Itasca Project introduction

What is Itasca?

An employer-led civic alliance focused on:

- Building a thriving economy and quality of life in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan region

- Reducing and eliminating socioeconomic disparities

Who is Itasca?

50-plus cross-sector community leaders from Minneapolis–Saint Paul:

- Private sector CEOs

- Public sector leaders include: the Governor, the Mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Chair of the Met Council, the leaders of the University of Minnesota and MnSCU and private colleges, county commissioners, etc.

- Leaders of major foundations (e.g., McKnight Foundation) and United Way

Itasca Project priorities

Generate high quality job growth

Itasca Project goals
- Raise economic competitiveness & quality of life
- Reduce & eliminate disparities

Improve our region's education system

Advance a comprehensive and aligned transportation system

The Itasca Project Approach

Why regional competitiveness?

Competition is intensifying
Competing with focused, well-organized regions that are deliberately driving their economic development and enhancing the livability of their communities

We need strong public and private leadership
Resolving complex issues (e.g., socioeconomic disparities) is beyond the scope and capabilities of any one group

Resources are finite
Public and private resources are limited and strained; Can maximize by acting regionally, working collaboratively, and focusing on the most critical needs of the region

How Itasca works

- Participants agree on priority issues that will address regional economic vitality and quality of life

- A CEO or team of CEOs takes the leadership on each issue and assembles a task force

- Task forces identify a unique role for Itasca and get things done, typically work in partnership with scores of organizations around the region

- Focus on the facts with support from McKinsey

- Operates as "virtual" organization – no physical presence, staff, or standing agenda

- Volunteer "working team" provides ongoing oversight and guidance

A set of principles guide selection of and approach to each initiative

Facts first. We invest the time and resources required to get the best shared fact base and to incorporate best practices prior to working on an issue.

Limited agenda. Participants agree on a limited number of priority issues that will address regional economic vitality and quality of life.

Unique contribution. We identify a unique role for Itasca to play. That varies by initiative, but usually focuses on accelerating change.

CEO commitment. We are driven by passion. Each initiative is led by a CEO who is personally dedicated to the initiative.

Collaboration is key. Itasca participants work in partnership with many organizations across the region to accomplish an identified goal. Our approach is non-partisan; we connect many perspectives and points of view to make meaningful progress.

Minimal structure. A small working team, including chairs, meets weekly. All participants have the opportunity to meet 4-6 times each year. Initiative task forces, composed of Itasca participants and members of the community, meet as needed according to the initiative work plan.

A brief history of Itasca Project initiatives (2004 – present)

Year initiated	Task force (leaders)	Impact
2004	▪ U of M - Business Relationships (Jim McNerney)	▪ Established "front door" to U of M and significantly improved commercialization effectiveness
2004	▪ Retain & grow leading businesses (Jon Campbell)	▪ Expanded reach and impact of Grow MN efforts (with MN Chamber), enabling more companies to expand in MN
2004	▪ Transportation (Jay Cowles, Charlie Zelle)	▪ Helped secure stable funding for transportation and transit through 2006 constitutional amendment and 2008 transportation bill
2005	▪ Early childhood development (Bob Bruininks, Al Strouken)	▪ Elevated importance of issue across the community; convened and aligned stakeholders to advance issue
2005	▪ Mind the Gap – Socioeconomic disparities (Lynn Casey, Mary Brainerd)	▪ Raised awareness of socioeconomic disparities and catalyzed action through report, Speakers Bureau, toolkit, *tpt* documentary, discussion guide, etc.
2007	▪ Financially Fit Minnesota (Brad Anderson)	▪ 30 employers worked together to increase employee savings and banking, and close gaps between employee groups
2007	▪ Minneapolis Public Schools Strategic Plan (Bruce Nicholson)	▪ Supported development of MPS Strategic Plan – putting district on stable path to improved performance
2008	▪ Minnesota's Future Initiative (Dick Pettingill, Chip Emery, Tom Tiller)	▪ Identified required reforms for MN to achieve world-class schools, focused on teacher quality, principal effectiveness, data
2009	▪ Job Growth (Ken Powell, Marilyn Carlson Nelson)	▪ Launched Greater MSP to attract, expand, and retain jobs; initiated business bridge to support growth of small companies
2011	▪ Higher Education (Greg Page)	▪ Task force to identify strategies for higher education system
2013	▪ Disparities (Brad Hewitt, Maykao Hang)	▪ Task force on what employers can do to close employment disparities

Why the name?

The Itasca Project takes its name from Itasca State Park. Local legend has it that in the 1950s and 60s, leading business people would congregate there in the summer, and would talk about how to make the region a better place.
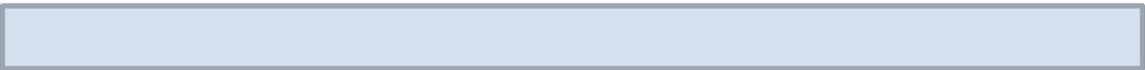

The park gets its name from Lake Itasca, headwaters of the Mississippi. Henry Schoolcraft, who verified the lake was the source of the Mississippi in 1832, made up the name from the Latin phrase *verITAS CAput,* "true head"

Itasca engages participants on many levels to move priorities forward

Working Team
- 10-12 volunteers drawn from full group

- Meets weekly
- Guides initiatives, explores areas for potential future involvement

Full Group
- All participants
- Are asked to contribute dues
- Invitation only
- May participate in taskforces

Q1: Full meeting
Tend to focus on 1-2 current initiatives

Q2: Set of small group meetings
Tend to focus on member-driven topics

Q3: Full meeting
Tend to focus on 1-2 current initiatives

Q4: Set of small group meetings
Tend to focus on upcoming priorities

Taskforce (when applicable)
- Members drawn from Itasca participants as well as experts, those suggested by participants, etc
- Tends to meet monthly for ~6-9 months

Ramp-up phase
- Definition of scope, desired solution
- Identification of chairs, other taskforce members
- Fact-gathering[1]

Active Taskforce Phase
- Problem-solving and discussion at monthly meetings

Ramp-down phase
- Codifying findings (e.g., writing report)
- Identification of long-term home for effort, if needed