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# Recharge the Range

January 2016 - December 2018

The Department of Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation is pleased to present this “Recharge the Range” final report.

The Recharge the Range initiative was implemented as a global downturn in the iron and steel industries impacted the Iron Range which resulted in the closure of mining operations and the layoff of thousands of miners and vendor employees.

More than 600 Iron Range business, community, tourism, arts, recreation leaders, and members of the public presented ideas at four Recharge the Range forums in early and mid-2016. Hosted by Iron Range Resources & Rehabilitation and its regional economic development partners, the forums generated new ideas for business growth, community improvement, culture, arts, tourism and recreation.

Following the forums, action groups led by area business, community and cultural leaders moved forward with implementing a strategic roadmap for economic development. Targeted areas included: large business expansion and attraction, small business strategies, education and talent development, infrastructure, natural resources, tourism and recreation, and livable communities.

Over 120 action group meetings were held at which hundreds of volunteers participated and brought forward initiatives to Recharge the Range. The agency has committed resources to advance the initiatives that address consensus visions advanced at the forums to revitalize downtowns and business corridors and increase arts, culture, tourism, recreation and quality of life opportunities.

I extend my appreciation to the action group chairs and especially Sara Ferkul who administered all of the action group meetings with scheduling, reporting, and managing details.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Finnegan  
Deputy Commissioner

# The Economic Impacts of the Child Care Shortage in Northeastern Minnesota

*Opportunities to Partner on Solutions*

JULY 2018

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## Large Business Expansion & Attraction

*Chairs: Curt Anttila, Brian Hanson, Wayne Kangas, David Rhode*

**Purpose:** Comprised of the region's industry and economic development leaders, this committee examined the large business sector and its essential role within the Iron Range economy. The group identified the top challenges of large business which are workforce vacancy, wage pressure, worker training and availability, and lack of quality child care.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Regional Talent Forecast Study:** The agency provided funding for a workforce skills assessment that is being administered by APEX and scheduled to be completed in March 2019. The report will analyze the current and future talent supply, their priorities and their barriers. It will also analyze the workforce demand among the region's leading industries: aviation, energy, engineering, financial/banking, healthcare, higher and K-12 public education, hospitality, manufacturing, tourism, transportation and logistics, and wood and paper products. The findings will be utilized to enrich the talent pool for new and existing businesses.

**Child Care Shortage Solutions:** Ample and quality child care is extremely important to the area's families, employers and workforce. The agency formed a coalition of partners that included private sector business, non-profits and economic development organizations. Through investments of time and financial resources made by the agency, Northland Foundation, Blandin Foundation, St. Louis County and United Way of Northeastern Minnesota, funding was made available for physical expansions at local child care facilities. In addition, the agency financially supported the internal and external development infrastructure at new and existing child care facilities.

