



Strategic Plan 2022-2024

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Building bridges to a brighter future! It's all about partnership and collaboration.



Attracting and retaining great employers

Executive summary

Wright County is located Northwest of Minneapolis and has a population of approximately 141,000 people with a mix of rural and suburban communities including residential, agriculture, retail and commercial industrial development. The county has seen significant growth over the last several decades and is expected to continue to be part of a high growth area of the state out to 2053.

Wright County advantages for economic development:

- The county's proximity to the metropolitan areas of Minneapolis/St Paul and St Cloud.
- Access to good transportation (access to I-94, rail and state highways)
- Quality of the workforce (work ethic)
- Lower land costs compared to more urban areas
- Supportive local regulatory environment
- Age of the working population
- Diversity of industries currently in the county
- Favorable cost of housing compared to metro
- Favorable cost structure of labor compared to metro
- Established EDA's at county and several cities
- WCEDP reputation, engagement and collaboration with business, governmental units, non-profits and educational institutions.

Wright County opportunities to enhance economic development:

- Expansion of available workforce
- Enhance higher educational opportunities in the county
- Expand on the full continuum of housing options

- Enhance infrastructure assets
- Enhance quality child care resources
- Enhance broad band in rural areas
- Improve brand awareness in areas outside of the county

Resource constraints:

Given the partnership has a staff of two people with a large agenda and a volunteer board, it is important that the staff and WCEDP resources are allocated toward the strategic priorities with the greatest impact in the county. Additionally, staff needs to determine when contractors or other organizations may be needed to perform certain tasks when staff does not have the resources to perform these tasks.

Role of WCEDP

The role of the WCEDP is to collaborate with the county and city EDA's, chambers, educational institutions, non-profits and the private sector to promote economic development in the county. Its primary roles are:

- Providing economic development technical expertise, support and connections
- Conducting business, retention and expansion visits
- Attracting, developing and retaining talent
- Marketing the county to promote the attraction and retention of talent and increased commerce
- Building countywide economic development capacity that promotes healthy economic development.

Our Mission

To support a healthy and diverse environment for businesses and residents that provides employment opportunities and enhances the overall economic vitality of Wright County

Our Vision

Wright County is a highly desirable place to live, work and own a business.

Strategic imperatives:

- Business retention and expansion
- Workforce development and attraction
- Marketing the County as a great place to live, work and do business
- Build economic development capacity across the county

For additional detail regarding the strategies, tactics and resource allocation see plan details below.

Strategic Imperatives detail

Business development, expansion and retention

- While the Partnership's focus is to serve the economic development needs of all businesses in the county, it also encourages engagement by all businesses, governmental units, educational institutions and non-profits to work in partnership to expand the resources working toward greater economic development in the county.
- Business retention and expansion will be a primary focus of the organization.
- While business attraction is a secondary focus given the labor shortage and the resources available for this activity, the WCEDP will continue to work with MN DEED on business attraction and work collaboratively with chambers, EDA's and cities and townships as opportunities develop.
- In 2021 the WCEDP made 13 business development, expansion and retention visits. During 2022-2024 the WCEDP will make 12-15 of these visits per year.
- Since many of these visits involve area city, county and chamber representation, it is necessary to have great coordination with the other collaborators and solid agendas to make the meetings as productive as possible.
- Great follow up is key to these visits and making sure that the needs of the businesses are heard and that the businesses are connected with the resources they need.

	Business development, expansion and retention		
2022-2024 Strategies	Priorities	Tactics	Role
Business expansion and retention visits	Prioritize businesses with greater needs and businesses with 20 to 30 employees for BRE visits	Collaborate with area chambers, cities and EDA's to conduct these visits to identify needs and provide assistance where needed	Lead
Grant Research, Administration	Continue to assist with administration of Federal and State grant funding to businesses where needed by local government entities	Work with area cities, county and EDA's to administer and seek additional opportunities for funding area businesses, research other available grant opportunities and be able to have a matching amount available when required	Partner
Responding to individual business needs	Respond and track all types of inquiries to identify resources to assist businesses with growth, retention and expansion opportunities	Continue to build positive relationships with partners in the county and state to bring greater resources to Wright County businesses and engage with contracted individual to assist with business planning, technical assistance, etc.	Lead and collaborate
Participation on local city EDA's	Prioritize involvement based upon EDA's with greatest needs and highest opportunities.	Develop an EDA and chamber GAP analysis to identify those with greatest needs.	Lead
Financial packaging Assistance	Seek connections with businesses seeking financing and make referrals to professionals to support appropriate funding options	Continue to be main point of contact to SBA, SBDC, bankers, accountants and legal	Partner

