A LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Why This Moment:
West Central Minnesota in a Global Context

Profound changes have come to west central Minnesota since the start of the 21st Century.

Farms have grown much larger because of advances in technology. Educational systems (from early childhood through college) are better integrated in an effort to promote student achievement, increase workforce, and ensure a vital democracy. Healthcare is not only modern but also networked with providers regionally and by specialization. Our population overall is aging but we are also experiencing a “brain gain” of individuals 25 to 40 years old that offsets the “brain drain” of high school graduates leaving the region.

At the same time, we have chronic workforce shortages that interrupt economic growth, a lack of affordable housing appropriate to the life stage of current residents and prospective newcomers, and not enough high-quality affordable child care.

Against the backdrop of these shortages, our region of west central Minnesota has an abundance of open space characterized by wild and natural landscapes, as well as land under cultivation. By contrast to life in densely populated urban areas, we believe our quality of life is highly desirable. We have safe communities, good schools, access to healthcare and jobs, and ample opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors.

In the 21st Century, our lived experience is both local and global.

Broadband access, although not universal, has connected people here with people everywhere—economically, politically, culturally, and socially—and as effectively as if we were all in the same room. Companies headquartered around the globe employ individuals and do business with organizations located in our nine-county region.

Transportation systems, interstate highways, municipal, regional and international airports, more efficient vehicles, railways and mass transit—all link residents in our nine counties with the rest of the world.

Estimates are that more than 40% of Minnesota households are moving residences every year. Those who move into this region bring their economic, political, cultural, and
social experiences and connections with them and they keep those networks active. When they create new relationships with local residents, the resulting networks expand, and collaborations naturally occur.

All of this—immense change, worrying shortages, the globalization of our small corner of the world—sets the stage for West Central Initiative’s strategic plan for 2020-2021-2022.

The plan is nested within two broader frameworks (page 6). The first is based on the four cornerstones of economic development: human capital, economic competitiveness, community resources, and foundational assets. The cornerstones are identified in the strategic plan of the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations (MADO) of Greater Minnesota, of which West Central Initiative is a member. We also locate our work within the United Nation’s 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Linking our priorities with these complementary frameworks for progress, we will act locally while fostering regional connections and understanding our role in furthering the well-being of our global society.

Anna M. Wasescha, President

Our Vision for West Central Minnesota

A vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable world starts here in west central Minnesota.
An Enduring New Framework for WCI

In our new strategic plan, we celebrate the unique advantages of being both a philanthropic and a planning organization.

Our work at WCI is understood through the lens of four core values that we will seek to embody in all that we do.

1. **Neighborliness** arises out of a strong belief that our interconnectedness is crucial to our long-term viability. Town to town, county to county, organization to organization, and certainly person to person, the fabric of our region depends on cooperation, appreciation, openness, and generosity.

2. **Generosity** is a dimension of neighborliness, but it flies higher over the region because it speaks to a willingness to embrace a common good that can only be achieved through collective action, through everyone giving of their time, talent, and treasure.

3. **Empowerment** in our current context is directed both internally and externally. We encourage both our staff and our fellow citizens to be a part of bold action in our region, and to develop and use power to a good end.

4. **Trend-testing** is a dimension of that bold action. We learn from one another while we work together to solve problems. We will embrace risk and learn from our mistakes, always.
When all of us work together, our region and world thrive.

Our Strategic Priorities for the Next Three Years

Reimagine Regional.
We will develop a greater unity and pride in our unique geographic region while being cognizant of our increasingly global lives. We will foster mutually beneficial connections, model cosmopolitanism, and stand for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Invest in Local.
We will invest in new strategies that build resiliency across sectors and localities, honor the unique assets of each community, and ensure our children have the support they need to grow and thrive.

Educate, Activate, Celebrate.
We will cultivate a greater sense of possibility and confidence in what we can do together, building capacity inside our organization and across our region to seize opportunities, try new things, and learn from all we do.
West Central Initiative's Strategic Plan in a Regional & Global Development Context

Along the way, we will understand our progress through two lenses: the Minnesota Association of Development Organizations’ (MADO) DevelopMN cornerstones, and the United Nations’ 17 sustainable development goals. Both lenses focus in on what a region and community need to accomplish in order to become strong and resilient for generations to come.

Our Cornerstones of Regional Development

(mnado.org/developmn)

1. **Human Capital:** We invest in the people of our region.
2. **Economic Competitiveness:** We enhance, promote, and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship.
3. **Community Resources:** We help build strong, inclusive, and engaged communities.
4. **Foundational Assets:** We work to foster collaboration, efficiency, and access to the above- and below-ground infrastructure vital to our collective well-being.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

(sustainabledevelopment.un.org)

1. **No Poverty**
2. **Zero Hunger**
3. **Good Health and Well-being**
4. **Quality Education**
5. **Gender Equality**
6. **Clean Water and Sanitation**
7. **Affordable and Clean Energy**
8. **Decent Work and Economic Growth**
9. **Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure**
10. **Reduced Inequalities**
11. **Sustainable Cities and Communities**
12. **Responsible Consumption and Production**
13. **Climate Action**
14. **Life Below Water**
15. **Life on Land**
16. **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**
17. **Partnerships for the Goals**
Meta-goals are specific to our organization and essential to the success of our fiscal years 20-21-22 strategic plan.

1. **Build Organizational Capacity.** We will focus on building the capacity of our staff, upgrading the technology and data systems that inform our work, and renovating the physical building that houses us. All of us will continue to learn about our fields and our communities and we will pay close attention to strengthening our critical thinking abilities. In our knowledge economy, we need these skills to make the most of the software and databases that inform our work. As workplaces evolve, so too will our building design. We need less space for physical storage and more space for people to work, create and gather.

2. **Communicate.** Perhaps no other field has changed as rapidly as communications. We will sharpen our brand, optimize our use of social media, and adopt new media strategies to ensure that all our communities are included in the conversation about what we can do together.

3. **Lead.** We have the privilege of being included in many of the important exchanges of ideas and information that affect our region. With that, comes the responsibility to speak publicly about what we have learned, analyzed, and confirmed. We will do this through education and advocacy, and by being vigilant about safeguarding the role that civic dialogue plays in a thriving democracy.

4. **Apply a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Lens to Everything.** Our awareness of how our society has addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion historically and in the present day led to our decision to tie our strategic plan to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. The underlying principle of these global goals is to “leave no one behind.” As an acknowledgement of our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we will prioritize increasing our staff and board competencies so that we are better able to apply that lens to everything we do.

5. **Maintain Fiscal Balance.** Our compact with our board and all our stakeholders is that we will be faithful stewards of the resources we currently have and that we will endeavor to increase our endowment to ensure we can meet our mission into the future.
Putting It All Together

West Central Initiative’s new strategic plan has a lot of moving parts, but each part helps move us toward one destination: a thriving, inclusive and prosperous region.