## Small Business Strategies

*Chairs: Andrew Hanegmon, Jared Sabin, Shawn Wellnitz*

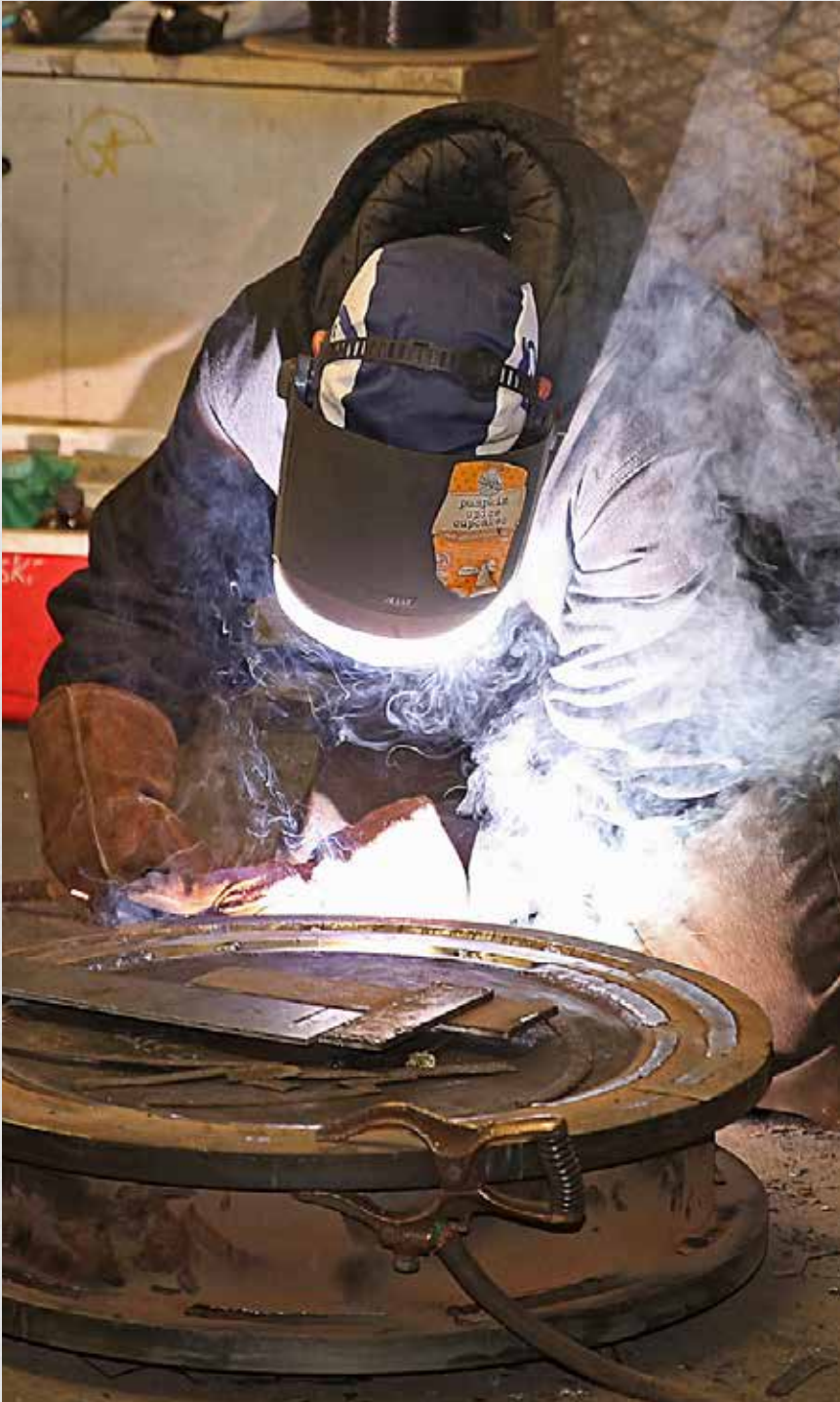
**Purpose:** *Comprised of small business owners, entrepreneurs, small business support service providers, regional economic development leaders and lenders, this committee examined the small business sector and its essential role within the Iron Range economy. The group identified ways to strengthen and expand entrepreneurialism and small business networks by improving options for start-up and maker spaces, increasing availability of financial resources, and creating awareness of available technical assistance.*

## Results & Impacts to Region:

**Entrepreneurs on Tap:** The agency provided funding to host a three-part series of forums focused on cultivating the network of small businesses and entrepreneurs. The forums included subject matter expert presentations, panel discussions and networking. Each event was attended by approximately 50 individuals from the small business sector.

- Technology & Social Media to Grow Your Business (May 2017)
- Starting Your Business on the Iron Range (August 2017)
- Growing an Exceptional Staff and Culture (November 2017)





## Education & Talent Development

*Chairs: Gregg Allen, Bill Maki, Peter McDermott, Jessalyn Sabin*

**Purpose:** Comprised of educators and education administrators, workforce center representatives and area employers, this committee examined the region's largest barrier to economic growth: the shortage of skilled and unskilled workers and applicants. The workforce shortage is not unique to northeastern Minnesota; it is happening throughout the state. The group identified potential solutions including:

- Attracting additional talent pools to the region including immigrants and foreign exchange students.
- Attracting the region's underemployed, unemployed and non-participating residents.
- Developing needed training and certification programs that align with regional industries.
- Addressing employment barriers such as child care shortage.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Welding Certification Program:** The agency convened a forum of regional businesses that employ welders to determine how to proceed with addressing the area's welder shortage. Solutions were identified to grow the number of people choosing welding as a profession and put them on an education fast track. In response to the forum, the agency provided funding for Advanced Minnesota and Mesabi Range College to develop an Accelerated Welding Institute for individuals to obtain a certificate of completion and immediately start a career as an entry-level welder. In addition, a training program was established for area businesses to upskill their existing workers. These two welder programs began in January 2018 and will continue through 2019.



