



Scott County **RISE**

Resources for Inclusive Success and Employment

Workplace Inclusion Manual

A Comprehensive Guide for
Building Inclusive Workplaces

A program of the CareerLift workforce program



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Introduction

Welcome to the Scott County RISE (Resources for Inclusive Success and Employment) Workplace Inclusion Manual. This comprehensive guide provides business leaders with actionable strategies for creating inclusive workplaces.

This manual integrates insights from the Scott County RISE training series, DEI best practices, local demographic data, and critical economic analysis from the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's 2026 Business Benchmarks Report.

Manual Structure

- The Business Case for Workplace Inclusion
- Understanding Workplace Inclusion
- Inclusive Hiring Practices
- Training and Workforce Development
- Employee Retention Strategies
- Community Resources and Partnerships
- Your Action Plan



Section 1: The Business Case for Workplace Inclusion

Minnesota's Economic Imperative for Growth

Minnesota's economy stands at a crossroads. For generations, our private sector powered remarkable innovation and prosperity. But we cannot rely on past success—the data shows Minnesota's economy is no longer keeping pace with the nation.

URGENT: Minnesota Is Falling Behind

From 2019-2024, Minnesota ranked 33rd in GDP growth, 39th in job growth, 40th in labor force growth, and 46th in median household income growth. More people are leaving our state than moving here.

Minnesota's Declining Economic Competitiveness

The Minnesota Chamber's 2026 Business Benchmarks Report reveals dramatic decline across nearly every growth measure:

METRIC	2007-2019	2019-2024
GDP Growth	18th	33rd
Job Growth	20th	39th
Labor Force Growth	22nd	40th
Median Household Income Growth	21st	46th

Source: MN Chamber of Commerce, 2026 Business Benchmarks Report

Minnesota has slid from middle-of-the-pack to the back third of states in key growth indicators. These trends affect employer competitiveness, employee livelihoods, and community vitality.

The Workforce Crisis: We Cannot Afford to Leave Talent on the Sidelines

Minnesota faces severe workforce challenges that make inclusive employment economically essential:

- Labor force growth: Only +0.2% annually since 2019 (ranked 40th)
- GDP per capita growth: Only +1.0% annually (ranked 38th)
- Labor participation: Projected decline from its peak of 73.9% to 65.8% by 2030
- Job vacancy ratio: Nearly 2 openings per job seeker
- Structural challenge: Aging population + declining birth rates

The Bottom Line

With slow workforce growth and massive job openings, Minnesota businesses cannot overlook ANY talent source. Inclusive hiring isn't optional—it's essential for survival.

The Migration Crisis: People Are Leaving Minnesota

Minnesota's persistent population loss serves as a referendum on our economic competitiveness:

- Net domestic migration (2020-2024): -47,900 people (ranked 41st)
- Historical pattern: Negative net migration in 20 of the past 24 years
- Total loss since 2001: Nearly 123,000 more left than moved in
- Brain drain: Approximately 8,300 college-age students lost annually

Why This Matters for Inclusion

With people leaving and workforce growth stalled, Minnesota MUST tap into underutilized talent pools: women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, formerly incarcerated individuals, older workers. These aren't 'nice to have'—they're survival strategies.

The Three Imperatives for Inclusion

1. The Moral Imperative

At the heart of inclusion is the belief that all individuals deserve respect, fairness, and equal opportunity. Every person, regardless of background, deserves:

- Equal access to employment opportunities
- Fair treatment in the workplace
- Respect for unique perspectives
- Professional growth opportunities
- An environment free from discrimination

2. The Economic Imperative

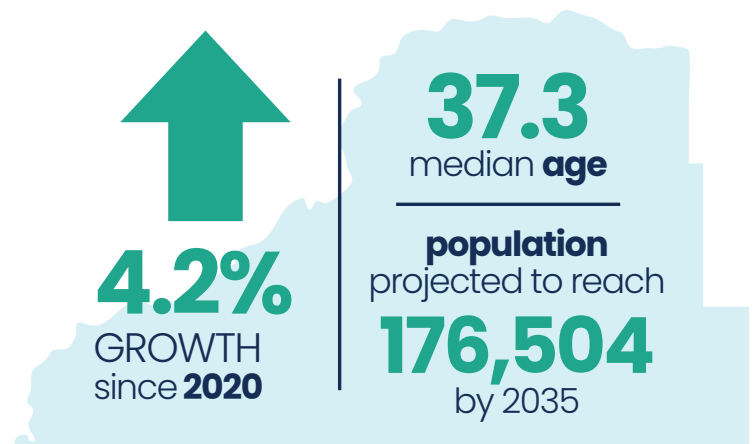
Scott County and Minnesota demographics show why inclusive hiring is economically critical.

