

A wide-angle photograph of the Minnesota State Capitol building, a grand neoclassical structure with a prominent central dome topped by a golden statue. The building is set on a large, well-maintained green lawn. A paved walkway leads from the foreground towards the building. The sky is overcast and grey. In the top right corner, there are green tree branches. The overall image has a blue-green color cast.

# Minnesota Insights Review

Published September 2021

# Executive Summary

From August to November 2020, we surveyed and spoke with state and local policymakers across Minnesota to understand how the government and private sector responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what policymakers want from advocates during this time.

Policymakers identify the economy, public health, civil rights, and small business support as top issues facing the state as it recovers from COVID-19. This Review takes an in-depth look at changes in discussions about policy priorities for urban versus rural communities during the pandemic, policymakers' concerns about budget deficits and economic recovery, civil rights, and best practices for effective advocacy in Minnesota.



## Urban Versus Rural Policy Priorities

- Urban priorities include following public health guidelines, offering financial aid, and safely reopening businesses.
- Rural priorities include getting employees back to work, fixing rural broadband access, and minimizing government intervention.



## Economic Considerations for COVID-19 Recovery

- Policymakers are worried about balancing the immediate needs of their communities with reduced state and local budgets.
- Private organizations that are proactive about helping their communities gain goodwill in the eyes of policymakers.



## Civil Rights and Social Justice

- Many policymakers see an opportunity for companies to participate in conversations about social justice in the community.
- Private sector investment into local communities can help redress racial and social injustices, and help strengthen the bond between businesses and the communities in which they operate.



## Effective Advocacy in Minnesota

- Legislators expect advocates to foster professional, proactive relationships with them.
- Coordination and flawless communication are essential for advocate engagement.

# **Urban Versus Rural Policy Priorities**

# Urban Versus Rural Policy Priorities

Top issues for Minnesota policymakers depend in large part on where they live.



## Urban Policy Priorities

### Follow Public Health Guidelines

*“We need to actually listen to public health officials. I still see people struggling with the simple things like not wearing a mask and we need to help them see that their compliance will get us out of this quicker.”*

-Executive Agency Policy Specialist, I

### Offer Financial Aid

*“One priority is continuing financial aid like the emergency SNAP program regardless of household income. That’s pushed out more than \$20 million in food support per month for families—we have to keep doing that”*

-Representative, D

### Safely Reopen Businesses

*“If we can find a safe way for businesses to open up again near capacity, that would be the biggest thing. We really need that. We just need to be smart about it.”*

-County Policy Advisor, D

## Rural Policy Priorities



### Get People Back to Work

*“We’re rural and have smaller populations, so we are cognizant of the COVID situation but not overwhelmed by it; it’s not as high on our priorities. We need people working and contributing more than anything.”*

-Representative, R

### Fix Rural Broadband Access

*“My constituents are struggling with remote learning and working. We’re a rural area and don’t have reliable broadband access in most places, so fixing that tends to be at the top of my list.”*

-Representative, R

### Minimize Government Intervention

*“Our priority right now is just getting out of the way. I think people around here feel the state is overreaching with the restrictions. Our needs are unique and the government is hurting more than helping.”*

-City Councilmember, I

**Economic Considerations  
for COVID-19 Recovery**

# Economic Considerations for COVID-19 Recovery



## Policymakers' Budget Concerns

Policymakers worry about balancing community needs with restricted budgets.

*"We're dealing with a couple of billion dollars in shortfalls over the next two years, so they're going to have to figure out what is getting cut or if they'll come up with additional revenue... We are expecting a much worse budget situation."*

-Senior Legislative Analyst, D

*"As a result of COVID-19, we have a multi-billion dollar budget deficit; it's going to suck all the oxygen out of the room. We're not going to get much else done until we get that sorted out. The bottom line is there's just not going to be any state dollars to throw around."*

-Representative, R



## Private Sector's Role in COVID-19 Response

Policymakers look to the private sector for support in pandemic response and recovery.

*"We need businesses to develop their own corporate policies that reinforce the public health guidelines. It takes a group effort. Local and state governments can't provide the whole public health response on their own."*

-Research Coordinator, Executive Agency, I

*"We need an effective response in Minnesota. The government can do a lot to build that response, but we also need partnerships with the community—particularly with business organizations who have the resources in place to make a meaningful difference."*

-Senator, R



## Importance of Community-Centered Philanthropy

Organizations that proactively help communities gain goodwill in the eyes of policymakers.