## Infrastructure

*Chairs: Jeff Borling, Jason Chopp, Latisha Gietzen, Harold Langowski, Whitney Ridlon*

**Purpose:** Comprised of energy professionals, mining leaders, environmental and planning consultants, engineers and architects, community development representatives and municipalities, this committee examined the region's infrastructure needs and gaps. The group identified the strengths and weaknesses in the region's sewer, water and electric systems, roadways, runways and communications. Robust infrastructure is essential for operating a business, enabling trade, linking supply chains, connecting workers to their jobs and sustaining a community.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Blandin Foundation Broadband Communities Partnership:** The agency provided funding to the Blandin Foundation Broadband Communities program which involves an intensive two-year partnership between Blandin and six area communities to advance broadband initiatives. Successful in their bids to become a Blandin community were: Bois Forte/Cook/Orr, Ely, Hibbing, Aitkin County, Mountain Iron-Buhl area and Chisholm. Their initiatives to date include:

- Chisholm launched a unified online presence through a collaborative landing page.
- Bois Forte, Cook and Orr offered basic computer and internet classes to its residents.
- Chisholm, Cook and Hibbing public libraries allow residents to "check out" broadband hotspots.
- Palisade developed free Wi-Fi on its main street corridor.
- Hibbing and Access North provided free computers to disabled and senior citizens.
- Chisholm installed Wi-Fi on its public school buses.
- Ely launched a website to promote working and living in Ely.



## Natural Resources

*Chairs: Shawn Bina, Julie Lucas, Mike Mlinar, Rolf Weberg*

**Purpose:** *Comprised of scientists, engineers, private businesses, municipalities and subject matter experts, this committee examined the current state and emerging trends related to the region's natural resources including minerals, timber and water as well as their byproducts. The group identified obstacles and opportunities shared by the private and public sectors related to ferrous and non-ferrous mining, secondary mining products, energy production and consumption, forestry and land management, and water usage and quality.*

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Mass Timber Study:** The agency provided a grant for a mass timber study that is being conducted by the Bureau of Business and Economic Research at UMD's Labovitz School of Business and Economics. The study will examine the economic feasibility of introducing mass timber manufacturing to the state of Minnesota and Minnesota's Arrowhead Region. The study is scheduled to be completed in December 2018 and will focus on:

- Mass timber market demand growth and projections
- Current and potential capacity of local lumber producers
- Economic impact analysis of this new industry in the region
- Barriers to market

**Enterprise for Strategic Resources (ESR) Project:** The agency provided a grant to ESR to develop and implement a plan for the strategic use of the region's natural resources (minerals), securing federal funding, and creating new businesses and industries in the region related to natural resources. ESR's work commenced in July 2018.

## Tourism & Recreation

*Chairs: Allyse Freeman, Jim Makowsky, Beth Pierce, Tony Sertich*

**Purpose:** Comprised of tourism professionals, hoteliers, attraction and recreation operators, retailers and municipalities, this committee examined the economic and quality of life impacts of the region's tourism and recreation industry. The group identified the importance of regional unity in branding, customer service, marketing and online presence.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Certified Tourism Ambassador Program:** The Iron Range is now one of two regions in Minnesota (the other is Rochester) taking part in the Certified Tourism Ambassador™ (CTA) program, an industry-recognized

certification for frontline staff that is accredited through the Tourism Ambassador Institute. Curriculum customized to the Iron Range was developed and is open to all area businesses who are connected to the tourism industry including hotels, restaurants, retail outlets and attractions. Through classroom and online training modules the employees will earn their certification and join 12,000 other CTAs worldwide. Coordinated by the Iron Range Tourism Bureau and supported by agency funding, the program's goal is to drive visitor spending through in-depth knowledge of the region. Training sessions began spring 2018.

**Community Calendar of Events:** The agency provided funding to launch a new website, [www.northlandevents.org](http://www.northlandevents.org), in March 2018 that includes regional events and festivals. Online regional calendars are tourist trip-planning tools and have been successful for many destination areas in the nation.