Scott County Population (2024): 157,206 people

- 4.2% growth since 2020 (10th fastest in Minnesota)
- Median age: 37.3 years (younger than state)
- Projected to reach 176,504 by 2035

Unemployment Disparities:

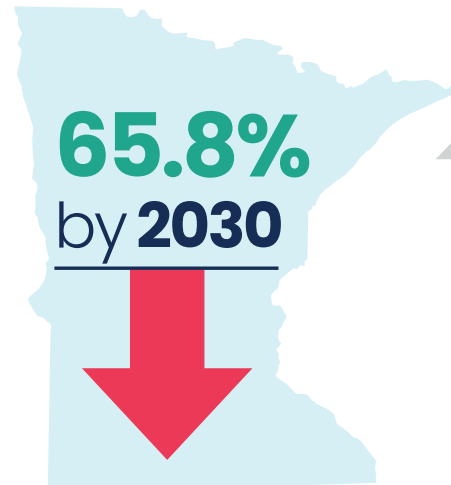
- Black or African American: 9.6% (higher than state average)
- Hispanic or Latino: 6.0% (higher than state average)



Future Workforce: 24,100 students aged 5-14 (15.3% of population) represent tomorrow's workers, with increasing diversity.

With Minnesota's labor participation declining to 65.8% by 2030, employers must tap into:

- Women
- People of color
- Individuals with disabilities
- Formerly incarcerated individuals
- Older workers
- Immigrants and refugees



3. The Business Imperative

Innovation:

Companies with diverse teams are 35% more likely to outperform competitors. Different perspectives drive innovative ideas and better problem-solving.

Employee Retention:

Inclusive workplaces reduce costly turnover. SHRM estimates replacement costs at \$4,700 per employee, though actual costs are often higher. Employees who feel included stay longer.

Employee Engagement:

Engaged employees are productive. When valued and respected, employees are more motivated, creative, and dedicated, leading to better outcomes and higher profitability.

Key Takeaway

Workplace inclusion is a critical business driver AND economic necessity for Minnesota. Given our declining competitiveness and workforce constraints, we cannot afford to leave any talent on the sidelines. By embracing diversity and fostering inclusion, companies unlock workforce potential, drive innovation, and secure long-term growth.



Section 2: Understanding Workplace Inclusion

Defining Key Terms

To ensure consistent understanding, define these terms organization-wide:

Diversity

Any characteristic or dimension differentiating individuals. Includes but not limited to: age, gender identity, race, origin, religion, disability status, veteran status, sexual orientation.

Equity

Creating a fair, just environment free from bias, ensuring all individuals receive resources and tools they need to succeed, accounting for individual needs. Includes access, status, and structural inequities.

Inclusion

Creating an environment where all individuals feel a sense of belonging, respect, and encouragement to be their authentic professional selves, where unique perspectives, experiences, traditions, and cultures are valued.

Multiple Dimensions of Diversity

Diversity extends beyond race and gender to encompass characteristics and experiences making each person unique.

Internal Dimensions (Core Identity)

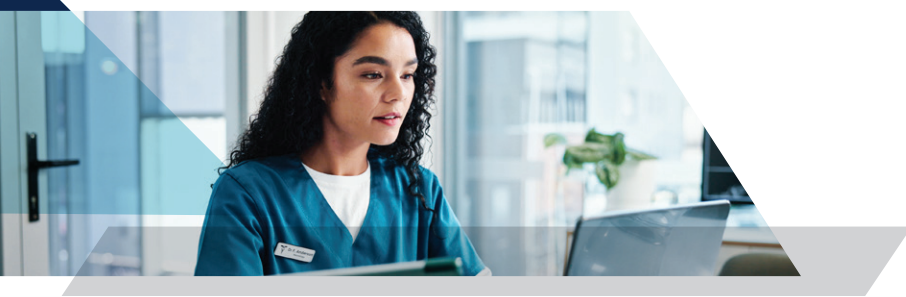
- Age
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Physical ability
- Sexual orientation

External Dimensions

- Geographic location
- Income
- Personal habits
- Recreational habits
- Religion
- Educational background
- Work experience
- Appearance
- Parental status
- Marital status

Organizational Dimensions

- Functional level/classification
- Work content/field
- Division/department/unit
- Seniority
- Work location
- Union affiliation
- Management status



What Inclusion Looks Like

Inclusion creates workplaces where everyone feels valued, respected, and empowered. Organizations should tailor approaches based on: community served, industry, employee base, business size, existing culture.

