



How Many People Run Our Towns?

Fact Sheet: Positional Leadership Across Rural and Urban Minnesota

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v.2024 includes an additional table (3) and an additional column in the appendix denoting demand for each county.

Governmental Leadership

Positional leaders are crucial components of our communities and there are many governmental positions - both elected and appointed - to fill. In Minnesota there are 87 counties, 853 municipalities, 1,780 townships, 333 school districts, and 590 “special” districts which provide oversight functions related to water, sewer, cemeteries, highways, airports, fire protection, soil and water conservation, and hospitals.¹ This amounts to a total of 3,643 governmental agencies requiring leadership. Of the 4,389,033 residents in the state over the age of 18 (eligibility for positional leadership) we find that 1 in every 241 people in Minnesota need to serve as a government leader.²

Nonprofit Leadership

Social life as seen through the nonprofit lens reflects who we are as communities. We recognize many of these groups such as the American Red Cross, 4-H Clubs, and Humane Societies. There are also community-specific groups such as bicycling associations, community improvement groups, libraries, arts and cultural groups, and lake associations. The nonprofit sector in Minnesota is thriving, and in 2020 there were a total of 31,603 registered nonprofits across the state.³ These social organizations also require positional leaders. We find in Minnesota that 1 in every 23 people need to serve as a nonprofit leader.⁴

The Rural-Urban Continuum

There are important differences in leadership between urban and rural places in Minnesota. The 2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Code (RUCC), created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service, assigns counties on a

¹ Source: 2017 Census of Governments, 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau

² This assumes that every government agency requires five people to serve. Most county governments include five, while city governments and school boards can be larger.

³ Source: 2020 National Center for Charitable Statistics, Internal Revenue Service

⁴ This assumes that every nonprofit group requires six people to serve. Data on average board sizes range from 12 to 15 and estimates for optimal board sizes range from 5 to 7.

continuum from large metropolitan to small nonmetropolitan. The full list of the counties assigned to each Continuum Code can be found in the Appendix.

The demand for government leadership can be calculated by taking the number of residents over the age of 18, divided by the number of governments requiring boards. The size of these boards are not available by each type of government, rather the analysis will assume that five resident positions will be demanded by each. This is a conservative estimate as, for example, while there are five commissioners in most Minnesota counties, school districts have 6-7 board members and some, even more.

Table 1: Number of Governments by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Governments	Population Age >18	Leadership Demands
1 (most urban)	576	2,735,443	1 in 950
2	190	190,153	1 in 200
3	505	492,913	1 in 195
4	272	244,168	1 in 180
5	26	28,066	1 in 216
6	810	369,552	1 in 91
7	567	200,778	1 in 71
8	324	58,329	1 in 36
9 (most rural)	373	69,631	1 in 37
TOTAL	3,643	4,389,033	1 in 241

The difference in demands for government leadership between the most urban and most rural counties is striking. In the most urban counties of Minnesota, 1 in 950 residents over the age of 18 must serve as a governmental leader (Table 1). In the most rural counties of the state this demand dramatically increases to 1 in 37 residents.

The demand for nonprofit leadership can be calculated by taking the number of residents over the age of 18, divided by the number of nonprofits. Here we assume that each nonprofit board will require six resident members.

Table 2: Number of Nonprofits by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Nonprofits	Population Age >18	Leadership Demands
1 (most urban)	16,970	2,735,443	1 in 26
2	1,580	190,153	1 in 18
3	3,497	492,913	1 in 21
4	1,938	244,168	1 in 19
5	255	28,066	1 in 17
6	3,472	369,552	1 in 15
7	2,181	200,778	1 in 13
8	750	58,329	1 in 10
9 (most rural)	960	69,631	1 in 9
TOTAL	31,603	4,389,033	1 in 21

In the most urban counties across Minnesota, 1 in 26 residents over the age of 18 must serve as a nonprofit leader (Table 2). In the most rural counties of the state this demand increased to 1 in 9 residents. We also know that community leaders have multiple hats they wear and that is likely more true in our rural communities where there is a higher demand for leaders.

