

Community Conversations: Minnesota's Changing Demographics

Focusing on Our Growing

Senior Population



Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction—Focusing on Our Growing Senior Population	1
Section 2: Discussion Planning—Putting the Power of Dialogue to Work for your Community	5
Section 3: Dialogue—Discussion Guide: Senior Population	9
Section 4: Follow Up—Things to Think About: Senior Population	11

Focusing on our Growing Senior Population

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

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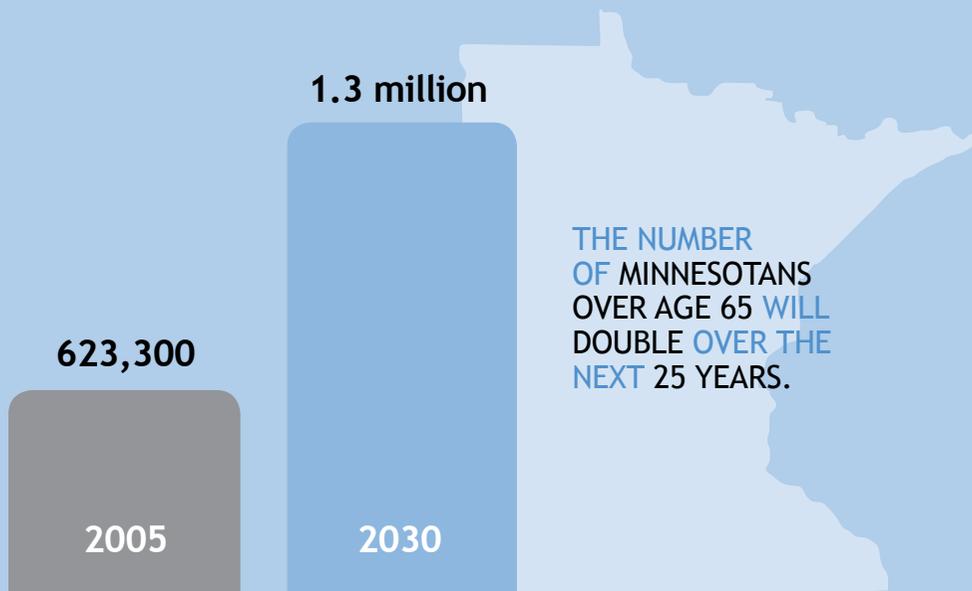
Focusing on Our Growing Senior Population

Trends

Aging is the dominant demographic trend in Minnesota and across the country. The number of Minnesotans over the age of 65 will more than double over the next 25 years to 1.3 million. State-wide, there will be more individuals over 65 than those who are school age by 2020, having significant effects on the kinds of services residents look to local governments to provide.¹

Due to total population growth, the actual number of younger households (in which the head of household is under age 65) in the state will increase, but

will become a lower percentage of all households, and will be concentrated in the central lakes region and the metro corridor. All regions of the state will experience growth in the over-65 age group. As a percentage of the population this group will grow fastest in the metro corridor between St. Cloud and Rochester and slowest in the southwest simply because the proportion of older residents is already high in that area due to steady out-migration of younger residents. 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 age 65.



The baby boom generation—those individuals born between 1946 and 1964—started turning 60 in 2006. This generation differs from previous ones in many ways. Aging has changed due to better overall health, but coupled with higher rates of chronic illness like diabetes; lower disability rates, the presence of more blended families; and increasing ethnic diversity. Surveys show that most people in this age group expect life to continue “as is,” contributing to a trend of aging-in-place instead of moving to retirement or nursing homes. In fact, the Minnesota Board of Aging reports that only 10 percent of older Minnesotans plan to move, and many seniors plan to (or will need to) work past traditional retirement age.

Whether these expectations will become reality remains to be seen. All of these trends will influence the kinds of services that people will need. Further, service needs will continue to evolve as the large group of people over age 65 moves into their 70s, 80s, and beyond.²

Trend Effect: City Services

The needs of an aging population will be varied. Cities and the community organizations within them will be called upon to serve this growing subset of our population.

Older residents will need transit, easy-to-read signage, benches in public spaces, sidewalks, ramps, additional lighting, and more parking. Families caring for elderly parents or other relatives may look for zoning changes to allow mother-in-law apartments and other home adaptations.

Transit and technology solutions will also become important. Heightened vulnerability to crime will create the need for crime prevention/education, public safety services, fraud protection, and specialized first-responder training. Older residents will benefit from supportive home maintenance programs and code enforcement. Increasing risk of injury will create the need for fall-prevention services, public safety, and emergency services. Ironically, at the same

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time that all of these services become increasingly important, cities may see growing resistance to the property tax as more and more people have to live on fixed incomes.