Inclusion opportunities:

- Ensuring equal growth and advancement opportunities
- Encouraging open dialogue and active listening
- Accommodating dietary restrictions
- Accommodating language barriers
- Partnering with community organizations
- Implementing inclusive hiring practices
- Creating employee resource groups (ERGs)
- Designing accessible work environments

Removing Barriers to Employment

Review hiring processes to identify and remove barriers and bias:

- Where and how are you posting jobs? Is online-only creating barriers?
- What language do job postings use?
- Are minimum qualifications truly necessary or can skills be taught?

Understanding and Addressing Bias

Bias is unconscious favoritism toward/against particular social groups, influencing actions and perceptions. Whether conscious or unconscious, bias creates barriers and causes missed talent opportunities.

Good news: Bias can be addressed:

1. Accept that we all have biases based on experiences
2. Challenge assumptions, focus on facts vs. subjectivity
3. Implement structured processes minimizing bias opportunities
4. Provide training on recognizing and mitigating bias

Remember

Successfully demonstrating inclusive practices doesn't happen overnight. The journey isn't linear. Mistakes are inevitable. The key: start somewhere and stay committed.

Section 3: Inclusive Hiring Practices

Introduction

Who we hire and how we hire transform businesses and communities. Building diverse teams is a strategic imperative. When organizations embrace diverse employees, they tap into perspectives, experiences, and ideas driving innovation and improving decisions.

Minnesota's Workforce Reality

With nearly 2 job openings per job seeker and only +0.2% annual labor force growth, Minnesota businesses cannot afford to limit talent pools. Inclusive hiring is an economic necessity.

Job Postings Best Practices

Review job descriptions thoroughly and regularly:

- Collaborate with hiring teams to understand requirements
- Ensure job title and responsibilities accurately reflect role
- Review for clarity and conciseness
- Confirm alignment with team structure and qualifications
- Avoid unnecessary requirements deterring qualified candidates
- Use welcoming language for all candidates
- Highlight commitment to inclusive workplace

Important

Inclusive job descriptions are your first communication with candidates, setting the tone for company culture.

Interviewing Best Practices

Understand potential unconscious biases in hiring processes—hidden assumptions and judgments made without realizing it:

- Preference for candidates from same school
- Strong preference for particular accents/dialects
- Favoring candidates without employment gaps
- Affinity for candidates with similar hobbies/interests

Bias mitigation strategies:

- Implement training programs for bias recognition
- Adopt structured interview processes with standardized questions
- Use skills-based assessments
- Utilize diverse hiring panels (different levels, departments)
- Focus on job-related criteria vs. subjective factors

Recruiting Through Diverse Channels

Broaden candidate pools beyond traditional job boards:

- Niche platforms targeting specific communities
- Local community job fairs
- Partnerships with educational institutions
- Connections with community-based organizations
- Targeted outreach to underrepresented groups

Scott County Labor Market Data

Understanding the local labor market helps target recruitment effectively:

METRIC	VALUE
Available Workers	90,354
Unemployment Rate	2.7%
Labor Force Participation	75.3%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	42%

Local Resources

Connect with local organizations for diverse talent:

- Scott County Economic Development
- Shakopee Chamber of Commerce
- Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
- CareerForce locations
- MI C.A.S.A.
- Community Resource Center



Section 4: Training and Workforce Development

Building From Within

Minnesota businesses facing workforce shortages must recognize employee development as a strategic investment. The skills gap is widening—by decade's end, Minnesota faces shortages of highly skilled workers across sectors.

Internal Policies Supporting Growth

Review existing policies; identify growth opportunities:

- Educational opportunities
- Tuition assistance and reimbursement
- Flexible scheduling for training
- Paid time for skill development

Internal Training Programs

Develop skill-building opportunities where employees learn and grow without leaving the workplace:

- Learning management systems
- Cross-training programs
- Job shadowing
- Certification programs
- Skills-based advancement pathways

Career Pathways

Strong talent pipelines require clear career pathways. Employees should see not just their current job but where they can go next. Pathways vary by industry, job, and regional needs.