Administer revolving loan fund	Continue to promote and administer revolving loan fund if funds become uncertified.	Work with individual businesses to complete applications, have Finance Task Force review and make determination, present to County Board for final approval and administer funds in an efficient manner, follow up with loan recipients for repayment completion	Lead
Partner Development	Continue to grow the membership and sponsors of the partnership to increase public/private collaboration in economic development	Develop deeper relationships with existing and new partners to retain and expand the membership through regular personal and electronic contact	Lead
Map relationships with EDA's, chambers and cities to identify collaborative gaps	Allocate time based upon the individual needs of each entity	After completion of the map various EDA's, chambers and cities will be evaluated and made to help fill any economic gaps, build relationships and improve collaboration.	Lead
		Continue to be a convener of local chambers, EDAs and cities to build county wide economic development focus, hold special events/training sessions to provide technical assistance	
Partner communications	Determine how partners want to communicate with the partnership (in person, by phone, email, zoom) to provide best service to each entity.	Use membership invoices and thank you notes to encourage connections by various means.	Lead
		Reinforce WCEDP imperatives in newsletter, provide links to website, feature business news about partner and non partner organizations	Lead
		Revive the production of a member directory/resource guide, review sponsorships/ad sales to offset costs	Lead

Workforce development and attraction

- Given the labor shortages existing across the country and specifically in Wright County, it is essential that there is a focused effort to attract and develop talent.
- For there to be success in workforce development and attraction, it is essential that the WCEDP lead in this collaborative effort with the businesses and educational institutions within the county.
- Strong partnerships with higher educational institutions outside the county is key to both recruiting and developing the talent pool.
- Given Wright County's proximity to both the Mpls/St Paul and the St Cloud metropolitan areas, there is great opportunity to attract talent either commuting to or from Mpls/St Paul or living in the St Cloud area.
- The Workforce Pathways program has been very useful in promoting career readiness and creating exposure to the careers available in the county. This program will be expanded to more schools during the planning horizon.
- The CEO program has been successful and will be expanded to grow the impact of the program.
- With high competition for workforce, the WCEDP will continue to advocate for county amenities that will improve the quality of life in the county to attract and retain talent in the county.
- Given the homogeneous nature of the current population, it may be difficult to attract workers of different races to the community. Encouraging the schools, business and local government to develop strategies to be an inclusive community could help the recruitment of future workers.

2022 Strategic Plan - Workforce development

2022-2024 Strategies	Priorities	Tactics	Role
Support the workforce development needs of the county	Work with educational institutions to develop workforce skills to meet the needs of local businesses	Identify hard and soft skills including leadership development needed by business and work with educational institutions to improve the skills of the Wright County workforce	Advocacy and support
		Inventory CTE programs in schools and help connect with local businesses	Partner
Build strong relationships with educational institutions for recruiting	Focus on recruitment of students to work in Wright County	Further develop relationships with SCTCC, Bridgewater, Wright Technical Center, CMJTS and others to develop and recruit workforce	Lead
Support the development and retention of resources to improve the competitiveness of Wright County in attracting talent	Childcare, transportation, a continuum of housing, broad band, improved infrastructure, skill development and mental health are priorities in attracting talent	Support county wide efforts for increased childcare resources, improved transportation, broad band and workforce flexibility and benefits	Advocate

Continue to administer and promote the CEO program	Expand the reach of the CEO program in the county	Continued development of CEO program, expanding the reach toward schools in effort to increase sponsor relationships, marketing program, additional hourly wage to facilitator for additional meetings with schools, mentors, sponsors, reserve fund for lean years	Partner
Workforce pathways program	Further develop the workforce pathways program	Develop curriculum for 9 school districts to engage students in Workforce pathways, soft skills, work ethic etc.	Lead/partner
		Ongoing marketing of available jobs, training opportunities, County amenities,	

