

## **2025 Twin Cities CEDS Committee Workshop**

The fifth and final workshop for the 2025 Twin Cities CEDS Committee was held on September 19, 2025 in-person at the office of the Metropolitan Council. Approximately 14 committee members of the 25-member committee were in attendance. The conversation centered on emerging opportunities, existing challenges, and the kinds of partnerships and strategies needed to build a competitive and inclusive regional economy. Participants were provided with a draft copy of the report and were asked to come prepared to discuss and provide feedback on this draft document.

### **Talent, Workforce, and Inclusion**

A recurring theme throughout the discussion was the urgency of workforce challenges. Participants underscored that labor availability remains a constraint across industries, particularly in lower-wage positions where housing affordability and commute accessibility directly affect supply. While reskilling and upskilling resources exist across the region, several participants noted that these tools are often fragmented or not widely visible. The challenge is less about inventing new programs and more about building stronger bridges between workforce development and economic development systems.

Equity and inclusion were woven throughout the workforce conversation. Participants emphasized the importance of connecting disadvantaged communities to quality job opportunities, not just entry-level positions. Efforts to support talent attraction and retention must be broadened to ensure that workers from diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, valued, and connected to the region's economic future.

### **Branding and Visibility**

The region's image and narrative were also seen as critical. Participants discussed how Minnesota and the Twin Cities are often underrecognized nationally despite strong assets. "Explore Minnesota" was highlighted as an existing partner with a platform for amplifying business and talent attraction. However, the consensus was that more collaboration, resources, and coordination are needed to elevate the message that Minnesota is both a great place to live and to grow a business or career.

Branding discussions extended to competitive positioning. Participants suggested framing the region's strengths around "access"—access to housing, jobs, mobility, nature, and quality of life. This framing was seen as not only distinctive but also authentic to the lived experience of residents. The City of Bloomington shared its own branding work, developed with state partners, which focused on access as a competitive advantage. This example was received as a strong potential model for regional alignment.

## **Economic Resilience and Regional Assets**

Participants tied the five focus issues of the regional strategy to existing priorities such as racial inclusion, startups and innovation, climate economy, housing, and transportation. At the same time, they stressed the importance of highlighting Minnesota's natural assets—what one participant described as the “Settlers of Catan” advantage. These include wind, water, agricultural strengths, and other geographic resources that could serve as anchors for a globally competitive clean energy economy.

Climate goals were discussed as important but not sufficient on their own. Several participants urged that the strategy should also emphasize how the state's geographic and resource advantages can be leveraged through workforce, infrastructure, and policy alignment. Collaboration between urban and rural Minnesota was described as essential to maximizing these opportunities, with participants stressing the need for cross-regional partnerships that connect resource-rich areas to innovation hubs.

## **Local Coordination and Alignment**

The conversation also touched on local comprehensive planning processes. Cities across the region are beginning updates to their comprehensive plans, and while economic development is not a required element, participants saw this as an opportunity for greater alignment with the regional strategy. A clear and accessible executive summary of the regional plan, they suggested, could help local governments integrate shared priorities more easily into their own planning and grant-seeking efforts.

Questions were raised about whether there has been intentional alignment between the regional strategy and the strategic plans of cities and counties. Facilitators confirmed that overlap exists, particularly in housing, climate, transportation, and regional parks, but also acknowledged that broader engagement across economic development partners is necessary.

## **Entrepreneurship and Business Growth**

Entrepreneurship emerged as another critical theme. Representatives from the health tech sector described a thriving ecosystem of incubators and accelerators but pointed to a persistent “funding gap” between early-stage startup and the ability to scale into mid-size firms. While some success stories were shared, the lack of venture capital and post-startup supports continues to hold back growth.

Participants also emphasized that the private sector often follows the signals sent by public policy. Developers and design firms explained that while they can innovate and adapt, the frameworks set by policy—whether related to housing, clean energy, or

commercial development—ultimately shape outcomes. Several participants saw this dynamic as an opportunity for stronger partnerships, where businesses can contribute expertise while policymakers provide clearer direction and incentives.

### **Collaboration and Next Steps**

Throughout the conversation, collaboration emerged as both a strength and a need. Participants consistently pointed to the importance of “intersections and crosswalks” between different systems, sectors, and geographies. While many resources exist, the opportunity lies in better connecting them to create a coherent, accessible pathway for residents, businesses, and communities.

As the session closed, facilitators encouraged participants to continue engaging with the strategy. They noted that a draft report will be circulated for review, with a public comment period providing opportunities to refine and strengthen the final plan. Participants were asked to share the report within their networks, provide feedback, and consider letters of support to help move from strategy to implementation.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion highlighted both the challenges and the opportunities facing the region. Workforce shortages, branding gaps, and entrepreneurial funding needs are pressing issues, but participants also identified clear strengths: natural assets, quality of life, and a strong foundation of collaboration. By aligning across sectors and geographies, the region is well-positioned to not only address its immediate challenges but also to build a more inclusive and resilient economy for the future.

### **High-level quotes:**

*It is important to double down on our generally high quality of life through investment and protection, while very strongly prioritizing pushing a turn-around story on equity and addressing our housing needs. We want to be poised to take all high-value opportunity for strong and "good" business growth (where "good" was associated with clean tech, well paying jobs, and strong connections between employers and those seeking work at all skill and income levels).*

*Our North Star: The MSP region is known as a world-class place for inclusive opportunity and quality of life, driven by its role in designing, building and exploring solutions to global challenges*