work best with a small group—ideally 10 to 12 individuals. They gather to discuss a topic, identify resources, and develop an action plan, and perhaps take responsibility for implementing that plan. If a larger number of stakeholders needs or wants to be involved in the dialogues, the group can be broken down into subgroups. The collective insights of the various groups are then compiled into a common report.

The basic steps to conducting a dialogue include:

1

Identify the stakeholders.

Who is or will be affected by the outcome of this discussion? Who has an interest in it? Who can impact the outcome and the success of any implementation effort? Assess what other local governments have done in this area, including counties and school districts. For most of the issues, almost anyone in your community might have a stake in the outcome, so think broadly.

2

Recruit the stakeholders.

Invite participation by the individuals (or representatives of groups) identified in Step 1. Be careful not to invite just the usual group of community activists. Encourage all groups, including those that may not have participated in city issues in the past, to become involved. Be sure as well that there is good participation and balance by age, gender, economic status, family status, geography, ethnicity, occupation, and so forth. For most issues, you may also want to publish a general announcement inviting anyone who is interested to participate. Consider different ways of contacting individuals in your community, especially younger generations, who may rely upon different technologies for social interaction.

Additional resources on dialogues:

- The Democratic Governance page on the National League of Cities. To view this page, visit www.nlc.org/resources_for_cities, click on “Programs & Services,” and then click on “Democratic Governance.”
- *Smart Democracy: How to Engage Citizens*—a publication available for purchase from the International City/County Management Association at bookstore.icma.org/Smart_Democracy_How_to_Engage_P1241C23.cfm.
- Everyday Democracy is a nonprofit organization that works to help communities engage in successful dialogue. For information, visit www.everyday-democracy.org.
- For more information about community dialogues, contact **Kevin Frazell**, League of Minnesota Cities director of member services, at (651) 281-1215 or kfrazell@lmc.org.

3

Retain a facilitator.

Conducting successful small group dialogues usually necessitates the services of a trained facilitator. The facilitator takes responsibility for helping the group get through the dialogue, makes sure all participants have a balanced opportunity to speak, leads the discussions toward conclusions, and if appropriate, an action plan. The facilitator does not directly participate in the content of the discussion, offer his or her own personal opinions, or lead the discussion in a particular direction or toward predetermined conclusions. Many organizations today have staff who are trained in group facilitation skills.

If your city doesn't have a trained facilitator on staff, check with your county, school district, institutions of higher education, larger local/regional businesses, or the University of Minnesota Extension Service. Any of these organizations might be willing to contribute a few hours of their facilitator's time to a community dialogue on an important issue. And, of course, you will need to be clear about expectations for the facilitator. Beyond facilitation, will he or she be expected, for example, to type notes, prepare a report, or make public presentations?

4

Establish your meeting times and locations.

City hall can work, but consider an optional location where everyday citizens are more used to congregating—e.g., library, coffee shop, park building, or community center. Be sure the setting is comfortable and can provide enough seating. The setting should also accommodate a group discussion (i.e., seats can be arranged in a circle or some other way that is conducive to a group conversation). Arrange for refreshments. Depending on who is in the group, you may also need to provide for child care.

5

Use this Discussion Guide to conduct the dialogues.

Using the Discussion Guide in Section 3, feel free to modify the questions in a way that seems more relevant to your community or to the group. It is best, however, to keep the questions very broad so as not to lead the discussion into predetermined directions. The idea is to connect a current community issue to the values and life experiences of the members of the group, and to their commitment to becoming involved in addressing the issue.

The Discussion Guide in Section 3 is designed to take the group through several discussions, including:

- Background and personal connection to the issue;
- Consensus-building on what the issue is about;
- Future vision about what can and should be done; and
- Development of an action plan, including agreement on assignment of responsibilities for follow-through.

The introduction on the growing immigrant population (Section 1) is designed to serve as a resource for the discussion process.

It's important that someone take notes to document the dialogues, including an outline of the group discussion, agreement points, action plan, and follow-up responsibilities.

6

Follow through on next steps.

Determine whether completion of the dialogues is sufficient in itself, with the work of implementation to be turned over to others, such as staff, or whether further follow-up discussions and action steps require additional meetings. Also be sure to get evaluations from the participants on the dialogue itself. What worked? What didn't? What could be improved?