Marketing the county as a great place to live, work and do business

- Based upon the board's analysis and comments in the stakeholder survey, it is evident that the WCEDP needs to lead the marketing of the County as a great place to live, work and do business.
- This is an opportunity to promote the tangible assets of the county and help all businesses in the county attract commerce and a quality workforce.
- There was a comprehensive marketing strategy developed in 2015 which was focused primarily on the attraction of new businesses to Wright County. Many of the strategies outlined in the document have been implemented and have been successful.
- Given the need to attract talent to the region, a new marketing strategy will be developed with its primary focus on the attraction of talent. The audiences for this marketing will be workers in the St Cloud area who commute to the metro and workers in the metro that want to live in a safer, less busy, smaller community with great amenities and quality of life.
- The website and the e-letter have been very successful in communicating with the business community. With the new focus on attracting talent, the site will be upgraded to better feature the quality of life and the great careers available in the county.
- A web site and SEO audit will be conducted to determine the effectiveness of the current website and inform the digital marketing strategy going forward.
- A countywide resource guide will be developed to promote the different communities and their unique characteristics.
- Through this marketing campaign there is an opportunity to show Wright County as a welcoming community to all.

2022 Strategic Plan - County wide marketing			
2022-2024 Strategies	Priorities	Tactics	Role
Develop a marketing plan for the attraction of talent, promoting local commerce and attraction of businesses to Wright county	Develop countywide brand, tagline and brand guidelines that appeal to target audiences promoting jobs, safety, schools, cost of living, workforce pathways program etc.	Select marketing firm to assist in developing strategy and implementation of tactics to successfully market the county	Lead
	Identify target audiences NW/SE of Wright county to be reached with marketing	Explore sponsorship opportunities to assist in funding	Lead
	Develop cost efficient marketing tactics to influence target audiences		
	Develop content based upon target audiences, brand guidelines and attributes of the county		
	Revamp website to reflect branding, improve SEO and promote Wright county to target audiences		
	Develop attribution measurements to measure return on investment and review quarterly	By monitoring web traffic, clicks etc, staff can determine the effectiveness of marketing spend	
	Complete annual marketing review to review results and refine strategy		

Develop strategy to promote non-county owned commercial and industrial property for sale in Wright County	Work with area commercial real estate firms to enhance links to realtors on the WEB site and other channels	Maintain Site Selectors Page on website	Partner
Create a Countywide Resource guide	Showcase the high quality of life, safe living and low cost of living in Wright County	Feature all cities and special sites within townships, as well as special events for the year	Lead



Promoting the county's assets

Economic development capacity building across the county

- Given the need for additional resources to promote economic development in the county, it is essential that the WCEDP continues to collaborate with the county and city EDA's and chambers and work to build additional economic development capabilities within these organizations.
- Since there are a variety of different sized cities and chambers with different levels of skills and tools available to promote economic development, staff will conduct an inventory of its collaborators and create a roadmap to help build the capacity of these organizations.
- WCEDP has been a leader in bringing economic development organizations together and will use these relationships to expand the collaboration through educational seminars on relevant topics to economic development and workforce well being.
- The partnership will continue to promote its networking events as a means of building enthusiasm for economic development, collaboration between various sectors and create additional community engagement.
- The partnership will continue to be an advocate and community resource to promote infrastructure necessary to promote the economic development of the county



Helping main street!

2022 Strategic Plan - Economic development capacity building

2022-2024 Strategies	Priorities	Tactics	Role
Partner to build economic development capacity for area cities	Identify city EDA's and chambers in the county that have economic development gaps and collaborate with them to build their capacity	Build economic development checklist of best practices in BRE and train/assist in implementing in EDA's and chambers	Lead
Economic development capacity building for cities, townships, businesses and residents	Conduct three capacity building seminars annually	Seminar ideas: mental healthiness, zoning pros & cons, workplace innovations to retain and recruit talent, working from home pros and cons, education of elected officials in economic development strategies, <u>How to start a business-SBDC</u>	Lead

Develop networking opportunities to support economic development	Annual meeting Golf Fundraising Event Annual Holiday Social Event Attendance-Director	Continue to develop sponsorships for events and provide quality networking opportunities	Lead
Infrastructure	Advocate for infrastructure that enhances county economic development	Work with local governments to understand infrastructure needs and opportunities	Advocate

Strategic planning process:

The process used to complete this strategic plan was to survey stakeholders utilizing an online survey which was sent out by email to approximately 1200 businesses, educators, non-profits and local government officials asking participants about their impressions of the work of the WCEDP, the state of the local economy and what the greatest challenges were in growing their businesses. This survey was completed in November 2021 with 49 individual respondents.

