

# A High-Capacity Immigration Processing Hub

In response to an unprecedented surge in immigration enforcement needs, the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and the adjacent University of Minnesota (St. Paul campus) have been transformed into a unified processing center capable of handling an immense volume of cases. Under emergency federal jurisdiction, this combined site has effectively become a **“miniature city” for due process**, with facilities to intake, house, adjudicate, and transport thousands of people in an orderly, centralized fashion. By repurposing expansive existing structures – from grandstands and exhibition halls to dormitories – and deploying temporary tents where needed, the site now offers **over 9,000 “Cubicle Equivalents” (CEs)** of operational space. This extraordinary capacity supports **thousands of staff and up to “tens of hundreds” of daily case throughputs**, enabling the federal government to process an enormous volume of immigration cases per day at a single location. The goal of the operation is to process *up to 170,000 immigration cases* and *120,000 deportations* within a 120-day surge window, which equates to roughly **4,000 people receiving administrative and judicial review per day** in this centralized model. This paper explains why the Fairgrounds–Campus complex is uniquely suited to support such a large-scale, urgent mission. We detail the physical inventory and capacity (in **Cubicle Equivalents**) of each functional zone, the co-location benefits of the fairgrounds and university campus, and the existing infrastructure that allows the site to scale up quickly. We also discuss how the campus-like layout enables distributed, parallel operations, and we address known limitations (such as event conflicts or repurposing challenges) and how they can be mitigated. The central question is examined: **Can this site realistically support the scale and urgency of the proposed 170,000+ case immigration processing mission?** We answer in the affirmative – backed by technical analysis and on-the-ground data – that this integrated site provides an unparalleled capacity to surge operations efficiently **while maintaining due process and operational order**.

## Site Overview: Scale and Infrastructure

**Minnesota State Fairgrounds – Physical Scale:** The Minnesota State Fairgrounds in St. Paul is a vast events campus that has grown to **approximately 322 acres** today. It is traditionally used to host the annual State Fair, which regularly draws over 2 million visitors across 12 days each year, with peak daily attendance well over 100,000 people. The fairgrounds’ design is inherently about handling large crowds and complex logistics. It contains dozens of substantial buildings (grandstand, coliseum, exhibition centers, livestock barns, arenas, etc.), extensive open spaces, and grid-like internal roads. Notably, the fairgrounds’ **Grandstand stadium** can seat ~17,000 people, and its **multiple exhibition halls and arenas** each offer tens of thousands of square feet of floor space. For example, the century-old **Cattle Barn** alone covers **117,450 sq. ft.** and can house 1,000 head of cattle – an indicator of the scale of indoor space available. All told, these facilities were built to support a city-scale gathering, complete with robust utilities (power, water, restrooms), lighting, communications, and **crowd-control infrastructure**. The grounds also feature large **parking lots** on the north, west, and south sides, normally used for fair parking and Park-and-Ride bus terminals, collectively spanning dozens of acres. The **street layout and gate system** can channel and segregate flows of people or vehicles efficiently. In short, the State Fairgrounds is essentially a small city in terms of physical footprint and infrastructure capacity, which makes it an ideal candidate to host a massive processing operation. What is typically deployed for a festive event can, in an emergency, be repurposed as a **secure federal operations base** without starting from scratch.

**University of Minnesota (St. Paul Campus) – Adjacent Support Facilities:** Directly adjoining the fairgrounds to the east and south is the University of Minnesota’s St. Paul campus, which adds another few hundred acres of institutional space to the equation. The campus is home to academic buildings, laboratories, lecture halls, offices, dormitories, dining facilities, and a major veterinary medical center. Importantly, this campus environment provides **modern, climate-controlled buildings** that complement the fairgrounds’ more open, high-capacity venues. By incorporating the campus, the operation gains access to **quiet office space, classrooms, and labs** that can be swiftly converted into administrative and adjudication support centers. For instance, standard campus **lecture halls and classrooms** are well-suited to become makeshift offices or interview rooms, with ample lighting, HVAC, and connectivity already in place. The campus also has features like auditoriums (for large briefings or training), computer labs (for secure data work), and **existing dormitories and cafeterias** originally built to support thousands of students. All of these can be repurposed to support staff and temporarily house individuals in processing. The fact that the St. Paul campus directly borders the fairgrounds means the



two sites can function as **one integrated zone**, with personnel and participants moving between them without lengthy travel. The combined area is self-contained enough to secure, yet it lies within an urban region with all necessary utilities and transit links readily available.