Example: A food processing employee may begin on the line, then move into quality assurance, logistics, or management with training and clear pathways.

Mentorships, Internships, and Apprenticeships

Mentorship

Connects internal employees in ongoing relationships. An experienced employee offers feedback, guidance, and support throughout a career journey.

Internship

Short-term on-the-job experience providing exposure to the organization and field skills. Paid or unpaid; may include mentorship elements.

Apprenticeship

Longer-term, highly structured program combining learning, specialized training, classroom instruction. Often aligned to specific trade/industry, resulting in industry-recognized credential and employment. Paid experiences offering career pathways.

Many Minnesota businesses connect with local high schools, colleges, and universities to develop the future workforce. Minnesota Chamber Foundation's Business Education Network (BEN) connects students with high-demand careers through local chambers and schools.

Key Insight

Minnesota businesses face both challenge and opportunity to bridge skills gap by investing in future workforce. Internal training, career pathways, and partnership programs reduce turnover, strengthen culture, ensure individuals enter with needed skills.



Section 5: Employee Retention Strategies

The Cost of Attrition

SHRM estimated in 2022 that replacing a tenured employee costs around \$4,700, though many employers report a much greater impact. This includes recruitment time/cost, lost company knowledge and experience, training and onboarding costs.

Inclusive Leadership

It's often said employees don't leave bad organizations—they leave bad leaders. Bad leaders with poor communication, unprofessional/toxic behaviors, and a lack of trust struggle with retention.

Building inclusive leaders:

- Executive leaders lead inclusively by example
- Hold direct reports accountable to same standards
- Consider different learning and communication styles
- Tailor leadership to individuals
- Advocate for employees; ensure everyone has seat at table
- Model respect and empathy
- Build foundation of trust; address issues transparently

Building Inclusive Culture

Inclusive workplace culture means people are respected for who they are, differences are valued as assets, diverse perspectives and authentic voices are welcomed. When inclusion is woven into culture, employees are more engaged and diverse talent stays.

Cultural competency is essential—leaders and employees must seek to understand and respect differences in cultural backgrounds and experience, building team cohesion and productivity.

Equitable Internal Processes

Retaining talent requires fair, transparent performance evaluations and promotions. Biases can interfere with advancement. Implement clear, structured systems for reviewing performance, ensuring decisions based on objective criteria and potential, not unconscious assumptions.

Addressing Barriers to Retention

Leaders can only remove barriers if aware of them. Regularly gather employee feedback through:

- One-on-one meetings
- Team meetings
- Employee engagement surveys

Give employees space to voice concerns; listen honestly and take appropriate action. When employees feel truly heard and see real change, loyalty increases.

Ensure everyone can participate by offering accessibility support, accommodations, and removing barriers. Accommodations such as ergonomic arrangements and accessible doors or ramps help eliminate growth and development barriers, allowing all employees to work to their full potential.

Core Idea

Inclusive leadership improves retention. Inclusive workplaces benefit all employees. When employees feel included, valued, respected, they're more likely to stay, innovate, and help organizations succeed.



Section 6: Community Resources and Partnerships

Establishing Community Partnerships

Partnering with community organizations and utilizing local/regional resources to resolve workforce challenges remains an opportunity for many Minnesota businesses. Minnesota's nonprofit landscape is vast, diverse, and contributes strongly to the economy. Nonprofits intersect healthcare, social services, mental health, education, employment services, and more.

By establishing relationships with external partners, businesses can:

- Better connect with underrepresented communities or individuals on economic sidelines
- Offer tailored and unique resources for employees
- Address barriers like education, transportation, and skills gaps

First identify existing workforce challenges, then tailor partnerships with organizations specializing in these areas. Whether building cultural competency, providing English language learning, childcare services, or transportation solutions, many nonprofits are well-suited to help.

MI C.A.S.A.

MI C.A.S.A. (Community, Support, Solidarity, Friendship) is a Shakopee-based nonprofit focused on raising awareness about mental health challenges and establishing healthy lifestyles.

Services include:

- Cultural navigation services
- Mentors assisting community members in navigating cultural change
- Connecting employees with resources and services
- Financial assistance and transportation
- Free services available in English and Spanish

Website: <https://micasamn.org/>

Community Resource Center

This nonprofit embraces culture and relationships, and provides access and resources to those in need.