The board of the WCEDP participated in a half day retreat at the Wright Technical Center where they reviewed the survey results, demographic data, population trend data and discussed the work of the WCEDP. Based upon this review, the group prioritized the importance of the various activities and discussed where higher or lower emphasis should be placed over the planning horizon.

The Executive Director of the WCEDP worked with the consultant to further develop the strategies, tactics and focus of the strategic plan, which was presented to the management committee of the WCEDP for review and comment in December 2021. After the plan had its final review and edits, it was approved by the full board and communicated to the Partnership at its January 2022 annual meeting.

Economy

- As the global and national economy is responding to the impacts of the pandemic and its aftermath, there will continue to be impacts on the local and regional economy as well.
- Inflation has spiked to forty year highs.
- Workforce participation rates have fallen dramatically as many people have left the workforce.
- Supply chains continue to be slow due to a lack of truck drivers and port workers along with pent up demand for products by consumers.

- Housing costs have risen dramatically over the past year and demand for all types of housing is driving rents and home prices higher.
- Workforce housing is in very high demand.
- Pandemic related fiscal and monetary policy continue to stimulate the economy which is causing an increased need for workers as consumer demand increases.
- Wage rates are escalating as businesses struggle to find qualified applicants.
- The state of Minnesota has a \$7.7 billion surplus and additional government funding for infrastructure will be forthcoming from the federal government.
- All of the above factors are impacting the economy in Wright county and present both opportunities and threats to economic development.
- The economy of Wright County is diversified with a mix of manufacturing, health care, retail sales and accommodations and food sales. Median household income is \$84,974 and per capita income is \$36,260 with 5.2% of the population in poverty. The county has about 3400 employers providing products and services both inside and outside Wright County.
- Given the inflationary pressures and lack of available workforce, economic development will be challenged across the country.
- Inflation plus increasing crime in urban areas and the ability to work remotely has the potential to cause workers to seek more suburban and rural areas which could be an opportunity for Wright county.

Below is a snapshot of key economic statistics for the county provided by DEED as of July 1 2019 which is the latest information available.

i Population estimates, July 1, 2019, (V2019)	138,377
Economy	
i In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2015-2019	74.2%
i In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2015-2019	70.3%
i Total accommodation and food services sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	123,821
i Total health care and social assistance receipts/revenue, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	397,728
i Total manufacturers shipments, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	1,184,940
i Total retail sales, 2012 (\$1,000) (c)	1,713,538
i Total retail sales per capita, 2012 (c)	\$13,457
Transportation	
i Mean travel time to work (minutes), workers age 16 years+, 2015-2019	30.5
Income & Poverty	
i Median household income (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$84,974
i Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2019 dollars), 2015-2019	\$36,260
i Persons in poverty, percent	△ 5.2%
BUSINESSES	
Businesses	
i Total employer establishments, 2019	3,413
i Total employment, 2019	39,381
i Total annual payroll, 2019 (\$1,000)	1,753,184
i Total employment, percent change, 2018-2019	2.6%
i Total nonemployer establishments, 2018	9,887
i All firms, 2012	11,975
i Men-owned firms, 2012	6,487
i Women-owned firms, 2012	3,471
i Minority-owned firms, 2012	302
i Nonminority-owned firms, 2012	11,318
i Veteran-owned firms, 2012	900
i Nonveteran-owned firms, 2012	10,475



Understanding each community

Demographics

- The population of Wright county is approximately 141,000 and has been growing steadily over the last several decades and is projected to be one of the faster growing counties in the coming decades.
- The population is 94% white, with 3.1% hispanic or latino and 1.4% asian. The county has significant opportunities to attract workers from other backgrounds with the higher non white populations in Hennepin and other adjacent counties.
- 28% of the population is under 18 years of age which has the potential to provide a good future workforce if they can be retained in the county.

- 7% of the population are veterans which is a good source of workers.
- 2.8% of the population is foreign born which is significantly below some neighboring counties. This population is expected to be one of the higher growth population segments in the state over the next several decades and provides opportunities for growth of the workforce.
- Over time the diversity of the county by race will change as is happening across the state and ensuring that the educational institutions and employers are adapting to this demographic shift will be key to economic growth in the long term.