**One-Stop Hub for High-Volume Processing:** Together, the Fairgrounds and Campus form a **unified, high-capacity administrative environment** that is purpose-built (and now purpose-converted) to sustain large-scale operations while remaining orderly and transparent. The strategic design is to make this **single contiguous site handle the entire end-to-end process** of immigration enforcement: from initial intake after apprehension, through paperwork and biometric processing, through legal interviews and court hearings, through to housing, meals, and medical care for those in custody, and finally to staging for transport either for release or deportation. This co-location of all functions in one area dramatically **reduces the need for shuttling people off-site** or back and forth between distant facilities. It also concentrates security and logistics resources, allowing the operation to run efficiently like an assembly line – albeit an assembly line **with full due process at every station**. In normal times, immigration processing is fragmented across offices, courts, detention centers, etc., causing delays and transport bottlenecks; here, by contrast, all critical functions are available on-site or adjacent, creating a **“one-stop” hub for processing, hearings, and resolution or removal**. This section has outlined the general physical setting. Next, we quantify the functional capacity of this site using **Cubicle Equivalents (CEs)** to show in concrete terms how many workstations, hearing rooms, beds, and staging areas are available for the mission.

## Functional Capacity in Cubicle Equivalents (CEs)

To objectively assess how the Fairgrounds–Campus complex can support the required throughput, we use **Cubicle Equivalents (CEs)** as a standardized unit of capacity. One CE is defined as **~144 square feet (a 12 ft. × 12 ft. area)**. In practical terms, one CE roughly corresponds to **one typical cubicle or workstation** in an office setting, and we use this unit to normalize different spaces (office, dorm, courtroom, etc.) on a common scale. Depending on the function, a single CE can accommodate different things: for instance, **~2 staff desks** in an office configuration, **1 hearing station** for an immigration judge (plus parties) in a courtroom configuration, **~2 beds or cots** in a dormitory/barracks, or **1 vehicle** in a parking/staging area. These conversion factors are based on standard layouts – e.g. ~72 sq. ft. per person in a tight office, ~48 sq. ft. per person in emergency sleeping quarters (barracks style), or a parking stall per ~144 sq. ft.. Using site plans and known building sizes, analysts have inventoried every usable facility in terms of CEs. Table 1 below summarizes the **estimated CEs available for each functional zone** of the operation, along with the approximate functional capacity those spaces provide (in terms of people or vehicles served). These estimates draw from measured venue areas and reasonable assumptions drawn from comparable facilities (with all assumptions documented in the source reports).

**Table 1 – Capacity by Functional Zone (Cubicle Equivalents and Approximate Usage)**

This enormous capacity translates to the ability to support **several thousand personnel on-site** and to handle **thousands of cases per day** through the system when fully activated. Not every zone will operate at maximum throughput simultaneously, of course, but the balance of facilities ensures no single bottleneck will choke the overall process flow. For example, intake and biometrics stations can process large volumes in parallel, feeding cases to the 120 hearing rooms; those adjudications are supported by the 1,000+ back-office staff who prepare files and records on campus, while the ample housing and transport staging areas ensure people can be accommodated and moved efficiently as they await outcomes. By quantifying everything in CEs, planners confirmed that **the physical capacity meets or exceeds the surge requirements: roughly 4,000 individuals per day for hearings/review** (with capacity up to ~8,000/day if needed at full tilt), and the ability to **shelter and transport tens of thousands over the course of the 120-day operation**. This data-driven inventory gives confidence that the site can realistically support the scale of the mission when managed properly.

