Cindy Gross, Director of Human Resources
Minnesota Department of Transportation
cynthia.gross@state.mn.us
612-523-9614
mndot.gov

Developing a Strategic Transportation Workforce Management Plan Partnerships and Opportunities

Introduction

The transportation industry continues to experience a high number of retirements and turnover, nationwide talent shortages, increased movement in the workforce, and an evolving culture shaping the workforce of the future. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has developed a strategic Transportation Workforce Management Plan to prepare the agency to navigate the changing landscape and demographics of the workforce. Strategic agency partnerships were developed to inform and shape the plan's development and influence implementation of gap strategies. Building capacity to address transportation workforce challenges requires an industry commitment from internal and externals stakeholders, industry experts, and academia.

Background

Demographic Impact on Workforce (Minnesota)

- Unprecedented increase in Minnesota's older adult population compared to younger populations.
- Minnesota's population in the 65+ age group will more than double from 2024 to 2075.
- The population in the younger age groups (0-19 years) shows a relatively stable but slowly declining trend.
- Natural change from births and deaths is expected to decline over the years, turning negative by 2065, indicating deaths will outnumber births.
- Working age population has next to no growth over the next decade.
- Losses from domestic migration continue.

Workforce Challenges and Priorities

Transportation Mega-Trends	MnDOT Challenges and Priorities
Demand for more nimble service delivery, innovative needs, changing business objectives, and workforce demands	Improve organizational agility in policy, procedures, & processes
Talent shortages	Lack of applicants
Increased movement in the workforce	Succession planning and career paths
Adjusting to the culture of the new workforce	Enhance the employee experience
Increased use and efficiency of data science, curation, analytics, and business intelligence to support decision making	Loss of institutional knowledge
Improved information management	

Concept and Framework

In 2023, MnDOT established a Workforce Planning Council. The Council's structure is representative of all work areas across the agency (leadership and subject matter experts). The Council serves as the agency's strategic decision-making steering team to:

- Set strategic direction for the highest priority workforce issues and opportunities
- Identify and address workforce challenges, trends and opportunities
- Identify emerging risks, anticipate changes, and adapt to the current and future workforce environment
- Develop, implement and deliver plan outcomes

MnDOT Strategic Workforce Plan Development
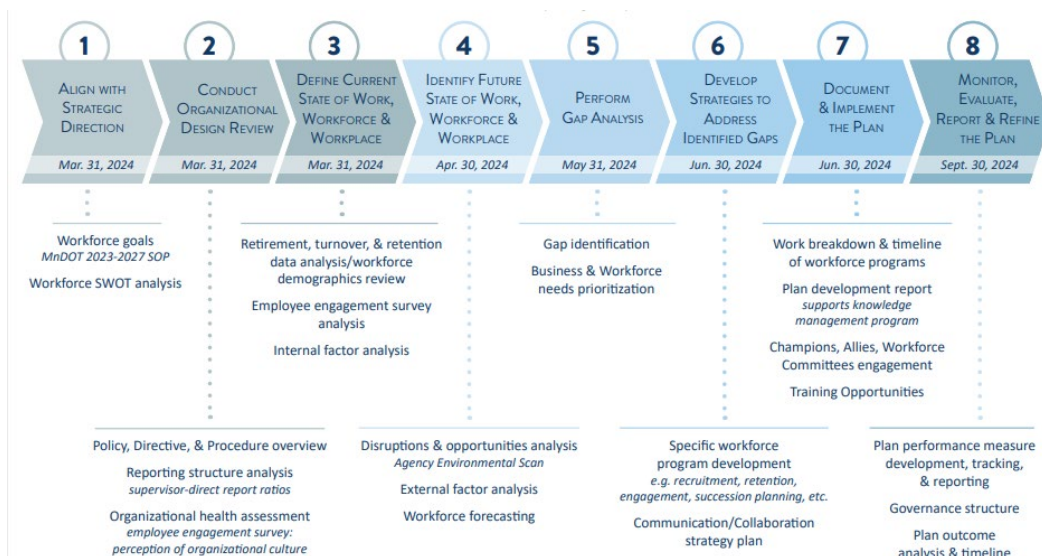
Key Findings, Gaps, and Opportunities

