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RESEARCH

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Executive Summary

2021 marked the second year of the pandemic and brought with it its own set of challenges for policymakers and the private sector alike. From July to October 2021, we surveyed and spoke with state and local policymakers across Minnesota to better understand the leading policy issues and how the public and private sectors can collaborate on these issues. Policymakers identified the economic ramifications of the pandemic, healthcare, and public safety as their main areas of concern for the upcoming year.

Economic recovery continues to be paramount to the fight against COVID. What this means, for Minnesota, is an emphasis on increasing financial stability, addressing the housing crisis, and small businesses.

In the wake of the virus, **healthcare** and the associated issues are inextricably linked to Minnesotans' quality of life. Policymakers have identified access to healthcare, essential workers, and mental health as the most effective means of improving health equity in the state.

Throughout our conversations, policymakers also highlighted the importance of corporate social responsibility and open communication between the public and private sectors. Looking forward, Minnesota can benefit from the successful partnership and engagement of the public and private sectors in advocating for a commitment to the good of all its citizens.

Policymaker Priorities for Minnesota

The top priorities among policymakers in the state are the economy (especially unemployment and labor issues), public health, and public safety.

Policy Priorities in the State

Conversations with policymakers



"What do you see as the top policy priorities for Minnesota in 2021?"

Economy

"[There is] a big concern about the economy, inflation, and keeping the businesses open."

Representative, R

"I would say rebuilding our small business community and getting people back to work."

Senator, R

Healthcare

"Health and human services related issues, like telehealth, waivers, caring for our most vulnerable, folks in long-term care facilities and those kinds of things, I think that's probably number one."

Research Analyst,
Executive Agency, D

Public Safety

"Well, I'd say [the most important policy priority] is safe communities. Public safety, the police, crime."

Representative, R

"Public safety. We are having a battle royal over police accountability."

Representative, R

Economy

Economic recovery remains at the forefront of the political conversation.

COVID has worsened employment outcomes, income inequality, and left many in dire economic straits. To combat the economic issues, policymakers want to focus on a better business climate for small businesses, employee development, and affordable housing.

Policymakers also point to actions the private sector is taking to support economic recovery.

Optimizing Shifts and Providing Furlough Payment

"A utility company was able to do a lot of shift optimization and be able to have a lot of work from home opportunities for a lot of their employees. They are back in full production [now] and I believe that they gave some kind of furlough payments out."

Council Member, D

Hiring the Unemployed

"We also saw kind of a realignment to meet the local need and businesses stepping up and doing what they can to hire people that are in need, but also change what they're manufacturing to better fit the market. So, the need for drivers, the need for the manufacturing side across the board, less industrial size pizzas, and more personal pan pizzas."

Representative, R

Changing Manufacturing and Production Goods to Meet Changing Demands

"One company that used to make alcoholic beverages- a distillery, for example. They started making alcohol for hand sanitizer. We saw another company take CPAP machines and convert them to ventilators."

Senator, R

Working to Secure Affordable Housing

"Lately, there are a number of organizations and private entities that are trying to work on things like the eviction moratorium, making sure that folks have access to food, and so forth. We've seen some folks step up to help with the issues of homelessness."

Representative, D

Investing in Employee Development



*“We focus on parts of the population that have been left out, mostly people of color. Their unemployment rates are much, much higher. And so, really **helping with the job skills, focusing on sectors where there’s potential for job growth, but also a career, right? Maybe they help get the skills to get in an entry-level job, but then continue to move up and accumulate more skills and become more valuable and earn more money to become self-sufficient.**”*

Commissioner, D

“Recently, 3M came forward with \$5 million to invest in workforce development in the community.”

Commissioner, D

Reducing inequality is a top economic priority. Policymakers point to a number of areas in which the private sector can help reduce economic inequality.

COVID has worsened employment outcomes, income inequality, and left many in dire economic straits. To combat the economic issues, policymakers want to focus on a better business climate for small businesses, employee development, and affordable housing.

Policymakers point to actions the private sector has taken to support economic recovery.