## Livable Communities

*Chairs: Vicki Hagberg, Ray Jobe, Randy Lasky, Mary McReynolds*

**Purpose:** *Comprised of health care professionals, educators, artists, private businesses, recreation and attraction operators, farmers, retailers, municipalities and subject matter experts, this committee attracted the largest amount of interest from volunteers with a wide variety of backgrounds who were eager to improve their communities on a number of fronts.*

1. Recharge Downtowns
2. Creative Communities
3. Healthy Active Communities
  - Fresh Food Access
  - Active Living
  - Mental Health

Each subcommittee examined elements that impact the quality of life of existing residents and play a significant role in attracting new residents to the region, including downtown physical assets and communal spaces, public art impact and economics, access to locally grown foods, access to public recreation and programs, and mental health issues and solutions particularly for youth.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Meet Up & Chow Down Recharged:** United Way of Northeastern Minnesota (UWNEMN) first launched Meet Up & Chow Down in Chisholm in 2016, and in 2017 expanded into Hibbing and served 3,205 meals combined in the two communities. In 2018 through Recharge the Range, United Way, Mesabi Family YMCA and University of Minnesota Extension collaborated to bring the program to Virginia for the first time and add a physical activity and health education component. Kids ages 1 to 18 enjoyed a free, nutritious lunch and a fun, physical activity each weekday during the summer months at Silver Lake Beach in Virginia. The original Meet Up & Chow Down began as a summer supplement to UWNEMN's Buddy Backpacks program that serves 787 kids during the school year on the Iron Range, where about 47% of enrolled children qualify for free or reduced lunch. The kids who are at-risk of going hungry

over the weekends (about 3-5% of school populations) receive a backpack filled with nutritious, nonperishable, child-friendly food items.

**Downtown Streetscapes Grant Program:** The agency created a new grant program beginning in fiscal year 2018 that assists with incentivizing investment in downtowns areas and business corridors through projects that promote safe and attractive environments for residents, shoppers, workers and visitors. In its first year, the program supported projects in seven communities including one commercial façade improvement, five pedestrian improvements, 13 public art exhibits and two enhanced public spaces. The program was again funded for fiscal year 2019 with an emphasis on project visibility and community support.

**Cool & Creative Event:** The agency provided funding for an event that convened artists, arts organization leaders, economic developers and civic leaders. The group gathered in March 2018 to work on building arts across the Iron Range to enhance community vitality. Event partners included Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, Lyric Center for the Arts, Blandin Foundation and Bush Foundation.

**Creative MN Art Study:** The agency provided funding for a study commissioned by the Minnesota Citizens of the Arts that examined the annual economic impact of artists, nonprofit arts and culture organizations in the region. The study concluded that a total of \$12 million in annual economic impact is generated by arts and culture organizations in the Iron Range (Itasca, Lake and St. Louis counties – excluding Duluth), confirming the connection between art and economic development.





## Agriculture

Chair: Steve Giorgi

**Purpose:** Comprised of farmers, health care professionals, public school educators, grocers, retailers and municipalities, this committee examined the viability of transforming the region into one with a sustainable agriculture. A consumer-driven national trend is emerging to “keep food local.” The group explored the facets of achieving sustainability in our region including: supply chains, food production and consumption, biodiversity, soil fertility, pest management, pool of existing and potential growers, USDA requirements and inspections, and the feasibility of a local processing plant for beef, chicken and pork.

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Study on Localizing Food Production & Consumption:** The agency provided funding for a study of the potential impact of local food as an economic driver within the agency’s service area. The study was completed in September 2018 and concluded that localizing the production and sale of foods could have a substantial economic impact to the region, including:

- Addition of 250 to 3,500 jobs in agriculture and processing
- Retention of \$51 million to \$256 million annually in food dollars
- Substantial economic spillover effects to related businesses

## Healthcare

*Chairs: Steve Giorgi*

**Purpose:** *Comprised of health care professionals, hospital and clinic administrators and public health officials, this committee examined the top four healthcare priorities in the region: mental health, obesity, substance abuse and socioeconomic disparities. Most private and public healthcare providers in our region are mandated to conduct independent healthcare assessments in order to identify and prioritize the top medical needs of patients. Nearly all recent assessments validate these four priorities. The group also identified two significant needs that are critical to providers and patients in our region: expanded broadband to make available telemedicine and healthcare workforce development to strengthen recruiting, retaining, training and certification.*

### **Results & Impacts to Region:**

**Collaborative Team:** Relationships were established among two primary groups who both play a critical role in improving health and healthcare in our region:

- Leaders and principals within the region's healthcare industry who share the common goals of better health, better care and lower costs in our region.
- Workforce centers and colleges who share the common goal of upskilling, training and certifying people to fill gaps in the region's workforce.

# Recharge the Range

A strategic roadmap for  
economic development