Putting together these two data sources, we find there are a total of 35,246 government and nonprofit organizations demanding leaders. The demand for leaders in Minnesota requires 1 in 21 adult residents must serve as a nonprofit or governmental leader. In the most rural counties of the state, we find this demand to be highest, at 1 in 9 adults requiring service.

Table 3: Number of Governments and Nonprofits by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Governments	Nonprofits	Leaders	Demand
1 (most urban)	576	16,970	104,700	1 in 26
2	190	1,580	10,430	1 in 18
3	505	3,497	23,507	1 in 21
4	272	1,938	12,988	1 in 19
5	26	255	1,660	1 in 17
6	810	3,472	24,882	1 in 15
7	567	2,181	15,921	1 in 13
8	324	750	6,120	1 in 10
9 (most rural)	373	960	7,625	1 in 9
TOTAL	3,643	31,603	207,833	1 in 21

Table 4: Number of Governments and Nonprofits by Rural-Urban Continuum Code

RUCC	Governments	Nonprofits	Total Organizations Demanding Leadership	Percent Government
1 (most urban)	576	16,970	17,546	3%
2	190	1,580	1,770	11%
3	505	3,497	4,002	13%
4	272	1,938	2,210	12%
5	26	255	281	9%
6	810	3,472	4,282	19%
7	567	2,181	2,748	21%
8	324	750	1,074	30%
9 (most rural)	373	960	1,333	28%
TOTAL	3,643	31,603	35,246	10%

One other difference between the most urban and most rural places lies in the proportional relationship between the government and nonprofit sectors. In the most urban counties, just 3% of overall leadership demands are derived from governmental sources. Whereas in the most rural counties, governmental make up 28% of overall leadership demands almost ensuring the need to cross government-nonprofit boundaries to fulfill leadership supply.

See how your county stacks up in Table 4 below.
 For questions, contact Ben Winchester, benw@umn.edu.

Table 4: Number of Governments, Nonprofits, and Residents Age 18+ by County

	Governments, 2017	Nonprofits, 2020	Population Age >18, 2020	Demand
Aitkin County	53	157	13,034	1 in 11
Anoka County	40	1,059	275,754	1 in 42
Becker County	57	223	26,736	1 in 16
Beltrami County	63	289	34,776	1 in 17
Benton County	23	141	30,955	1 in 32
Big Stone County	30	59	4,075	1 in 8
Blue Earth County	49	404	55,070	1 in 21
Brown County	32	227	20,310	1 in 13
Carlton County	45	222	28,079	1 in 18
Carver County	30	391	77,890	1 in 31
Cass County	80	204	23,840	1 in 15
Chippewa County	29	101	9,593	1 in 13
Chisago County	32	225	43,569	1 in 29
Clay County	54	267	48,834	1 in 26
Clearwater County	35	71	6,417	1 in 11
Cook County	9	79	4,709	1 in 9
Cottonwood County	34	122	8,769	1 in 10
Crow Wing County	59	407	52,003	1 in 19
Dakota County	56	1,498	332,708	1 in 36
Dodge County	25	135	15,339	1 in 16
Douglas County	42	309	30,580	1 in 15
Faribault County	40	149	10,870	1 in 10
Fillmore County	46	215	16,111	1 in 11
Freeborn County	45	197	24,027	1 in 17
Goodhue County	43	353	36,901	1 in 16
Grant County	30	91	4,655	1 in 7
Hennepin County	98	7,352	1,008,791	1 in 23
Houston County	33	179	14,636	1 in 12
Hubbard County	41	163	16,554	1 in 14
Isanti County	25	183	31,218	1 in 26
Itasca County	66	307	35,503	1 in 16
Jackson County	34	80	7,726	1 in 12
Kanabec County	26	80	12,543	1 in 21
Kandiyohi County	52	268	32,859	1 in 18

