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How is Minnesota doing?

Keep an eye out for these images to quickly tell which way the trend is going:



Undesirable or negative



No change, or not enough data to draw conclusions



Desirable or positive.

Milestones 2011 Summary

The 2000s have been a challenging decade for Minnesota and the nation. The combination of a serious recession, high unemployment rates and a turbulent housing market has heightened citizens' worries about the future. In the face of these adversities, legislators recently decided it was time to resurrect Minnesota Milestones, a goal-setting project initiated in the early 1990s. This is the second update of Milestones since 2002.

The results show a mixed picture. While there has been good progress in some areas, the majority of indicators show either no real change or change in a negative direction. In particular, economic and environmental indicators reveal few favorable trends.

There are many government accountability measures and many indicators projects. Most state agencies now have performance goals and measure progress toward these objectives. [Accountability Minnesota](#) provides performance indicators for Executive Branch agencies of Minnesota state government.

Among projects with a more general scope, the most notable is the Wilder Foundation's Minnesota Compass, which will produce regular updates on a wide variety of statewide indicators and provide more detail by geography and groups of interest. [Minnesota Compass](#) is the expansion of an existing indicator project focused on the Twin Cities.

Minnesota Milestones, originally developed by Minnesota Planning, is distinctive because the goals were established through grass-roots participation of citizens who attended public meetings to talk about their vision of Minnesota's future. Milestones measures progress toward broad societal goals, rather than through more narrowly-defined performance measures. Achieving these goals requires the combined efforts of government, businesses, nonprofit organizations and individual citizens.

Milestones established goals in four major areas: People, Community and Democracy, Economy and Environment. This edition of Milestones retains the original goals, but some indicators have been changed.

For each indicator, the trend is summarized as positive, negative or inconclusive. An upward-pointing thumb with a green background shows a trend moving in a favorable or desirable direction. A downward-pointing thumb on a red background indicates an unfavorable trend. A sideways-pointing thumb with a yellow background suggests no clear trend is evident.

Trends may vary from year to year, and may show different results over the long run than over the past few years. A certain degree of subjectivity is inevitable in rating the trend. Generally, this update focuses on trends since 2000, identifying the decade-long trend rather than what occurred over a single year.

People

The first major goal area is divided into five sub-goals. First, our children will not live in poverty. Second, families will provide a stable, supportive environment for their children. Third, all children will be healthy and start school ready to learn. Fourth, Minnesotans will excel in basic and challenging academic skills and knowledge. Fifth, Minnesotans will be healthy. The indicators related to **People** are aligned to these five areas.

Overall, six of 20 People indicators showed favorable changes, seven showed negative shifts and seven showed no clear pattern.

Among the positive changes, Minnesotans are living longer, have improved on college readiness and math test scores, smoke less and are less likely to be injured in traffic accidents. In addition, pregnancy rates for Minnesota teenagers have dropped.

Variables changing in a negative direction include rising levels of obesity and diabetes, both major public health problems with implications for health costs. The well-being of children is another area of concern. More children are poor, there are more low-birth-weight babies, and reading skills are lagging.

The remaining "People" indicators – a range of variables such as school readiness, immunization and high school graduation rates – showed no clear trends.

Community and Democracy

The Community and Democracy goals are divided into five sub-goals. First, our communities will be safe, friendly and caring. Second, people in need will receive support that helps them live as independently as they can. Third, all people will be welcomed, respected and able to participate fully in Minnesota's communities and economy. Fourth, people will participate in government and politics. Fifth, government in Minnesota will be cost-efficient, and services will be designed to meet the needs of the people who use them. The indicators related to **Community and Democracy** are aligned to these five areas.

Of 12 indicators linked to the Community and Democracy goal, seven showed no discernable change. These include measures of government performance and efficiency, such as the price of government, and bridge conditions.

Crime rate trends are a bright spot in the Community and Democracy group. Violent crime and homicide rates both declined substantially in the 2000s. On the down side, there has been a trend toward more severe poverty, with more homelessness and more use of food shelves.

Economy

The Economy goals are divided into five sub-goals. First, Minnesota will have sustainable, strong economic growth. Second, Minnesota's workforce will have the education and training to make the state a leader in the global economy. Third, all Minnesotans will have the economic means to maintain a reasonable standard of living. Fourth, all Minnesotans will have decent, safe and affordable housing. Fifth, rural areas, small cities and urban neighborhoods throughout the state will be economically viable places for people to live and work. The indicators related to the **Economy** are aligned to these five areas.

There were few bright spots among the economic indicators, which is not surprising given the recent recession. Of 18 indicators, none showed favorable changes, while

ten moved in an unfavorable direction.

On the down side, lagging economic growth has been a factor in higher unemployment rates and lower ratios of workers to population. Slow population growth has occurred across the state, with more areas experiencing out-migration. Incomes have fallen relative to the national average and wages have stagnated.

Environment

The Environment goals are divided into four sub-goals. First, Minnesotans will conserve natural resources to give future generations a healthy environment and a strong economy. Second, Minnesotans will improve the quality of the air, water and earth. Third, Minnesotans will restore and maintain healthy ecosystems that support diverse plants and wildlife. Fourth, Minnesotans will have opportunities to enjoy the state's natural resources. The indicators related to the **Environment** are aligned to these five areas.

Only one of 10 environmental indicators showed a positive trend. It should be noted that widely-accepted statewide environmental indicators are hard to find and national comparisons are scarce.

Three indicators changed to a negative direction. Minnesotans are using more water resources. Data sources point to declines in many species of breeding birds, raising concerns about the health of Minnesota's diverse ecosystems. Participation in traditional forms of outdoor recreation has declined as younger generations turn to alternative forms of entertainment.

On the positive side, lake water clarity in Minnesota appears to be improving overall, with more lakes showing improvement than deterioration.

The remaining five environmental indicators showed no clear change. These include greenhouse gases, energy consumption, frog and loon populations, and air and water quality.



Milestones is a product of the Minnesota State Demographic Center, a division of the Department of Administration