

# Lodging Workforce Study in Cass and Crow Wing Counties

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## Background and Purpose of Study

Tourism is a key industry in the Central Minnesota counties of Cass and Crow Wing, generating over \$350 million in gross sales and supporting more than 6,000 jobs (Explore Minnesota Tourism, 2018). In 2016, the two counties accounted for only 1.4 percent of employment in Minnesota, but had 8 percent of the state's accommodation jobs. Unfortunately, the tourism industry in Cass and Crow Wing counties has struggled to fill positions, and future demographic shifts point to continued workforce shortages.

The purpose of this study was to:

- Provide a qualitative view of the current and future workforce challenges facing the lodging sector in Cass and Crow Wing counties
- Examine regional and state models
- Provide ideas to empower local action for long-term sustainable strategies to maintain tourism as part of the region's economy



Explore Minnesota Tourism

## Findings: Challenges

Participants reported the following workforce challenges, most of which are not unique or isolated to the tourism industry.

- Nature of tourism employment within study context (seasonality, week-long stays, etc. impact recruitment and retention in competitive environment)
- Lodging businesses compete with other community industries for employees
- Increased employee expectations: pay, benefits, positions
- Limited labor force
- Perceived decline in soft skills
- Aging workforce
- Many youth have multiple responsibilities and/or jobs
- Identifying effective recruitment strategies
- Lack of transportation (public and personal)
- Lack of housing and/or high housing costs
- Government benefits and assistance programs are perceived as hindering employment
- Increased substance use regionally

**Resort &  
Campground**

## Findings: Strategies

Potential strategies include those that can be implemented by businesses, but others require collaboration within community.

- Encourage employee referrals
- Utilize social media to recruit employees
- Offer employees incentives to work the entire season
- Use testimonials from previous or current employees in recruitment materials
- Be flexible with employees' schedules and needs
- Get involved in the community and schools to help build awareness and connect with potential employees
- Explore new sources of employees (e.g., older adults, new residents, persons with disabilities, workcampers)
- Highlight skills and experiences students can gain from tourism employment
- Consider utilizing temporary nonimmigrant worker programs and/or summer work travel programs
- Partner with businesses that have complementary employment needs (e.g. opposite seasons)
- Collaborate with community partners to address broader shared challenges (e.g., housing, transportation)

## Methods

- Online survey sent to lodging businesses listed with Explore Minnesota Tourism (48 completed surveys)
- Follow-up interviews
- Interviews with 5 cold-climate states (Maine, Michigan, Montana, South Dakota, and Wisconsin)
- Community meetings

## References

Explore Minnesota Tourism. (2018). *Tourism and Minnesota's Economy*. Retrieved from <http://www.exploreminnesota.com/industry-minnesota/research-reports/facts-figures>

## Partners/Sponsors

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