*"One challenge communities often face is structural barriers in accessing services, like housing, public health, the criminal justice system... Locally, we have a priority to ensure that these resources go to those in most need. It means a lot when private organizations work with us to identify who is most in need—that builds trust in my book."*

-County Department Director, D

*"I want to see more organizations involved. They have the resources to help fund programs on the local level. I want businesses that are going to be good neighbors in Minnesota to succeed. If you are not on the forefront of being that kind of business, even if it comes at a cost, your reputation will suffer in the back end."*

-Policy Director, Executive Agency, I

**Civil Rights and Social  
Justice in Minnesota**

# Civil Rights and Social Justice in Minnesota

## Civil Rights and Social Justice Issues Hit Close to Home for Minnesotans



### Commitment to Racial and Social Justice

*“George Floyd’s murder has forever changed the city. We’ve gone through a lot here, and adding COVID on top of that has pushed governments and businesses to change. **Now more than ever, people are committed to racial and social equality. I’m hoping that private entities continue to play an ongoing role as we create and implement new policies to address these issues.**”*

-Executive Department Director, D



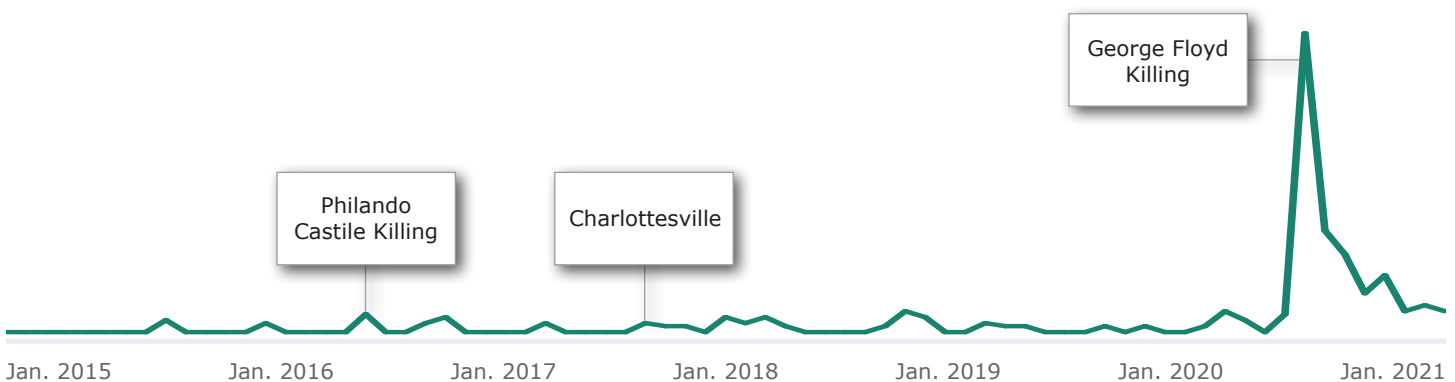
### Concern for Public Safety

*“After George Floyd was killed here everyone was horrified by what they saw, but they were also scared of the aftermath of the protests. Ours is one of the more affluent districts in the area, so **there are many people who want racial accountability in policing, but also they want the police to still exist. Most phone calls and emails I receive now are about precisely that. I don’t know the best way to balance both of those concerns, but we need to address them together and we need to do it soon.**”*

-Senate Legislative Assistant, R

## Google Searches for "Systemic Racism" Surged in Minnesota in Wake of George Floyd Killing

Google Trends Data in Minnesota from 2015 to 2021<sup>1</sup>



1. Google



# Civil Rights and Social Justice in Minnesota

## Private Sector Involvement

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Many policymakers see an opportunity for companies in the community to participate in conversations about racial justice practices. Private sector investment into local communities can help redress racial and social injustices, as well as help strengthen the bond between businesses and the communities in which they operate.



### A Diverse & Inclusive Workplace is a Win-Win

*“The private sector really should be advocating for this. Advocating for good racial and social policies in a workplace is essential to help those who are suffering, but it also makes for good business. You have a better reputation and you have employees who are more satisfied with their work. There are so many benefits from having inclusive workplaces that it makes sense not only from an altruistic perspective but it helps you have a successful and popular business.”*

-House Legislative Assistant, D



### Businesses Have a Role in Fostering Economic Mobility

*“When you talk about helping members of the community so they can be part of the workforce, buy homes, and spend money on local business, that resonates with our constituents more than abstract conversations about race. That’s why private sector buy-in is important, because the government can’t just wave a wand and fix all these social problems. Allowing businesses to do good in the community will go a long way in fixing many of our current problems.”*

-Senate Legislative Assistant, R



### Address Social Justice Issues in the Community

*“I think local businesses have an essential role to play in these conversations about civil rights and justice. There are organizations that I think are taking steps forward to address issues that we know disproportionately impact Asian American, American Indian, African American, and Latino families. I think businesses could play a role for Minnesotans in terms of lifting up racism as an urgent public health crisis, especially considering what we all witnessed in Minneapolis with George Floyd. I think it would be really impactful.”*

-Executive Agency Program Director, I

# **Effective Advocacy in Minnesota**

# Effective Advocacy in Minnesota

## Policymakers Want Proactive, Well-Coordinated, Professional Relationships With Advocates



### Engage Policymakers Through Multiple Avenues

*“The best way to engage is to reach out to individual legislators, engage at our caucus level, engage the leadership, attend fundraisers. That way, my colleagues and I are all on the same page on how legislation might affect all concerned parties. All of those are reasons that propel relationships to credibility, and they should take advantage of those.”*