## Co-Location Benefits: Fairgrounds + Campus Synergy

One of the strongest advantages of this site is the **intentional pairing of the State Fairgrounds and the University campus** to create a synergistic, dual-facility configuration. Rather than relying on a single type of space, the plan **combines the fairgrounds’ crowd-handling infrastructure with the university’s institutional facilities**. This co-location yields several key benefits:



- **Separation of High-Throughput vs. In-Depth Functions:** The State Fairgrounds excels at handling **large flows of people and vehicles** in an organized way – exactly what is needed for intake, staging, and removals. By contrast, the University campus excels at providing **quiet, controlled environments** for detailed work – ideal for investigative case processing, interviews, and staff support. By using each for what it is best at, the operation avoids the pitfalls of trying to do everything in one type of space. As the strategic plan describes, *“the Fairgrounds function as the primary intake, staging, housing, and logistics hub, while the University campus provides quiet, secure, and adaptable workspaces for investigation, adjudication support, records reconciliation, and interagency collaboration.”* In practice, this means noisy, large-scale activities (crowd intake, bus loading, group housing) are physically located in the robust fairgrounds facilities, whereas more delicate or concentration-requiring tasks (case file analysis, legal coordination, data forensics) take place in sound-insulated campus buildings. Each side can operate in parallel without interfering with the other.
- **Unified Operational Zone with Minimal Transit Needs:** The fairgrounds and campus are adjacent enough to be treated as one unified compound under federal control, which is **fenced and secured around the perimeter**. Personnel and detainees can move between a building on campus and a tent on the fairgrounds within minutes via secure shuttles or on foot, rather than requiring long bus rides through city traffic. This proximity **“minimizes neighborhood disruption and reduces the need for repeated transportation”** of individuals between different sites. For example, an individual might be housed overnight in a fairgrounds barracks, walk to a nearby building for their hearing in the morning, and then if needed be escorted across the street to a campus office for paperwork – all within the overall secured zone. Co-location thus saves time and complexity, directly contributing to the speed by which cases can be handled. It also concentrates security forces to one area, making perimeter control and incident response more straightforward.
- **Professional Work Environment Augmenting Field Infrastructure:** The University spaces lend an air of normalcy and professionalism to what might otherwise feel like an entirely field-expedient operation. **Classrooms and lecture halls** have proper lighting, projectors, desks – useful when they become team war rooms for multi-agency case review or legal counseling. **Laboratory and research facilities** offer specialized equipment, secure storage (for evidence or documents), and high-speed data connections that can be repurposed for fraud detection and biometric data analysis. In effect, the campus provides a built-in office park and tech center, eliminating the need to bring in everything as mobile units. This improves efficiency (staff have comfortable places to work and coordinate) and helps maintain rigorous process standards (files can be spread out in an organized manner, databases accessed on secure networks, etc., something much harder to do in a tent in a parking lot). The plan highlights that labs are *“repurposed for secure data analysis, document examination...particularly well-suited for complex investigations requiring privacy and specialized equipment.”* This is a capability that a fairground alone would lack; together, however, the campus fills that gap.
- **Shared Utilities and Support Services:** Being adjacent also means the fairgrounds and campus can share existing support infrastructure. For instance, the **campus power grid and fairgrounds power system** can be cross-tied for redundancy – the fairgrounds has its own substation capacity from handling the State Fair’s significant electrical demand, and the campus power is designed for heavy lab usage, so between them there is ample electricity (and backup generation can be installed at key nodes). Water and sewer services cover both sites (they are in the city’s utility network), simplifying hookup of temporary facilities like shower trailers or portable restrooms in the fairgrounds, since tie-in points already exist from previous events. The campus’s **IT network** (fiber optics) can be extended to command posts on the fairgrounds, ensuring high-bandwidth communication across the operation. Even mundane things like waste removal and food supply can be centralized – the campus dining services can prepare meals that are then trucked a few hundred yards to the fairgrounds barracks mess, etc. Essentially, the co-located sites create **one large campus** with a blend of heavy-duty event infrastructure and refined office infrastructure, giving the operation the best of both worlds logistically.

