

PILLAR 5: FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHY REGIONAL COMMUNITY



This Strategic Pillar summary report lays out the outcomes and direction for this pillar topic, as determined in the engagement sessions, with over 1,000 people contributing ideas and perspectives. This process has produced lots of ideas and strategic vision, which have been condensed into this Strategic Pillar summary.

FOSTERING AN INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHY REGIONAL COMMUNITY

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STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

- Foster an inclusive, diverse culture and population
- Encourage a healthy and happy regional community

IMPORTANCE OF AN 'INCLUSIVE AND HEALTHY REGIONAL COMMUNITY'

Throughout the stakeholder discussion sessions, an important topic was the evolution of the community culture and fabric. While some people expressed that they like the community vibe and culture just the way it is, many people also saw opportunity to continue to create more connectivity, inclusiveness and openness to new ideas. Of particular interest to many people across the workshops and focus groups was the idea of creating a healthier and happier community. Recent studies have also highlighted the need for more inclusivity, and this theme was reflected in the focus group sessions with young professionals and university students. This reflects shifting social values and is an important topic that relates to the pillar themes of human talent hub and regional positioning.

During the Think-Tank and focus group discussions, there was a keen interest expressed to elevate the 'healthy' aspect of the regional community, including aspects such as mental wellbeing, recreation opportunities and health food choices.



RegionalValue

- The region has begun the important work on inclusivity, with the recent inclusivity study undertaken by the Mankato Area Foundation. Building a region where people feel they belong and can create a successful life will be very important for regional appeal.
- Generational shifts are occurring across the county, bringing with it new values and expectations. Community values, such as being inclusive and welcoming diversity, will be important attributes that younger people will seek.
- A healthy active community culture will boost the sense of vitality and aliveness in the people and the community. The region already has a great foundation to build, especially in areas such as active sports events and recreation opportunities.

PROPOSED STRATEGIC ACTION AREAS

The proposed actions aim to elevate the quality of life and sense of belonging of residents. It also focuses on the idea of building a 'future-ready' culture, where the region is anticipating and adapting to changes in a proactive manner.

Proposed strategic action areas to support this pillar include:



FOCUS ON HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

There was significant interest in the notion of the region having a focus on healthy living, wellbeing and happiness. This was discussed in multiple settings, including the issues of recreation trails, healthy food choices and community gathering locations.



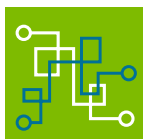
SOCIAL INCLUSION AND BELONGING

A key aspect of the community vision was a sense of belonging, being connected and engaged. This was reflected in multiple focus groups and sessions and was highlighted by 'outsiders' such as the University students. There is an opportunity to evolve the community fabric to be more open and inclusive, especially for new arrivals, immigrants and new residents.



FUTURE-READY CULTURE

An important part of this pillar is the notion of building a future-ready culture that is forward looking and is anticipating and adapting to important underlying trends. This requires a nimble mindset, and an ongoing investment in scanning for emerging opportunities and positioning the region to be at the forefront of important topics.



FutureInsight

- The decade ahead is likely to be one of significant social change, with new generations bringing different values and priorities. This will shape community and regional decision making.
- The issues of diversity, equity and inclusivity are complex, and can be uncomfortable to deal with in some cases. However, at a level of creating an inclusive and healthy community as a bedrock principle, this will help the community retain its appeal and attractiveness to a wide range of talent, future residents and investors.

Enhance the regional focus on reducing carbon footprint, increasing recycling and boosting cultural diversity.

“If we can grow sustainably, with every family unit having a good foundation of home, food, water, jobs, education, and access to healthcare, we could be an example to the rest of the country that these things are possible to achieve for everyone.”
- Survey #1 Respondent

Places for retirees that are affordable.

Support small businesses and events to bring community together to learn about different food and cultures.

Provide a safe, inclusive environment to raise families.

Age-friendly initiatives that align with Minnesota as an age friendly state.

Embrace and support newer members of our communities so they truly feel welcomed and encouraged to bring their perspectives and experiences into our communities.

“I believe the greater Mankato area is the next major metropolitan area in the Midwest. We have the infrastructure coming into place to have a lot of industry and development.”
- Survey #1 Respondent

Increase housing and diversity types along with community amenities in a diverse and equitable way.

Focus on mental health and interpersonal relationships.

Foster cultural diversity with an intentional focus on inclusivity and belonging – age, abilities, ethnicity and gender.

Focus on health, equity and diversity.



Create a sense of belonging.

Incorporate recreational wellness opportunities.

Intentional inclusion of diversity into the workforce, leadership, and social fabric of the community.

Pay attention to those who come to the region; support of diverse populations.

Examine how we care for an aging population.

Focus on the core family orientated values – ‘good families and good choices’.

Develop the local healthcare ecosystem and explore what does ‘bold’ look like in the healthcare future – could be opportunity for region.

“[The most unique strength of the region is] the Diversity, having the college here brings in so many different cultures that have things to offer. I think keeping that diversity is a key component to making this home to anyone.”
- Survey #1 Respondent

How do we grow the sense of inclusivity, and make people feel comfortable

Invest in a region wide ‘blue zone’ type concept and approach, focusing on healthy living and wellbeing

Explore community-based events that bring people together and build on local assets like food and arts

We are entering a period of exponential change – and we need to be looking forward and taking advantage of the change.

There is potential for a greater array of programs for healthy living, like yoga studios, health classes, and cooking and using local foods.

Source of Stakeholder Idea:

- Community Survey
- Think-Tank Workshop
- Focus Groups

The Greater Mankato Growth, Inc organization (GMG) has agreed to take the leadership role in helping develop the implementation plan, and will be convening other regional stakeholders to work on the Strategic Pillars and potential action areas. This work will progress through 2024.

For more information about **Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040**, please contact:



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'Transforming Tomorrow Together - Greater Mankato 2040' is a planning and visioning project exploring the future of the Greater Mankato region. This regional planning process has been supported by a wide range of stakeholders and institutions in the Greater Mankato region. This project is about coming together as a region and building a vision and roadmap for 2040.

More details about the initiative and the associated data analysis are available on the project portal:

lab2.future-iq.com/greater-mankato-2040/