	Governments, 2017	Nonprofits, 2020	Population Age >18, 2020	Demand
Kittson County	46	64	3,314	1 in 5
Koochiching County	16	137	9,831	1 in 11
Lac qui Parle County	40	83	5,273	1 in 8
Lake County	16	101	8,844	1 in 13
Lake of the Woods County	10	59	3,066	1 in 8
Le Sueur County	32	155	21,841	1 in 20
Lincoln County	28	75	4,320	1 in 7
Lyon County	43	231	18,861	1 in 12
McLeod County	33	258	28,494	1 in 17
Mahnomen County	25	39	3,857	1 in 11
Marshall County	70	108	6,903	1 in 7
Martin County	37	170	15,673	1 in 13
Meeker County	34	149	17,827	1 in 17
Mille Lacs County	34	168	20,290	1 in 17
Morrison County	58	228	25,976	1 in 16
Mower County	48	246	29,817	1 in 17
Murray County	36	108	6,401	1 in 8
Nicollet County	24	162	26,581	1 in 24
Nobles County	44	143	16,056	1 in 15
Norman County	39	77	4,975	1 in 8
Olmsted County	37	767	124,225	1 in 26
Otter Tail County	102	456	47,036	1 in 14
Pennington County	34	96	10,854	1 in 15
Pine County	59	174	22,986	1 in 17
Pipestone County	28	82	7,080	1 in 11
Polk County	90	258	23,515	1 in 12
Pope County	37	110	8,808	1 in 10
Ramsey County	45	3,521	427,139	1 in 20
Red Lake County	22	38	2,987	1 in 9
Redwood County	51	154	11,521	1 in 10
Renville County	43	150	11,348	1 in 10
Rice County	29	376	52,206	1 in 22
Rock County	26	95	7,257	1 in 10
Roseau County	52	145	11,662	1 in 10

	Governments, 2017	Nonprofits, 2020	Population Age >18, 2020	Demand
St. Louis County	145	1,358	162,074	1 in 18
Scott County	32	453	110,072	1 in 38
Sherburne County	22	326	71,512	1 in 35
Sibley County	30	113	11,403	1 in 14
Stearns County	88	814	120,904	1 in 23
Steele County	26	255	28,066	1 in 17
Stevens County	26	116	7,429	1 in 9
Swift County	39	109	7,541	1 in 9
Todd County	51	122	18,882	1 in 19
Traverse County	25	34	2,629	1 in 8
Wabasha County	36	155	16,743	1 in 15
Wadena County	29	161	10,590	1 in 10
Waseca County	26	119	14,553	1 in 17
Washington County	45	985	201,867	1 in 33
Watonwan County	27	103	8,416	1 in 11
Wilkin County	37	57	4,974	1 in 9
Winona County	41	288	40,382	1 in 21
Wright County	55	541	101,389	1 in 29
Yellow Medicine County	39	104	7,349	1 in 9
State of Minnesota	3,643	31,603	4,389,033	

Appendix 1: Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

RUCC	Description	Counties
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more	Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Le Sueur, Mille Lacs, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne, Sibley, Washington, Wright
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population	Carlton, St. Louis
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population	Benton, Blue Earth, Clay, Dodge, Fillmore, Houston, Nicollet, Olmsted, Polk, Stearns, Wabasha
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area	Crow Wing, Goodhue, Kandiyohi, Mower, Rice, Winona
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more, not adjacent to a metro area	Steele
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, adjacent to a metro area	Becker, Brown, Douglas, Faribault, Itasca, Kanabec, Koochiching, Lake, McLeod, Meeker, Morrison, Otter Tail, Pennington, Pine, Pipestone, Rock, Todd, Waseca, Watonwan, Wilkin
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999, not adjacent to a metro area	Beltrami, Chippewa, Cottonwood, Freeborn, Hubbard, Jackson, Lyon, Martin, Nobles, Redwood, Roseau, Stevens, Swift, Wadena
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to a metro area	Aitkin, Clearwater, Mahnomen, Marshall, Norman, Pope, Red Lake, Renville
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to a metro area	Big Stone, Cass, Cook, Grant, Kittson, Lac qui Parle, Lake of the Woods, Lincoln, Murray, Traverse, Yellow Medicine



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