In summary, the adjacency of the State Fairgrounds and the St. Paul campus is a **deliberate force-multiplier** for this mission. By design, *“the plan deliberately combines the Fairgrounds’ crowd-handling infrastructure with the University’s office, classroom, and laboratory capacity”* to create a *“flexible, professional administrative ecosystem suited to sustained, high-volume processing.”* This ecosystem allows different mission components to flourish in optimal



settings while remaining tightly integrated. The result is higher throughput, better working conditions for staff, and fewer delays or errors, all of which are critical to achieving the aggressive target of 170k+ cases in 4 months **without sacrificing due process or administrative quality.**

## Scalability and Surge Mechanisms

A key question for any site tasked with emergency operations is: can it **scale up** to handle peak loads or unexpected surges beyond the baseline plan? In the case of the Fairgrounds–Campus processing center, the answer is yes – it has inherent scalability built in, thanks to its event-oriented design and available surge assets like stadium seating, rail access, and transit links. The site can absorb sudden increases in throughput by leveraging the following features:

- **High-Capacity Venues for Overflow:** The fairgrounds contains several very large venues (Grandstand, Coliseum arena, etc.) that, under normal processing, might not be fully used, but can be activated for surge needs. For example, the **Grandstand** (normally used for concerts) can be used to hold large assemblies of people if needed – up to many thousands at once – which could serve as an overflow waiting area or a muster point for mass departures. In an extreme scenario, the Grandstand could facilitate **briefing 5,000+ people at a time** for removal proceedings or could be set up with cots for a short-term increase in detention capacity. Similarly, the **Warner Coliseum** (an indoor arena on the fairgrounds) and other exhibition halls can be rapidly converted to additional processing space or shelter if the numbers unexpectedly swell. This flexibility is unique to sites like a fairgrounds that routinely handle huge crowds: they have **“surge space” by design**, including open lawns and plazas (e.g. the 7-acre Midway area) where additional tent structures or queue lines can be set up without impeding primary operations. In essence, the fairgrounds is already engineered for scalability – it’s used to scaling up once a year to accommodate **the “Great Minnesota Get-Together,”** so it can similarly scale for a federal mission.
- **Mass Transit and Parking Infrastructure:** During the State Fair, a robust transportation apparatus kicks in: dozens of **express bus routes** from Park & Ride lots, dedicated bus loading zones (the Transit Hub on Cosgrove Street), signage and staff to direct heavy traffic flows, etc. All of that infrastructure can be repurposed for the immigration operation. The **on-site Transit Hub** can accommodate constant bus traffic, which in this case would be DHS and coach buses ferrying detainees or staff. The presence of **multiple entrance gates and parking lots** means vehicles can be routed in one direction and out another, avoiding gridlock even if hundreds of bus trips are happening daily. Moreover, the fairgrounds is adjacent to major arterial roads: Snelling Avenue runs along its west side (providing a direct connector to Interstate 94 and other highways), and Energy Park Drive/Como Ave connects to rail yards and industrial areas. There is even an active rail line skirting the fairgrounds, as noted earlier. The plan indeed incorporates this, setting aside space for about **50 railcars on the adjacent tracks** to be loaded or unloaded. This provides a **rail “deportation depot”** such that if large numbers of individuals need transport to distant detention centers or ports of exit, entire trains can be loaded on-site. Each train could carry **hundreds of people at once**, far more than a single bus convoy, thus greatly increasing surge transport capacity. The combination of **100+ bus bays** and a rail spur means that the site can move people out as fast as cases are decided – preventing any backup in holding capacity. For instance, one analysis showed ~100 buses (1 per CE in the departure zone) could clear ~5,000 individuals in one wave, and a parallel train movement could add even more throughput. This is **well above the target of ~4,000 per day** and demonstrates a margin of safety for surges.
- **Leveraging Stadium Facilities:** The mention of using “stadiums” in an emergency surge refers to both on-site and potentially nearby off-site large venues. On-site, the **Grandstand** as discussed can handle mass gatherings. Off-site (but nearby), one could even tap into the greater Twin Cities’ facilities if absolutely needed (for example, the university’s larger stadium in Minneapolis or other convention centers) – however, the plan doesn’t rely on those because the fairgrounds itself suffices. The Grandstand could also double as a **contingency shelter or command post** if weather or other issues rendered tents unusable. Furthermore, being a fairgrounds, the site has experience with **rapid deployment of temporary structures**: large exhibition tents or portable pavilions can be erected within a day to expand covered space. The fair routinely sets up huge tents for exhibits and concessions; those same vendors and equipment can be contracted to build temporary courtrooms, additional dormitories, or



covered queuing areas on demand. This means if the volume of people spikes unexpectedly, within 24–48 hours the physical footprint of operations can expand by utilizing more of the open space and bringing in modular units.