Older residents will also likely need access to health care services, including nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and ambulance services. Preventing older community members from becoming isolated will require social and supportive programs. Community nonprofits and faith organizations may provide some of these services. Cities may have a role as convener of organizations and resources. To keep seniors involved and to tap their skills and experience, cities can consider volunteer programs and civic and contributory opportunities for seniors.

Residential preferences concerning location and type of home will change. The recent trend of move-

ment away from the metro core may slow or even reverse. There will still be increasing movement to areas with a high level of amenities such as lakes. Statewide, most of the household growth will be caused by empty-nesters and elderly individuals living alone. These individuals will consider security, accessibility, convenience to relatives and friends, quality construction, and transit and pedestrian-friendly development when choosing where to live. In contrast, young families frequently consider yard space, number of bedrooms, storage space, schools, the neighborhood, and convenience to work. Cities, therefore, will need life-cycle housing to attract residents of all ages.

Finally, cities that host colleges or universities face the challenge of simultaneously meeting the service needs of large populations of young people and aging residents.

Special Needs of Seniors

Accessibility

Easy-to-read signage, benches in public spaces, sidewalks, ramps, additional lighting, and more parking

Housing

Supportive home maintenance programs and code enforcement

Health Care

Health care services, including nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and ambulance services

Safety

Prevention services, public safety, and emergency services

Trend Effect: City Employment

Increasing retirements will impact city workforces and make the need for workforce planning and knowledge transfer more urgent. Cities will have to compete more with the private and nonprofit sectors for new workers. According to data from the state demographer, the number of new workforce entrants (ages 18-24) increased 13 percent from 2000 to 2005. It will grow less than 1 percent from 2005 to 2010 and then start falling through 2020. Minnesota local government has fewer young workers and more older workers than the private sector, echoing a national trend.

According to Public Employee Retirement Association (PERA) data, 37 percent of the city employees in the state overall are over age 50. Some cities have older workforces than others. For example, in almost half of the cities in the state, about one-quarter of all employees are over age 50. In 150 cities, the challenge is even greater because at least half of employees are over age 50.

Since ethnic populations are younger overall, new workers are more likely to be more diverse. Consequently, cultural awareness and workforce diversity will become important issues. Cities might consider volunteer programs and return-to-work opportunities to continue to tap the skills and knowledge of older employees. Increasing retirements will create the need for knowledge transfer; new recruitment methods; and changes to hiring rules, compensation, and retention tools.

As some young workers join the workforce, challenges will arise from having multiple generations in the workplace, including differences in expectations and conflicts stemming from young workers supervising older ones. Individuals choosing to delay retirement for economic or other reasons will create challenges involving pensions, technology, and mobility needs.

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Putting the Power of Dialogue to Work for your Community

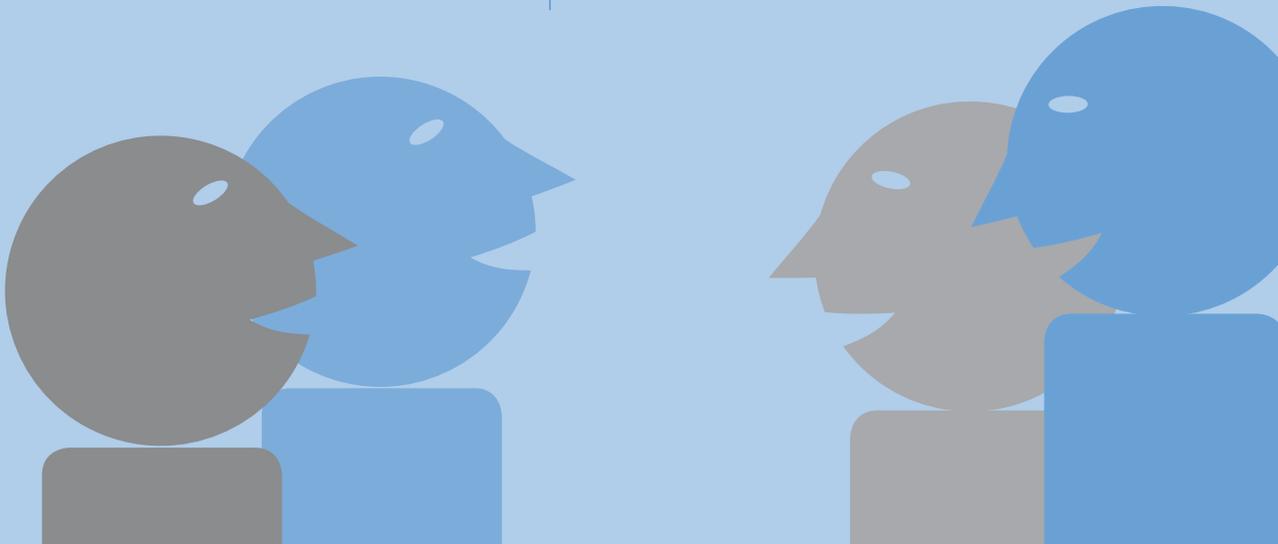
Increasingly, public officials are learning that one of the most effective ways to address challenging community issues is through citizen and stakeholder dialogue. Conducting such dialogues is part of the growing citizen engagement—or “democratic governance”—movement that seeks to tap the insights,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