Retaining the workforce now and in the future

































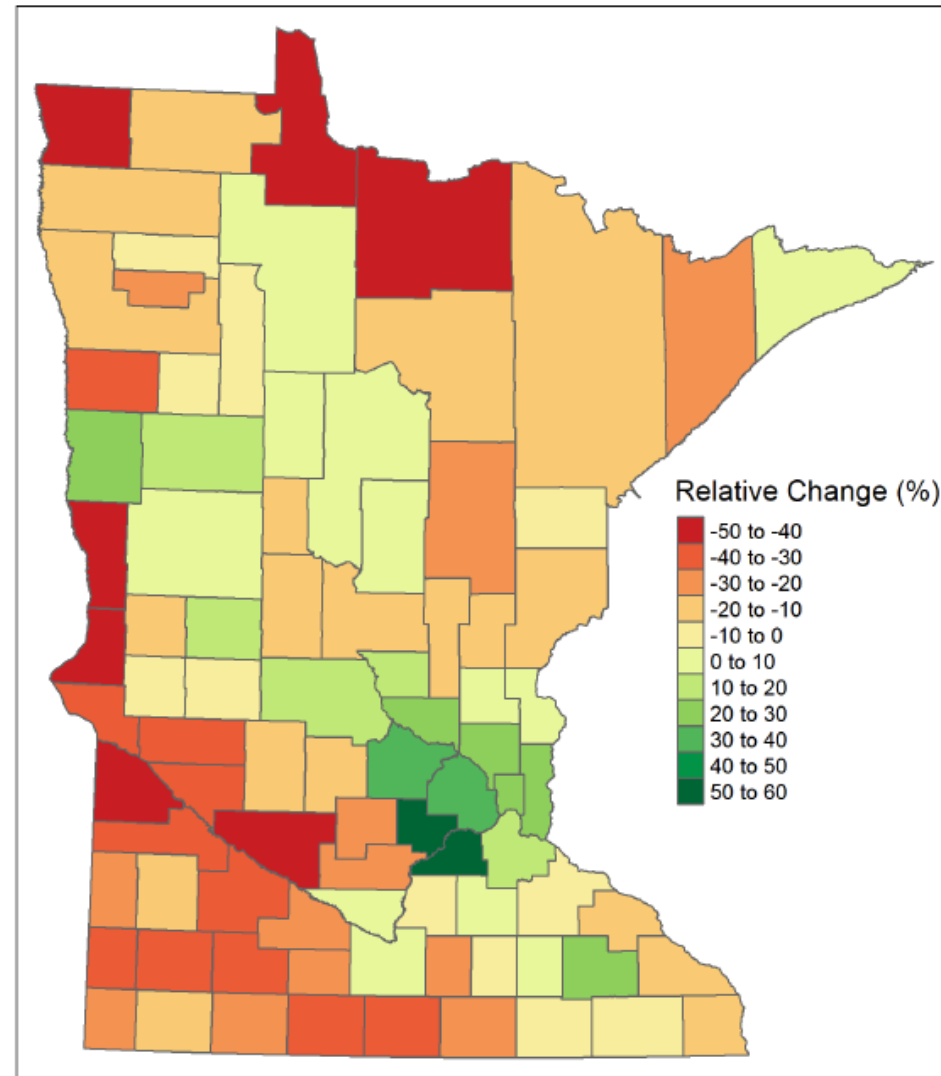
 PEOPLE	
Population	
 Population estimates, July 1, 2019, (V2019)	138,377
 Population estimates base, April 1, 2010, (V2019)	124,697
 Population, percent change - April 1, 2010 (estimates base) to July 1, 2019, (V2019)	11.0%
 Population, Census, April 1, 2020	141,337
 Population, Census, April 1, 2010	124,700
Age and Sex	
 Persons under 5 years, percent	 6.8%
 Persons under 18 years, percent	 27.7%
 Persons 65 years and over, percent	 13.0%
 Female persons, percent	 49.4%
Race and Hispanic Origin	
 White alone, percent	 94.4%
 Black or African American alone, percent (a)	 1.8%
 American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	 0.4%
 Asian alone, percent (a)	 1.4%
 Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	 Z
 Two or More Races, percent	 1.9%
 Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	 3.1%
 White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	 91.7%
Population Characteristics	
 Veterans, 2015-2019	6,895
 Foreign born persons, percent, 2015-2019	2.8%

Figure 9: Relative population change by county, 2018 to 2053



*Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center