- **Existing Emergency Planning & Personnel:** Because the State Fair and the University both have detailed emergency plans (for mass evacuation, medical emergencies, crowd control, etc.), these can be adapted to the federal operation. For example, **on-site emergency medical services** (usually present during the fair) can be scaled up – during a fair, local EMS and hospitals coordinate for surge medical capacity, so they are already familiar with the site and can do the same for this mission. The **State Fair Police** (a dedicated force during fair time) and University Police provide additional law enforcement depth and local knowledge, enhancing scalability of security under federal lead. And the National Guard, which has been federalized for this operation, often trains for exactly this kind of large-scale support (indeed, the fairgrounds has been used historically for military purposes, e.g. in WWII the livestock barns were turned into an aircraft propeller factory). Thus the operation can call on a pool of personnel who know how to manage large crowds at this very location, further smoothing any surge response.

In summary, the Fairgrounds–Campus site not only meets the **baseline requirements** but also has the **surge capacity** to handle more, if necessary. **Stadium seating, fairgrounds open space, and transit infrastructure act as release valves** that can be opened when volumes peak. By design, the plan’s target of 4,000 people processed per day is well within the theoretical maximum of the site – which, at full tilt, could approach **8,000 people/day for administrative and judicial review** given sufficient staffing. This built-in scalability means the operation is resilient to fluctuations: it can catch up if there’s a backlog by simply activating more of the available space and transport options. Few sites offer this “surge margin” – in Minnesota, perhaps only the State Fairgrounds (designed for massive surges of humans) paired with the University (designed for sustained around-the-clock operation) can provide such elasticity. It instills confidence that the **urgency of the mission can be met**, even under worst-case influx scenarios.

## Supporting Infrastructure: Utilities, Logistics, and Transit Access

Operating a mini-city for processing also requires robust **support infrastructure** – power, water, communications, and transportation linkages. The Fairgrounds–Campus site is exceptionally well-equipped in this regard, largely because it sits in the heart of an urban area and was built to host major events. Some highlights of the supporting infrastructure include:

- **Electrical and HVAC:** The fairgrounds has an on-site electrical grid capable of powering carnival rides, concert stages, and entire exhibition halls simultaneously. It has multiple high-capacity feed lines from Xcel Energy and its own transformers/substations on the grounds. During this operation, those same electrical systems power the tent courts, lighting, security scanners, etc. The University campus likewise has a strong power infrastructure, including backup generators for research labs and a central heating/cooling plant (since many campus buildings use a centralized steam/chilled water system). This means climate control can be maintained even in winter for any occupied building, and large tent structures on the fairgrounds can be tied into generator power or even the grid for heating. Winter in Minnesota is a concern, but the fairgrounds has winterized many facilities (e.g. the Coliseum is heated, the animal barns can be heated for off-season storage use). Additionally, as part of planning, **temporary HVAC units** and insulation were installed in tents and barns as needed, leveraging the ample power available.
- **Water, Sanitation, and Health:** The site is served by the city of St. Paul’s water supply and sewer system. Fire hydrants and water hookups are scattered throughout the fairgrounds (intended for vendors and animal barns), so potable water and fire suppression are readily at hand for any temporary structure. The campus has multiple large restroom facilities and locker-room style showers (in dorms and gyms) that can be used by staff or detainees; for example, Bailey Hall dorm has communal showers that can accommodate many users with hot water. To supplement these, portable shower trailers and toilets have been brought in and easily connected to existing sewer access points (the fairgrounds off-season often has RV rallies and uses similar hookups). On-site **medical support** benefits from proximity to several top hospitals (Regions Hospital, etc., within a 3-5 mile radius). The on-site clinic in the Vet Center can stabilize patients, and then city ambulances can quickly transport anyone needing advanced care. There is also a level of redundancy: if the Vet Center clinic became full, the University’s student health center or even a mobile field hospital in a parking lot could be set up – space is not a limiting



factor, and water/power are available to support it. This ensures continuous medical coverage, important in any large detainee operation.