With productive community conversations, you can explore the possibilities—and celebrate your successes!

Discussion Guide:

Population Trends

This guide deals with the topic of general population change. The topics listed here guide participants into discussion of the community's future, based on current population trends and what the preferred future might look like. While all areas will experience population change over the next 50 years, the experiences of differing regions and of individual cities will vary widely. A common understanding of the community's history and its current population trends will help inform discussion of the future.

Begin each session with a reminder of the ground rules for having an effective dialogue:

- Everyone deserves respect.
- Everyone gets the same opportunity to speak and be heard—only one person talks at a time.
- Participants can disagree, but they must do so amicably and without personal attacks.

Discussion Guide: Population Trends

Topic 1

Background and Personal Experiences

This topic allows the group members to begin discussion about the background of their community, including connecting their personal experiences to history.

- What is your personal experience in this community? How long have you lived here? What brought you or your family here in the first place?
- If you're new to this community, how was your former home different?
- Why do you stay in this community?
- What do you think are the values and strengths of this community?
- What, in your opinion, are the one or two top challenges for the future of this community? How are population changes affecting these challenges?

Topic 2

Current Challenges

Building on the groundwork laid in the first discussion, this topic is intended to guide the group into a more in-depth dialogue and consensus building about what the future looks like, given current trends.

- What does the future of our community look like? Is our population growing, stable, or declining?
- What role does our community play in the state? In the region? That is, why do people come here to live, work, shop, and/or play?
- Are there any population trends we see on the horizon that might change the direction we are going?
- If current population trends continue, what do you think this community will be like in 2025? How do you feel about that?
- Briefly, what are the top two specific issues related to population trends that this community is going to have to address in the next two years?

Topic 3

Future Vision

With a common understanding and language about the history of the community and the current challenges it faces based on population trends, this topic moves the group into dialogue about the preferred future.

- What would you like the population of this community to be like in 2025? You can answer based on both overall vision and/or specific characteristics. *(Once each person has answered this question, then go to Question 2.)*
- What common themes did we hear in the answers to Question 1? Where do we agree? Where is there significant disagreement?
- What existing forces will help lead our community toward the future we want?
- What forces will inhibit us in getting to that future?
- How can we realistically affect those forces, both the positive and the negative?

Topic 4

Action Plan

At this stage the group starts to move from vision and ideals to action!

- What concrete steps do we need to take today, in the short-term, to start achieving the vision we have for our community?
- What about for the longer term?
- What will each of us here commit to doing?
- Who else needs to be engaged at this point to move our plan forward?

This session should end with agreement about who will write the action plan, including assignments of responsibility for implementation and how the group wishes to review, modify, and commit to that plan.

You may copy pages of this booklet for use in your organization, or you may download them for further customization from the League web site at www.lmc.org/page/1/changing-demographics.jsp.

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Things to Think About: Population Trends

As your community discusses and plans for changes in its population, keep the following considerations in mind:

Things to Think About Now

- What role does our city play in its region (e. g., employment center, retail magnet, residential community, agricultural base)?
- What factors influence where people live? How important are the characteristics of a community in people's location decisions?
- Have we considered potential partnerships with other governments, nonprofits, and the private sector as a way to meet demand for service?

Things to Think About for the Future

- Do we have a good understanding of future population projections for our region and our city? If not, where can we get such information?
- What implications does the role our city plays in our region have for our future population growth, stability, or decline?

- Should our projected future population be taken as a given, or are there things we could do to change our future if we want to?
- How will the need and demand for city services and facilities change because of population changes?
- Have we considered potential partnerships with other governments, nonprofits, and the private sector as a way to meet that demand?
- What implication does this have for future housing needs in our city—do we need more housing, is the amount we have about right, or will there be more houses than potential buyers? What type of housing stock will our residents want? What household types will we have?
- What impact will population changes have on property values and, consequently, the tax base of our community?
- How does the size and composition of our current city workforce compare to what will be needed to meet the needs and demands of the future?
- Do we understand the pending retirement patterns of our existing employees?
- Do we have a workforce plan for realistically recruiting and retaining the city staff we'll need in the future?

Endnote

1. Population projections in this document come from “Minnesota Population Projections 2005-2035” report and presentation, Office of State Demographer. Available at www.demography.state.mn.us.



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