Providing Access to Technology

*“Folks don’t have access to laptops or computers. Nowadays, so much is done through technology. So many of the job interviews and job applications are done through technology now that **people really need to have that connection.**”*

Commissioner, D



Raising Wages

“They should just raise their wages. I imagine they’ll find some workers. We should probably continue having expanded unemployment insurance and kind of keep people’s wages higher.”

Policy Specialist, D



Reducing Barriers to Entry

“I think the private sector really can have a role in who they hire and how they support those people. And so the more the private sector can look at their hiring practices, do you really need a four-year degree to do that job? Can they do it with a two-year degree or certification and we get them in the door and then we can provide training to help them develop competency for more responsibility, right?”

Commissioner, D



Donating Services and Products to Local Communities

*“It would be good if we had our private companies supporting the community by making sure the community is taken care of by maybe **donating services and products and even funding to the community.**”*

Council Member, D

Healthcare Keeps its Place Among the Top Three Issues

Looking beyond COVID, policymakers have broadened the conversation on healthcare and identified accessibility, mental health, and equitable pay for essential workers as the most pressing issues for the year. Ensuring access is not only a matter of addressing COVID, but of envisioning a world where we have curtailed the virus, as well.

The private sector’s support in working to help with healthcare-related issues throughout last year is noticed.

Supplying Healthcare Equipment

“I remember when COVID hit; they switched a lot of their manufacturing over to focus on N95s. I think at one point they started producing parts that went into the test.”

Senator, R

Setting Up Vaccination and Testing Sites

"I had a personal experience with Walgreens and the Retail Association, where we set up a vaccination clinic at a community center in my district, and they had three vaccines available."

Senator, D

"We had a number of different private sectors here in Minnesota that did help assist with testing. We had [testing] through the State Emergency Operations Center, we had a PPE warehouse. And so the state really worked to provide PPE for the congregate care settings, really long-term care, and hospitals that needed PPE."

Operations Manager, N/A

Increasing Pay and Worker Protections for Essential Employees

"Right now, we're working on some pay for essential workers who have been keeping things running during the pandemic when everyone else was staying home. Those are kind of the biggest things, though, paid family leave and things along those lines and just general worker protections."

Legislative Director, House of Representatives, D

Supporting COVID Regulations

"The best example I could give you is at the beginning of COVID, summer of 2020, the City of Duluth passed a mask mandate, like many other cities. It was actually partially at the request of private businesses that we do that. So we worked with the local chamber of commerce and other business groups, as well as small businesses individually, to pass that because they were not successful in enforcing their own requirements."

City Council Vice President, D

Policymakers welcome private sector support for healthcare funding.



Fund Health Services

“I would like them to be able to help out with other organizations or agencies here in town to maybe provide some funding. Some of the companies here in town, like, say, 3M, could help out places like the clinic to have more resources to provide to the community.”

Health Program Representative, Department of Health, D

“I would do it with one-time funding or any funding to make a big difference in that Mayo research. There’s a lot of detailed capabilities in individualized medicine. Is that something we can effectively roll out and utilize for certain populations that maybe don’t have the same healthcare outcomes as the mainstream?”

Representative, R

Public Safety

Minnesota was gripped by a rise in gun related crimes, driven in part by the unemployment surge of 2020, staffing shortages in law enforcement, and morale problems in the police department.

“We just had a massive 15 person shooting in St. Paul this last weekend, one woman died. Both of the shooters are felons and the judge just said he wouldn’t be charging them with a crime. We have so much to do to enforce current laws, current sentences, not reduce parole.”