-Senator, D



### Advocate With Context in Mind

*“It's always good when you get shared goals and you get some coordination of efforts. A lot of times, an advocate can just contact you and be really focused on one side of an issue or one piece of an issue and not understand the whole context of what you have to accomplish—that can be counterproductive. They need to understand the timelines and constraints that we work under.”*

-Representative, R



### Be at the Table for Policy Conversations

*“It's not necessary to meet with the broad spectrum of legislators if they're just trying to get your vote, but if they are trying to negotiate a high-level deal, they should absolutely send someone. There it's essential, it's not even a question. There has to be someone in the room willing to discuss the details with me.”*

-Representative, R

*“If a company comes through one of my committees with an issue, if I don't have a company representative in front of me, immediately I see them as a large organization that doesn't have credibility. Communication is hard without a face and a name. That cannot go well for them in legislation, so the humanizing part is very important.”*

-Representative, D

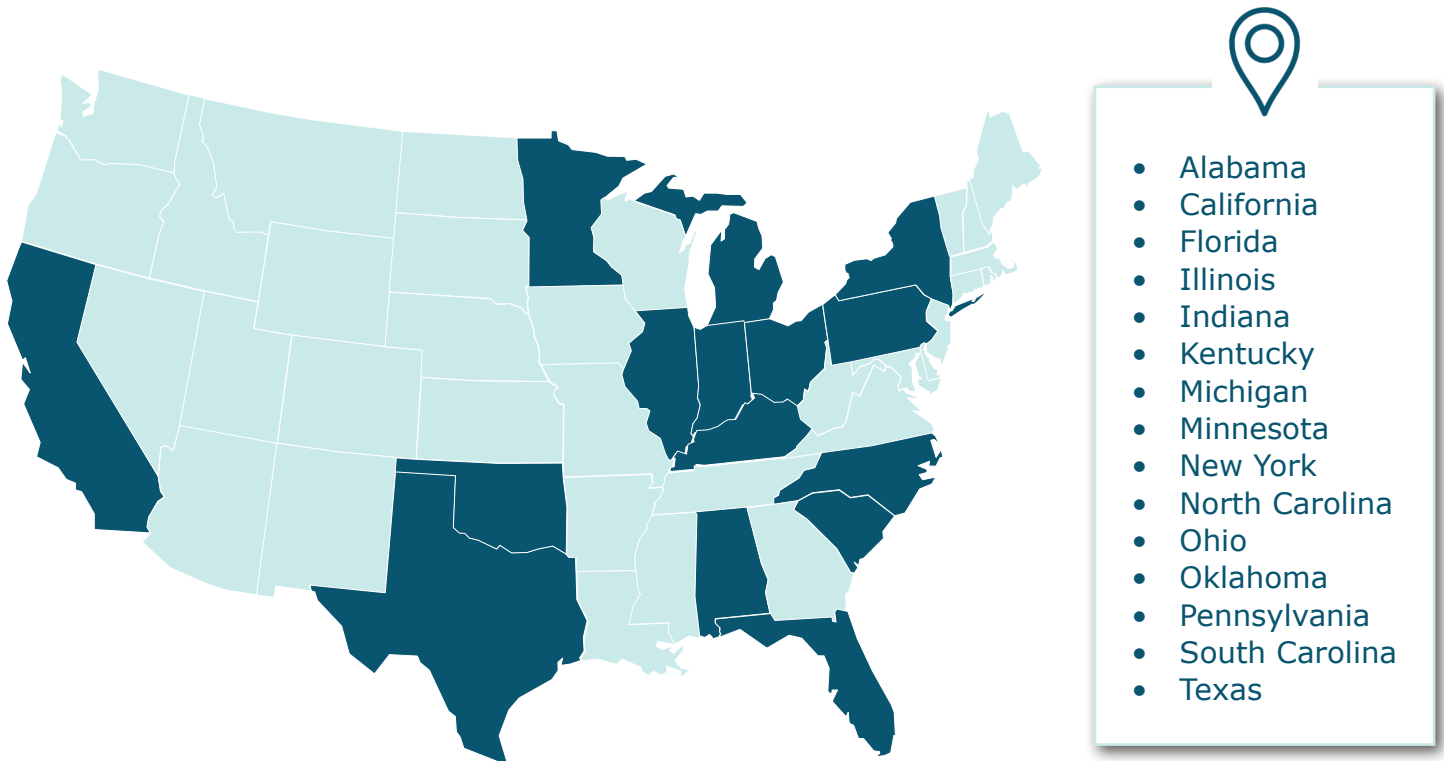
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States Insights Review**

# States Insights Review

Ballast Research provides direct feedback from senior policymakers to government relations professionals, helping advocates make better use of policymakers' time and provide the resources most useful to those in government.



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