Focus areas:

- Healthcare and housing support
- Career assistance
- Education support
- Partnerships with public schools, Shakopee Chamber, Community Development Agency

Website: <https://www.communityresourcecmn.org/>

CareerForce

Serves both employees looking for work and businesses looking for workers.

Website: careerforce.mn.gov/shakopee

Southwest Intermediate District 288

Provides programs for youth and adult learners:

- Free English Language Learning
- GED preparation
- Family literacy classes

Website: swmetro288.org/288-programs/adult-education



Section 7: Your Action Plan

The Minnesota Chamber Foundation provides a simplified, attainable approach to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. This 5-step framework helps organizations move from awareness to action.

Step 1: Lay the Foundation

Identify the Opportunities

Data shows organizations prioritizing DEI have higher innovation, productivity, retention, and financial performance.

Define Your Terminology

Ensure diversity, equity, and inclusion are understood and used consistently. (See Section 2 for definitions.)

Define Your 'Why'

Explain why you're embarking on a DEI Journey, and outline what you hope to accomplish. Your 'why' will help anchor efforts and ensure that initiatives align with goals.

Define Mission and Vision

Mission: Structure, direction, accountability, actions, goals—what you hope to accomplish.

Vision: If the mission is accomplished, what does this mean for the organization?

Step 2: Gather Key Stakeholders

Gather Buy-in From the Top

Ensure the tone is set at the top by gathering executive leaders to champion efforts. Leaders must cascade initiatives and expectations down to managers, supervisors, individual contributors and be held accountable. Incorporate DEI into team meetings, one-on-ones, and company-wide meetings.

Gather Cross-Functional Group

Identify individuals interested in supporting this initiative. Build internal DEI champions representing multiple areas at various journey stages to assist with planning, strategy, and execution. These individuals help confirm definitions, mission, and vision.

Step 3: Conduct Baseline Assessment

Identify Where You Are

Every organization begins its DEI journey at a different place and time. Don't fear admitting infant stages—we all begin somewhere.

Identify Opportunities for Improvement

Culture, size, and industry vary significantly. Identify opportunities making sense to your culture, industry, and community.

Review Demographics

Demographic data is the easiest way to measure and track diversity. Capturing information at the beginning of the journey allows full progress monitoring internally and within candidate pools.

Document Accomplishments

DEI initiatives can exist in various forms. Capture and track information—it's all part of your journey.

Step 4: Build Strategy and Implement

Review best practice categories and identify opportunities within each:

1

Overall Strategy

Establish DEI strategy ensuring workplace culture, employment practices, policies, benefits support DEI goals. Strategy lays framework for anticipated outcomes supporting diverse, inclusive workplace.

2

Recruitment/Retention

Efforts help achieve diversity component. Remember: can't maintain diverse workforce without inclusion priority. Review all hiring phases for bias. (See Section 3.)

3

Community Engagement

Ensure community engagement viewed from DEI lens; business and community partners align with DEI goals.

4

Supplier Diversity

Prioritize partnerships with diverse suppliers/vendors ensuring companies maximize perspectives, innovative ideas, mindsets. Ensure partner businesses have positions on DEI aligning with your organization.

5

Workplace Programs

Consider establishing internal programs: mentorships, internships, apprenticeships, employee development programs, DEI Council, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). (See Section 4.)

6

Training/Education

DEI training strengthens culture by highlighting diversity importance and offering actions for creating inclusive, equitable workplace.

Step 5: Hold Yourself Accountable

Set Goals

Be intentional; set realistic, attainable goals. Year-over-year progress may be minor, but each accomplishment contributes to long-term goals and outcomes.

Monitor Progress

Continually check in by monitoring progress toward goals.

Regularly Assess Performance

Rely on data and assessments to show how you're doing: conducting employee engagement surveys, reviewing employee demographics.

Be Transparent

Consider publishing a transparency report highlighting all DEI initiatives/efforts for the year, outlining opportunities for improvement/shortcomings, highlighting future goals.

Acknowledge Mistakes

Don't fear failure. Consider setbacks and mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.

Share Opportunities for Improvement

Openly communicating opportunities creates a culture of trust and honesty.



Conclusion:

The Time to Act is Now

Minnesota's future is not predetermined. We possess extraordinary strengths: world-class companies, a talented workforce, and an enduring spirit of innovation. But we must look past our legacy to what's really holding us back today.