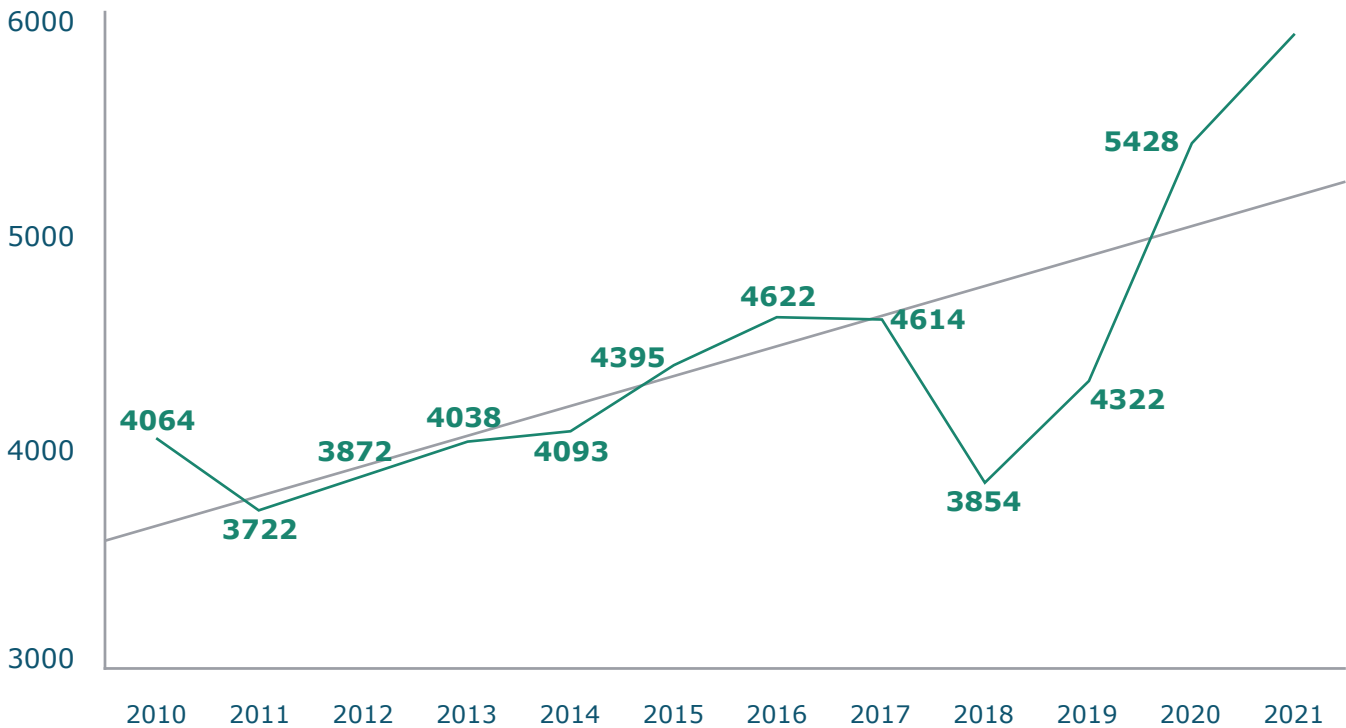
Representative, R

“I’d say, [the most important policy priority is] safe communities. And a big concern about the economy, inflation, keeping the businesses open. [And when I say safe communities, I mean] Public safety, the police, crime.”

Representative, R

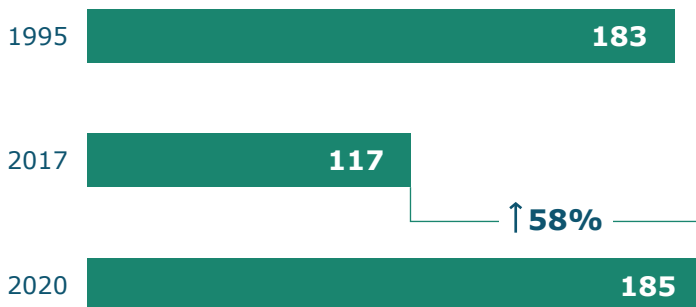


Violent Crimes in Minneapolis, MN 2010-2021^{1,2}

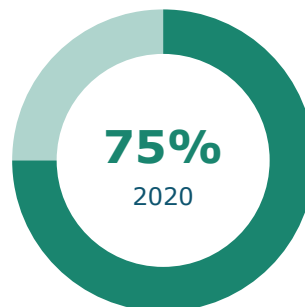


According to a Uniform Crime Report released by the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, released in July 2021³, Minnesota recorded 185 murders in 2020, a 58% increase from 117 in 2019. That's higher than the previous record of 183 in 1995. The report also said that 75% of the state's murders in the previous year were gun-related.

