

## **Strategic Priority: Job Growth**

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants consistently stressed the need to prioritize job quality alongside job quantity. Many expressed that simply growing the number of jobs is not enough if those jobs do not support a family-sustaining wage. Investments in clean energy and healthcare were discussed as promising sectors, though participants voiced concerns about whether those sectors offer mobility or long-term economic security. Several participants emphasized workforce alignment as a strategy, especially in adapting education and training programs to prepare for technological transformation, including automation and AI. Programs like Genesis Works and Lakeville Works were mentioned as strong models for scalable workforce pipelines.

Entrepreneurship emerged as a central theme, especially in marginalized communities. Participants advocated for positioning business ownership as a core economic strategy and career path, not an alternative. K–12 education was seen as a critical lever for long-term job growth, and participants proposed earlier exposure to technology, entrepreneurial thinking, and industry-aligned skill-building.

Repurposing commercial real estate was suggested as an economic opportunity that could be directly tied to job creation. Many agreed that declining office demand, especially in suburban areas, represents untapped economic potential and could be part of a larger job growth strategy.

### **Key Partners and Organizations**

Participants identified several regional organizations central to advancing job growth, including Greater MSP, DEED, local workforce boards, and chambers of commerce. There was also a strong desire to see institutions like the University of St. Thomas, the Carlson School of Management, and Beta.MN play more direct roles in building out a coordinated regional tech and innovation ecosystem. Organizations such as NEON, MCCD, and Redesign were named for their strengths in supporting small business development in culturally relevant ways. Some participants called for philanthropic partners to shift their support toward entrepreneurship as a vehicle for equitable growth.

### **Evaluating Progress**

Progress on job growth was seen as needing stronger metrics and public accountability. Participants suggested measuring both job creation and job quality, and emphasized the importance of tracking family-sustaining wages, workforce participation among underrepresented groups, and spatial distribution of job growth across the region.

Others stressed the need to evaluate how well educational institutions and workforce training providers are aligning with actual market needs.

Several participants raised concerns about short-termism in job creation efforts, with some local strategies perceived as reactive rather than long-term or systemic. Others urged the use of longitudinal data to track outcomes of job creation strategies, particularly for BIPOC workers and younger adults transitioning into the workforce.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Job growth cannot be decoupled from job quality and access. Stakeholders repeatedly emphasized that low-wage job growth alone will not move the needle on economic equity.
- Entrepreneurship and innovation must be treated as pillars of job creation, not as secondary strategies.
- Reimagining commercial real estate and investing in workforce-aligned education are key levers for sustainable, future-facing job growth.

### **Strategic Priority: Racial Inclusion**

#### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants called for racial equity to be deeply embedded in economic development—not a side initiative or an isolated goal. Many emphasized that procurement, hiring, contracting, and capital investment strategies must prioritize communities that have historically been excluded from wealth-building. Programs that support emerging BIPOC developers and entrepreneurs were described as essential tools for closing the racial wealth gap.

Policy strategies that intentionally address disparities—such as Hennepin and Ramsey County’s equity-centered economic development plans—were held up as models for embedding racial inclusion across government operations. Participants advocated for sustained investment in culturally specific business and workforce support, not just project-based funding. There was also a strong call to confront public perceptions and attitudes that downplay or resist discussions about race. Many agreed that real progress requires long-term narrative change and public education, particularly among white residents who may not perceive the same barriers.

Youth career exploration and mentorship programs were discussed as long-term equity strategies. Programs like Step-Up, the Emerging Diverse Developers Initiative, and Capital Pathways were named repeatedly as examples of efforts that provide on-ramps to opportunity.

## **Key Partners and Organizations**

Participants highlighted organizations already leading in this space, including the Alliance for Metropolitan Stability, Center for Economic Inclusion, the Black Women's Wealth Alliance, and the Latino Economic Development Center. Culturally rooted nonprofits such as Hmong American Partnership were noted for their critical role in reaching and supporting specific communities. Counties were also named as central players, with several participants noting that regional governments have become some of the most consistent drivers of racial equity strategies.

There was also recognition that philanthropic funders, CDFIs, and intermediaries must remain engaged and accountable to racial inclusion goals and consider how funding flows either reinforce or reduce disparities.

## **Evaluating Progress**

Participants advocated for a data-informed approach to tracking racial equity. They recommended metrics like homeownership rates, income disparities, business ownership by race, and access to capital. Others stressed the need for qualitative indicators, such as community narratives and stories that reflect lived experiences of racism and economic exclusion.

Many pointed to the problem of visibility without accountability. There was agreement that while many institutions now publicly support equity, there is little follow-through in terms of changing outcomes. Several noted the need for shared benchmarks and cross-sector collaboration to ensure continuity and progress across political cycles and leadership transitions.

## **Key Takeaways**

- Racial equity must be structurally embedded, not programmatically isolated.
- Economic empowerment through capital access and real estate development is central to racial inclusion.
- Measurement tools must include both quantitative disparities and community-based feedback mechanisms to reflect lived experiences.

## **Strategic Priority: Workforce Development & Skills**

### **Strategies and Solutions**

Participants stressed the importance of building regional systems that are adaptable and anticipatory—especially in the face of rapid technological change. Many agreed that Minnesota's workforce has traditionally been strong but warned that tech education

gaps, low awareness of future job needs, and inflexible training systems could erode this strength.

There was significant support for stronger alignment between K–12, higher education, and employers. One participant highlighted that Minnesota ranks among the lowest in the country for offering computer science in high schools, which was cited as evidence of a critical gap in readiness. Others discussed the need for curriculum and credentialing to keep pace with AI, automation, and other forms of disruption.

Context-sensitive policy was another theme. Participants noted that well-meaning regulations—like truck parking bans in Minneapolis—can unintentionally exclude specific worker populations. To address these gaps, participants called for more diverse voices at the policy table and for systems that are better attuned to community realities.

Participants also raised systemic barriers to workforce participation, especially in childcare and transportation. Several stated that lack of affordable childcare keeps women, and particularly women of color, out of the workforce. These barriers were framed not as ancillary issues but as central to any workforce strategy.

### **Key Partners and Organizations**

Stakeholders named Minnesota DEED, the Governor’s Workforce Development Council, trade associations, local workforce boards, and the MN Apprenticeship Network as key actors. There was broad agreement that these institutions should work in closer coordination with community-based organizations, CDFIs, and educational institutions.

Some participants also highlighted the importance of cross-sector leadership involving both public and private employers. Greater MSP was mentioned as an entity that could help facilitate data sharing and alignment.

### **Evaluating Progress**

Participants suggested that traditional job placement statistics do not fully capture workforce success. They recommended tracking net migration, wage growth, job quality, and how long individuals stay in the workforce post-training. Others emphasized the need for real-time data on job openings and the supply of job seekers, along with insights into how structural barriers—such as transportation deserts or childcare costs—impact different populations.

There was strong consensus around disaggregating racial data. Participants noted that without breaking out outcomes by subgroup, it is easy to miss distinct experiences

within broader racial categories, such as among Hmong, East African, or Latinx communities.

### **Key Takeaways**

- Technology education and alignment with future industries are urgent needs in the workforce system.
- Workforce policies must be informed by lived experience and rooted in community context.
- Childcare and transportation are not side issues—they are workforce infrastructure.