



NORTH CENTRAL REGION COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXTENSION IMPACT REPORT 2025



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MINNESOTA



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EXTENSION

Location: St. Paul, MN
<https://extension.umn.edu/>



17,900



EDUCATIONAL CONTACTS

12,100



Participants completed
SKILL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING



\$2.2 MILLION

GRANTS & RESOURCES
generated by communities

IMPACT INDICATORS

Educational Contacts	17,900
Number of community or organizational plans/policies developed	39
Number of community or organizational plans/policies adopted or implemented	27
Number of participants reporting new leadership roles and opportunities undertaken	11
Number of volunteer hours for community generated work	1,540
Dollar value of organization and/or community-generated volunteer hours based on Independent Sector hr value	\$58,766
Dollar value of grants and resources leveraged/generated by communities	\$2,215,135
Number of participants completing skill development training programs offered through Community Development Extension	12,100
Dollar value of grants and other resources received by Community Development programs	\$621,350
Number of Community Development full-time equivalents (FTEs) — i.e., FTEs funded by Extension specifically for Community Development Extension programming.	36.3

IMPACT STATEMENTS

■ Blandin Community Learning Network's Focus: Minnesota's Smallest Towns

Minnesota's smallest towns — communities of 3,000 or fewer residents — face challenges such as limited staff capacity, isolation, and few opportunities for shared learning leading to burnout and scarcity. In 2024, the Blandin Foundation offered one-time funding for small rural communities' priorities, but leaders also needed long-term capacity-building opportunities to sustain their efforts. University of Minnesota Extension developed the Blandin Community Learning Network to equip, engage, and connect leaders from eight small rural communities using an asset-based approach grounded in the Community Capital Framework.

The year-long program unfolded in three phases: identifying community assets and exploring possibilities, participating in five months of online learning focused on cultural, human, political, and social capitals, and applying Strategic Doing™ to collaborate strategically and take action. Participants strengthened their leadership capacity, confidence, and cross-community connections.



The evaluation showed a 105% increase in participants' ability to forge partnerships, an 81% gain in identifying actionable opportunities, a 76% boost in project leadership confidence, and a 67% increase in the belief that positive change is possible. Leaders noted the following:

- "It has opened many doors on how to get things done within our community using our best resource — the people."
- "I've learned some of our community assets and strengths and how we can collaborate and lean on/look to each other for assistance."
- "Better understanding of why projects may have failed."

Leaders reported applying their learning through monthly collaboration, downtown business expansion, pollinator garden initiatives, and increased civic engagement. By strengthening leadership skills, capacity and fostering regional networks, the Blandin Community Learning Network enables rural leaders to move beyond deficit-based recovery toward sustained, asset-driven community and economic development. The program contributes to stronger civic engagement, resilient communities, and long-term vitality.

In the article, [Leading the way: six tips for energizing your small community](#), the Blandin Community Learning Network shares insights from their work.

■ Transfer of Wealth, Minnesota

Minnesota households collectively held \$3.1 trillion in net worth in 2025, with \$105 billion projected to be transferred during the next decade as baby boomers sell homes, farms, and other assets. Without localized wealth transfer data, community members and nonprofit leaders lack the tools to plan charitable giving and grow community foundations, risking resources that support economic development, civic engagement, and long-term prosperity.

University of Minnesota Extension's Department of Community Development addressed this challenge using a two-pronged approach. First, Extension conducted county-level analysis to quantify local wealth and project the timing and scale of upcoming transfers. The analysis also highlighted the risk that wealth built by, with, and in rural communities could leave without intentional planning. Second, Extension educated the public through community foundations and nonprofits, providing localized data and practical guidance to set realistic giving goals and foster meaningful conversations among donors, advisors, and community leaders about retaining wealth locally.

In 2025, workshops and presentations reached 1,303 participants, providing county-specific estimates and tools showing that retaining only 5–10% of transferred wealth could significantly strengthen nonprofit services, fund community

projects, and support local economic vitality. A special analysis comparing wealth changes from 2021 to 2024 highlighted growth in rural communities and the role of assets, such as retirement accounts and land. Extension launched a [public website featuring Transfer of Wealth studies](#) for all Minnesota counties, a statewide report, and six custom regional reports, all of which are free to the public.

Nonprofit leaders and foundations use the data to improve their strategic planning, board engagement, and fundraising goals. Regional development commissions and initiative foundation systems incorporated the findings into annual planning, while organizations such as the West Central Initiative hosted giving events to help donors, advisors, and families explore how capturing even a small percentage of local wealth can build lasting community assets.

Broader public benefits were strengthened by a \$50,000 grant from the Minnesota Council on Foundations, which supported the "Minnesota State Share: 5% Does a Whole Lotta Good" campaign. By helping communities capture and put transferred wealth to work, these efforts ensure that investments made by today's generation build lasting assets that benefit current and future residents of the community.