Murder



Gun-Related



1. <https://vanlifewanderer.com/2022/03/18/is-minneapolis-safe/>

2. <https://www.minneapolsmn.gov/government/government-data/datasource/crime-dashboard/>

3. Source: Minnesota Department of Public Safety



Policymakers see an opportunity for the private to support the public sector with public safety related issues by:

Investing in Marginalized Communities

Investing in people helps create safer, more equitable communities. Economic security is paramount in creating a stable environment.

“Your ability to take care of your family or your own needs shouldn’t be dependent upon your zip code, which frankly, it often is, or the color of your skin. And so by really targeting investments and doubling down investments in communities that have been historically left behind, that’s not just nice to do; it’s necessary to do, I mean, I think, from a moral standpoint. But even from an economic and other perspectives, it’s critical that we do it.”

Commissioner, D

Public Safety needs to be recognized as a priority issue. Addressing it needs to be at the forefront of the public-private collaboration because equity is at the intersection of race, socioeconomics, education, and healthcare.

“I think we need to elevate those problems and make sure people understand, one, why they are important, but, two, the fact that means we may have to do wholly different things to create equity. And that can be challenging. But I think we have an obligation to give voice to that.”

Commissioner, D

Leading by Example Through Their Organizational Practices

Organizations have an opportunity to lead by example and create new partnerships. Change begins through the small ways we practice our values.

“Organizations can through their own policies and practices act as a demonstration of the importance of this issue for the public. I said that they can do so through their hiring practices, through their work with suppliers, mentorships, and internships, and through those sorts of things. But then also they can as part of the policy advocacy process, they can advocate in favor of policies that do, in fact, prioritize these issues.”