- The relationship between employees, supervisors, managers, and leadership can substantially change MnDOT's success.
- Leaders, managers, and supervisors have a large and significant impact on workforce productivity, longevity, engagement, and morale.
- MnDOT has a strong culture of performance faced with the challenges of significant workforce shifts/changes putting pressure on our ability to remain nimble and ready for the future.
- Our data visualization, analysis and use of the data could enhance our reporting usefulness.
- We are losing institutional knowledge further threatened by a tight labor market and the significant shifts in the newer workforce.
- We are an organization that can find itself stuck in toxic nostalgia (when applicant pools were plentiful, and the current and available workforce was highly skilled). Therefore, we have maintained a practice of replacement planning but will need to strategically plan and move toward a focus of succession planning.
- Because of the rapidly changing workforce landscape, our MnDOT workforce is changing significantly. MnDOT will need to alter approaches to recruitment, retention, and engagement practices. It will take a wholistic approach to recruitment, retention, innovation, and looking at how we do our work and delivery services.

Gap Strategies

MnDOT's Strategic Workforce Management Plan focuses on seven (7) gap strategy areas to address the highest priority gaps in Year 1. Each strategy has a structured roadmap with actions items and led by a champion from the Workforce Planning Council. The seven gap strategy focus areas are:

- Communication – develop an agency-wide communication plan and marketing campaign that reaches and resonates with all MnDOT employees.
- Workforce Data - optimize data to inform agency workforce decisions.
- Employee Experience and the Supervisor Role - provide development strategies for individual supervisors to take personal ownership and enhance the employee experience.
- Streamline Talent Acquisition - ability to hire quickly; enhance careers website; and identify opportunities within MnDOT websites to optimize the promoting of MnDOT jobs.
- Organizational Culture - reframe silo culture to improve collaboration and cooperation across divisions/offices where psychological safety is present, individuals feel safe to express themselves without fear of reprisal, ridicule, or exclusions.
- Intentional Knowledge Management - build knowledge transfer resources, cultural competency, and capacity to train so that all MnDOT's employees gain the knowledge and information they need to be effective in their jobs.
- Attraction and Retention Optimization - identify and develop ways to market the employee experience at MnDOT to achieve applicant pools with sufficient capability and retain employees in a competitive job market.

Building Capacity with Partnerships and Strategic Alignment

Building capacity is both internal and external to the agency and takes an industry-centered approach. Identifying and addressing workforce challenges and opportunities require strategic discussions and programming with universities, tech schools, community partners, consultants, and professional organizations.

Capacity	Partnerships	Alignment
Experience	Outreach and In-Reach	Strategic Direction and Alignment
• Consultant Support • University of Minnesota Department of Organizational Leadership and Workforce Development and Research Lab • American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials	• STEM Education and Outreach • Recruiters and Influencers • District Outreach • Employee Resource Groups • Communities of Practice • Industry • Educational Institutions	• One MN Plan • MnDOT Strategic Plan • Workforce Planning Council • AASHTO Workforce Planning Model • Unified Strategic Plan • Employee Engagement Action Plan • Office and District Business Plans

Summary

MnDOT is mid-way through Year 1 of plan implementation. Early outcomes include an increase in overall number of applicants and number of qualified applicants; a decrease in reposting of positions; improved selection and offer acceptance rates; and improved engagement and overall satisfaction ratings in pulse surveys.

Sources

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey and Local Area and Employment Statistics
Ipums.org from U.S. Census Bureau data
Minnesota State Demographic Center
American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials - Subcommittee on Transportation Workforce Management