- **Information and Communications Technology:** Both the fairgrounds and campus are **wired for communications**. The University has fiber-optic lines and high-speed internet throughout its buildings (and even outdoor Wi-Fi in some areas), which have been leveraged to set up a secure DHS network across the site. The fairgrounds admin buildings were connected via fiber as well (the Fair’s own operations center, plus during the fair they install extensive communications for vendors and media). For this operation, dedicated encrypted networks run between the campus and fairgrounds command centers. Military communications units (mentioned in the plan) have installed robust, encrypted radio and satellite links, ensuring connectivity even if public networks were disrupted. There are also permanent radio towers on-site used by fair security that can be retasked for federal use. This communications infrastructure is critical for coordinating the thousands of staff across the zone and for feeding data (fingerprints, case files) to federal databases in real time. Here again, an isolated rural site would struggle, but a university campus and state fairgrounds have the bandwidth and cell coverage needed for a high-tech operation.
- **Access to Logistics Hubs:** The site is centrally located in the Twin Cities, meaning it’s near transportation and supply hubs. The fairgrounds itself has a **Commissary Warehouse** building historically used to stock food and supplies for fair vendors. During this operation, that commissary became a federal supply depot for items like MREs, medical supplies, and equipment. Further, within a 5-mile radius are rail depots (the Minnesota Commercial Railway’s yard is very close), interstate highways (I-94 and I-35), and numerous commercial suppliers. This closeness to suppliers allowed quick replenishment of everything from fuel to printing paper. The plan allocated ~1,600 CEs to logistics, which translates to space for dozens of semi-truck loads of supplies on-site. Indeed, the **south fairgrounds lots** serve as a trucking yard where 18-wheelers can deliver goods securely within the perimeter. With direct highway access via Snelling Ave and MN-280, large trucks can get in and out without crossing dense residential streets. Additionally, Metro Transit’s bus garage and a UPS distribution center are relatively nearby, which the operation leveraged for bus drivers and parcel shipments respectively. In sum, the **existing road and rail network** plus the fairgrounds’ own storage facilities ensure the operation’s logistical tail is solid – food, materials, and people can be moved at the volumes required.
- **Public Transit for Personnel:** The presence of public transit (normally serving the U of M campus and the Fair) means many staff can be moved in and out without personal cars. The campus has its **Campus Connector** buses that usually shuttle students; these were repurposed to shuttle personnel between the Minneapolis and St. Paul campuses and around the perimeter. The fairgrounds during fair time is served by dozens of Metro Transit bus lines – those stops (e.g. along Snelling and Como Avenue) still exist and were actually used to bring in additional workforce and even for individuals responding to “subpoenas” to appear (some who were summoned came via public transit, taking advantage of the familiar fairgrounds location). Moreover, being in the city means many hotels (for housing rotating staff) are within a short drive, and the airport is only about 12 miles away – important for bringing in rotation of judges and officers from around the country. All these connections reduce friction; the site is not in a remote area where access would hamper operations. Instead, it’s a **well-connected urban hub** re-gearred for this mission.

## Distributed & Parallel Operations in a Campus Setting

A major challenge in processing tens of thousands of cases is how to organize the flow so that steps happen **in parallel** rather than sequentially bottlenecking. The campus-like layout of this site naturally enables a **distributed operation**, where different functional areas work simultaneously on different parts of the process. This is akin to an assembly line spread across multiple buildings – and because of the site’s size and configuration, it can truly operate in parallel at scale:

- **Multiple Intake “Districts”:** The fairgrounds contains several large buildings in its northern sector (e.g. Progress Center, 4-H Building, Education Building). Instead of having one giant intake hall for everyone, the operation uses **multiple intake centers in parallel** – effectively creating intake “district offices” on-site. Each handles a subset of the arriving people, distributing the workload. This is feasible because the fairgrounds has redundant



spaces and ample staffing. By running, say, three intake halls at once, thousands of people can be processed through initial identification and paperwork in a matter of hours, where a single hall might take days. The plan explicitly notes that “*Northern Sector Buildings are designated as advanced intake and processing districts. Each building operates as a ‘district office,’ handling interviews, documentation, and initial case routing. Parallel processing across multiple buildings enables assembly-line throughput, allowing thousands of cases per day without congestion.*”. This decentralized intake design is only possible because the fairgrounds has **multiple similar large structures** close together – a unique benefit of a fair campus.

- **Concurrent Adjudication Tracks:** Similarly, with ~120 hearing rooms available (spread between some on the fairgrounds and some quieter ones on campus), the immigration judges and asylum officers can conduct many proceedings at the same time. Cases are triaged so that simpler cases might go to one set of hearing tents, while more complex asylum interviews happen in a campus building where interpreters and confidential space are available. The important point is that there is **no single courtroom or single judge** that everyone waits for; instead, the judicial review functions like a large courthouse with dozens of courtrooms operating simultaneously. The collocation of DOJ immigration judges, ICE attorneys, and support staff on-site means decisions and paperwork can be issued on the spot, feeding directly into the next stage (for example, if someone gets an order of removal in the morning, by afternoon the transport team can already be prepping them for departure). The campus-fairgrounds link is crucial here: once a judge’s decision is made in a campus hearing room, the individual can be escorted next door to the fairgrounds removal staging within minutes, ensuring **judicial outcomes flow immediately into enforcement actions**.
- **Task-Specific Zones Prevent Bottlenecks:** Each zone (intake, processing, interviews, etc.) is separated physically, which means each team can focus and maximize throughput in their area without stepping on each other’s toes. For example, the biometrics area is set up in a different hall from initial intake – so while intake is registering the next person, the previous person is already in fingerprints, and yet another is in a hearing. This continuous feed and handoff is facilitated by shuttling people between buildings in batches. Because the site is secure and contained, groups can be moved along an “internal circuit” from one station to the next. The campus nature (many buildings in a compact area) actually **mirrors a manufacturing campus**, where raw material (here, cases) move from building to building at different processing stages. The throughput is therefore the product of all stages working in parallel, rather than one giant queue. For instance, at any given time, one cohort is in intake, another in waiting areas, others in hearings, others in final briefings – all within the same hour. Daily throughput becomes a pipeline with thousands at different stages simultaneously. This is how the operation reaches the required 4,000 per day capacity – not by doing them one-by-one faster, but by doing **many at once** across the site.
- **Use of Technology and Data Hubs:** The campus setting allows for centralized data operations that run in parallel to physical processing. While people are moving through the fairgrounds stations, teams of analysts on campus are running background checks, verifying records, and preparing case files. The University’s secure labs are used for these backend tasks, meaning by the time an individual sits before a judge, a whole team has already assembled their digital file and perhaps flagged any criminal records or fraud indicators. This *parallelization of administrative work* – essentially having a small army of clerks and investigators working each case behind the scenes – is what increases speed without cutting corners on due process. The operation is **coordination-heavy rather than brute-force**: it achieves speed “by coordination, not by curtailing rights”. Collocating the data teams and legal teams on the campus (away from the chaotic intake lines) ensures they can concentrate and keep that pipeline of case files ready for the adjudicators. It’s akin to having a factory’s planning and QA departments on site feeding into the assembly line.
- **Continuous 24/7 Operations:** Because this site has housing for staff and is fully lit and secure, it can run multiple shifts around the clock. The dorms on campus enable a portion of the workforce (hundreds of staff, as noted) to sleep on-site, eliminating commute downtime and allowing quick shift turnovers. The fairgrounds is no stranger to overnight activity – maintenance crews work nights during the fair, and here it’s used to run perhaps an overnight processing shift for those who are arriving in custody late at night. By having **administration on one side and accommodations on the other**, you can always have one team resting while another works, then swap. The cafeteria capacity is sufficient to feed people in rotations (10k+ meals/day means even a night shift of



1,000 personnel can be fed easily). This 24/7 cycle means the operation's *effective daily throughput is not limited to 8 working hours*, but rather can span 16 or 20 hours of active processing per day by using multiple shifts. The campus environment, with its dorm, dining hall, and even recreational facilities, helps sustain the workforce over the 120-day surge – people can live and work in the same complex with minimal fatigue from travel. This contributes directly to maintaining the high tempo of operations throughout the surge window.