The Minnesota Chamber of Commerce's 2026 Business Benchmarks Report makes clear: Minnesota is falling behind in economic competitiveness, workforce growth, population retention. We have:

- Dropped from 18th to 33rd in GDP growth
- Fallen from 20th to 39th in job growth
- Declined from 22nd to 40th in labor force growth
- Lost 47,900 residents to other states (2020-2024)
- Only 0.2% annual labor force growth

These trends create an urgent imperative: we cannot afford to leave any talent on the sidelines. Embracing workforce uniqueness and prioritizing strategies to train and retain the full spectrum of talent isn't just good ethics—it's an economic necessity.

Growth is the Difference

Growth is the difference between opportunity and stagnation, between retaining our next generation and watching it leave, between being a state that competes and one that falls behind. This is Minnesota's economic imperative for growth. The time to act is now.

Want to learn more about creating inclusive workplaces? Visit shakopee.org/scott-county-rise or reach out today. Together, we can build a more inclusive future—and a more prosperous Minnesota.

Resources and Contact Information

Scott County RISE Website: shakopee.org/scott-county-rise

CareerLift: A program of the Scott County workforce initiative

For questions or support, contact your local chamber of commerce or workforce development office.

Disclaimer

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Appendix A:

Scott County Demographic Data

This appendix provides detailed demographic information for Scott County to support your workforce planning and inclusive hiring strategies.

Population Overview

- 2024 Population: 157,206
- Growth 2020-2024: 6,278 (+4.2%)
- Median Age: 37.3 years
- County Ranking: 9th largest, 10th fastest growing in Minnesota

Race and Ethnicity

- White: 78.6%
- Black or African American: 5.2%
- Asian or Pacific Islander: 6.1%
- Hispanic or Latino: 6.2%
- Two or More Races: 6.6%

Educational Attainment (Age 25+)

- High School or Higher: 93.7%
- Associate's Degree or Higher: 61%
- Bachelor's Degree or Higher: 42%

Labor Force Statistics

- Available Workers: 90,354
- Unemployment Rate: 2.7%
- Labor Force Participation Rate: 75.3%
- Labor Force Growth (2020-2024): +15,405 (+20.6%)

Income Statistics

- Median Household Income: \$120,247
- Median Family Income: \$138,181
- Per Capita Income: \$53,499

Population Projections

- 2025 Projection: 159,790
- 2035 Projection: 176,504
- Expected Growth (2025-2035): 16,714 (+10.5%)

Appendix B:

Implementation Checklist

Step 1: Lay the Foundation

- Identify the opportunities
- Define your terminology
- Define your 'why'
- Define your mission and vision

Step 2: Gather Key Stakeholders

- Gather buy-in from the top
- Gather a cross-functional group of key stakeholders

Step 3: Conduct Internal Assessment

- Identify where you are as an organization
- Identify your opportunities for improvement
- Review demographics
- Document what you've accomplished in the DEI space

Step 4: Build Your Strategy and Implement

Identify opportunities within each best practice category:

- Overall Strategy
- Recruitment/Retention
- Community Engagement
- Supplier Diversity
- Workplace Programs
- Training/Education

Determine where you'd like to be:

- Short-term goals
- Long-term goals

Step 5: Hold Yourself Accountable

- Set goals
- Monitor progress
- Regularly assess how you're doing
- Be transparent
- Acknowledge your mistakes and use as opportunity to learn and grow
- Share opportunities for improvement

Appendix C:

Additional Resources

Scott County Resources

Scott County RISE: shakopee.org/scott-county-rise

Scott County Economic Development: scottcountymn.gov

Shakopee Chamber of Commerce: shakopee.org

Community Organizations

MI C.A.S.A. (Community, Support, Solidarity, Friendship)

Local Shakopee nonprofit providing cultural navigation, resources, support

Services available in English and Spanish

Community Resource Center

Website: communityresourcecmn.org

Healthcare, housing, career, education support

Workforce Development

CareerForce Shakopee: careerforce.mn.gov/shakopee

Southwest Metro Intermediate District 288: swmetro288.org

Adult education, ESL, GED preparation, family literacy

State Resources

Minnesota Chamber of Commerce: mnchamber.com

Minnesota Chamber Foundation DEI Resources: mnchamber.com/DEI

Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development: mn.gov/deed

Research and Reports

2026 Business Benchmarks Report (Minnesota Chamber of Commerce)

Minnesota 2030 Report (Minnesota Chamber Foundation)

Scott County Profile (DEED)

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Playbook (Minnesota Chamber Foundation)



Disclaimer

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