Senior Population

This guide deals with the topic of aging. This topic has two components—general community issues and city employment. A dialogue on city employment may have a narrower group of stakeholders, mainly current city staff. The guide provides an optional Topic 2 session on city employment, which may be used in addition to or instead of the first Topic 2 session.

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: Senior Population

Topic 1

Interpersonal Understanding

This topic allows the group members to begin exploring their respective experiences and viewpoints with regard to aging.

- First, introduce yourself, including the year in which you were born and your age.
- What has been your personal experience with “older” adults, however you define that? Relatives? Neighbors? Co-workers? Friends? Yourself, perhaps!
- What do you think of if I mention that someone is 60?
- When you think of yourself being 60, how do you picture your life? What will you be doing? How will you feel?
- Would you want to grow older in this community? Why or why not?

Topic 2

Looking at Our Community Through the Lens of Aging

Building on the groundwork laid in the first discussion, this topic is intended to lead the group into discussion about the realities of aging in this community, and to begin thinking about how it might be made better.

- What is the current age breakdown of our population? In general, what will our community be like in terms of the age of our population in five years, 10 years, 20 years? Are we satisfied with that? If we don't like that projected future, what, realistically, can be done to influence a different age makeup?
- What about our community now makes it a great place to age? What broad changes are needed to make it an even better place to age?

Topic 2—Additional *(optional)*

City Employment

Building on the groundwork laid in the first discussion, this topic is intended to guide the group into a more in-depth dialogue about the effects of an aging population on the city workforce.

- What is the current age makeup of the city workforce? Do we understand the retirement patterns we'll face in the future?
- Do you think the city would be a good place to work when you are over 65 years of age? Why or why not?
- Should we be making plans to encourage individuals to work past age 65? Why or why not?
- If so, what changes in personnel policies and job structures may be needed?
- Do we have plans in place for “knowledge transfer” from employees who will be retiring to those who will be replacing them?

Topic 3

Action Plan

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

- What specific issues do we need to begin addressing right away?
- 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: Senior Population

As your community discusses and plans to meet the needs of its senior population, keep the following considerations in mind:

Things to Think About Now

- What is the age makeup of our current population?
- What city services will our 65+ residents want and need? Our 75+ residents? Our 85+ residents? What are the different service needs for our mobile residents? Our less mobile residents? Our active residents? Our less active residents?
- Do we have a plan to develop and deliver the range of services demanded?
- Will our financial base allow us to provide such services? If not, can we develop a plan to pay?
- How will we keep aging citizens actively engaged in the community, and contributing as volunteers?
- Have we done a workforce analysis to understand the retirement plans of our current city workforce and the implications those will have for the city?
- How will we capture the knowledge of existing employees and transfer it to their replacement workers?
- What changes in job structure and work rules might we need to make in order to encourage older workers to remain an additional few years or to return in a part-time status?

- Have we considered less labor-intensive ways to deliver services (i.e., ways to do the same work with fewer people as retirements increase), such as cooperative agreements with other governments or entities, technology solutions, or volunteers?
- If we have significant ethnic minorities and/or immigrants in our community, do they view the city as a place to apply for work? If not, what changes do we need to make to become a more “welcoming” employer?
- What will we need to do in order to train supervisors and all employers to deal with a workforce that is more diverse both generationally and in ethnicity?
- Have we checked with county officials to see what they’re doing to address the needs of an aging population?

Things to Think About for the Future

- What types of people (including ages) are likely to stay in or move to our community?
- Overall, do we have a good understanding of the likely age makeup of our population in the future?
- If we aren’t satisfied with our projected future population, are there realistic steps we can take to influence it in a more desirable direction?
- Is our housing stock, both existing and planned, consistent with the needs of our projected future population?

Endnotes

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.
2. Statistics and other information from presentation given by Hal Freshly, Minnesota Board of Aging, to the League of Minnesota Cities Demographics Task Force on March 21, 2007.



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