Representative, D

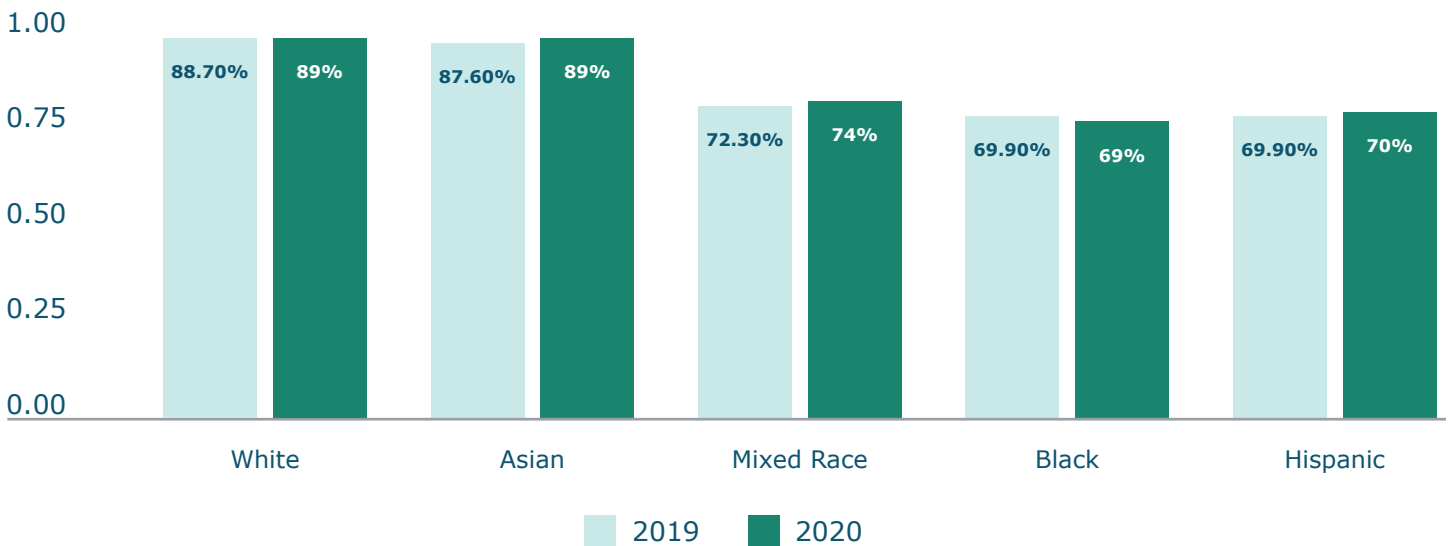


Education

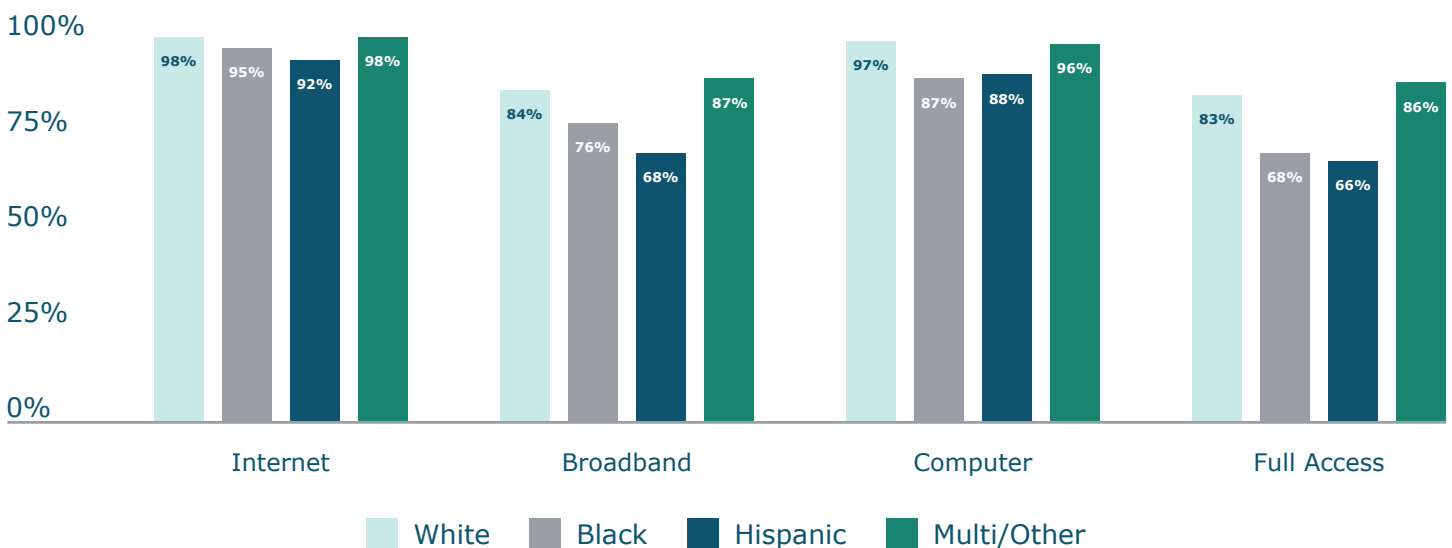
Equity in Education is a Top Priority

Minnesota policymakers noted the importance of closing achievement gaps related to both race and class. According to the Washington Post (05/2020)⁴, Minnesota residents faced one of the nation’s largest educational disparities based on income and race even prior to the pandemic.

Minnesota High School Graduation Rates 2019-2020⁵



Access to Internet by Race⁶



4. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/30/minneapolis-racial-inequality/>

5. <https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-news/minnesotas-graduation-rate-increased-in-2020-but-disparities-remain>

6. Source: www.nea.org



The Minnesota Post reports that in 2019⁷, the state ranked 50th for racial disparities in high school graduation rates. With COVID and remote learning, this achievement gap has only grown wider. Distance learning has created challenges, especially for those without the resources to bridge that gap.

“We have one of the highest rates of racial disparities in terms of both economics and education.”

Outreach Coordinator, D

“One of the biggest things we’ve seen is the education gap, especially around urban kids and kids from the rest of the state... We’ve never, ever spent more on education than we have right now in the state of Minnesota on education and yet, the achievement gap is growing.”

Representative, R

“Tied with that is education and closing some of the gaps that we know that have been formed during the pandemic. Certainly, parents have been struggling to keep kids on track, as have our teachers and staff. And so I think that’s going to be a hot topic for the next session.”

Representative, D

Funding Public Education is Crucial

Policymakers are concerned with funding public education and voiced that failing to do so would perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Without adequate funding, those students already struggling will continue to fall by the wayside.

The private sector’s support in education related issues is always welcomed:

*“One of our big cable providers in our community has stepped up to **provide access to broadband for folks in our community that have not been able to afford it** and so we had a program where we were handing out laptops to folks so that they could get connected.”*

Commissioner, D

7. <https://www.minnpost.com/community-voices/2021/03/education-equity-whats-ailing-minnesota/>

The private and public sectors are going to have to continue working together to fight education related issues in the state.

Strategies such as tax credits or school incentives will require public-private collaboration.

“Collaboration with the government on making a widespread and sustained effort to address inequity. That would mean companies working with the government to invest in education programs like specific degree programs or school-related internships, but also to really transform how we look at our workforce and who we attract and employ and things like that.”

Outreach Coordinator, D

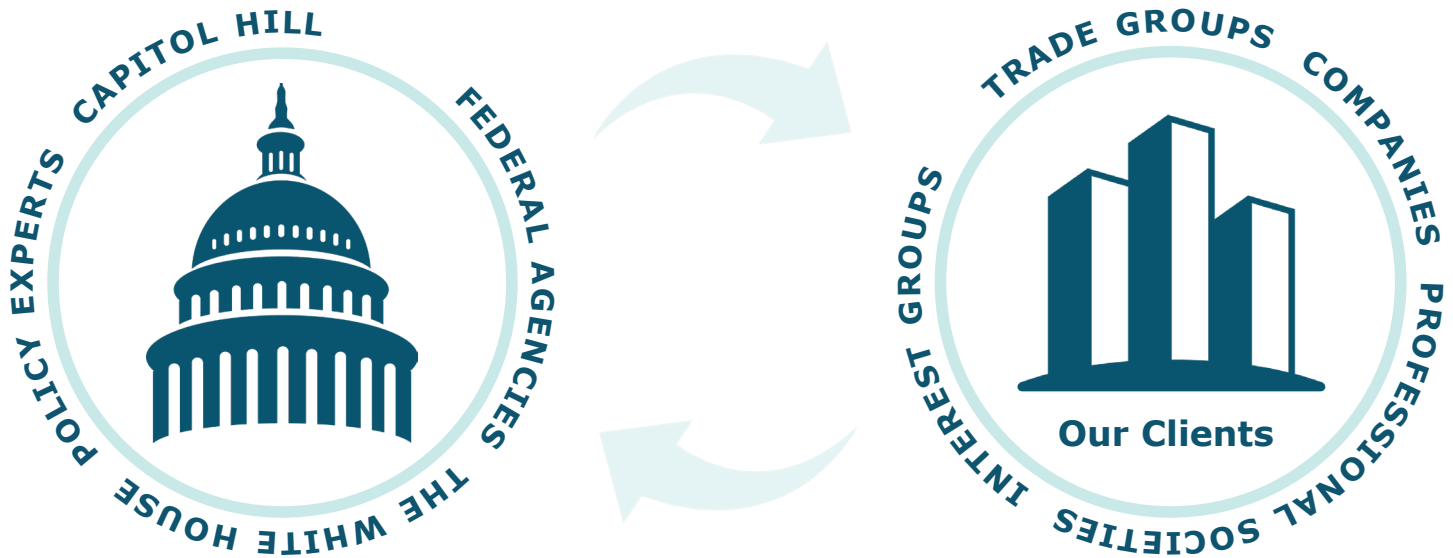
“I’d like to see tax credits. Let’s say you want to support kids from minority-based communities who are stuck in failing schools. I’d like to see business organizations be able to get tax credits so they make a donation to a group that would say “Hey, we’re going to give opportunity scholarships to kids that are stuck in a bad school so that they can go someplace else.” I would like to see those businesses receive tax credits so that if they do decide to make a charitable donation that they could write it off on their taxes.”

Representative, R

About Ballast Research

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Head of US Communications, Fortune 10 Company

”

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