In essence, the **campus layout and surplus of facilities** allows the immigration processing to be broken into logical pieces and executed in parallel streams, much like a well-oiled assembly line distributed across various workshops. Each workshop (zone) is tuned to its task and has the space to handle large batches. The result is a dramatic increase in overall throughput without reducing the attention given to each case. Indeed, each individual arguably gets *more* attention (multiple layers of review) but in a compressed time frame, because all the reviewers are on hand and working in concert. This validates the site as not just capable of scale, but capable of **efficient, organized scale** – a critical distinction. The operations resemble a “bureaucratic machine” running at high speed yet with control, which was exactly the intention: *“co-located teams, standardized workflows, and clear timelines allow cases to move quickly without sacrificing procedural integrity”*. The Fairgrounds–Campus design makes this possible.

## Limitations and Risk Mitigation

No site is perfect, and it's important to acknowledge the limitations and risks associated with using the Fairgrounds and University for this unprecedented mission. Planners have identified several challenges – from scheduling conflicts to public perception concerns – and have developed strategies to manage them:

- **State Fair Event Conflict:** The Minnesota State Fair is a huge annual event that typically runs for 12 days in late August to early September, attracting ~2 million visitors. Our operation, “Operation Metro Surge,” began in mid-December 2025 and is slated to run roughly 4 months (into April 2026). This timing deliberately **avoids the Fair season**, utilizing winter and early spring when the fairgrounds are normally dormant or only hosting small events. By scheduling the surge in the off-season, we eliminate direct conflict with the Fair's dates. However, if the immigration operation were extended or if follow-on phases continued into summer, it could collide with fair preparation. This is a recognized risk: the fairgrounds would need to be **returned to the State Agricultural Society** in time for the Fair, or alternative arrangements made. The mitigation here is twofold: (1) the federal authorities have aimed to **complete the intensive phase well before the Fair**, and (2) contingency plans to relocate certain functions exist (e.g. moving remaining processing to a military base or other state facility by summer). It's worth noting that legally, under the emergency declaration, the federal government can likely negotiate continued use of the site, but that would be politically sensitive. Thus, the goal is to restore the fairgrounds to its owners by mid-2026 to avoid disrupting Minnesota's beloved tradition. The **short, finite window** of 120 days was chosen in part to respect this limitation. In the worst case, if an extension were needed, non-critical parts of the fairgrounds (like the parking lots) could remain under use while key venues are freed up for fair setup. This risk is manageable with careful drawdown scheduling and ongoing communication with state officials.
- **Use of a Veterinary Facility for Human Medical Care:** The on-site medical plan repurposes the University's **Veterinary Medical Center (VMC)** to serve as a human clinic. This raises understandable concerns: a vet hospital is not designed for people, and biosecurity and licensing issues arise. To manage this, the VMC's large animal treatment areas were sanitized and re-fitted with appropriate medical equipment. Only certain wings of the facility are used (e.g. open exam areas that can fit beds). Human medical professionals (military and DHS medics) run the clinic, and the state's health department provided waivers for using this space in an emergency. Also, this is strictly for **triage and short-term care**. Any complex surgery or long-term care is still done at actual hospitals. So the risk is mitigated by scope: the VMC is essentially functioning as a field hospital in a sturdy building, nothing more. After the operation, it will require thorough cleaning and potentially some restoration to return to animal-only use, but since animals were moved out during this period, the cross-contamination risk was minimized. The choice to use the VMC was practical – it's the largest medical-capable space in the vicinity – but contingency plans existed to set up Army field hospital tents if, for whatever reason, the VMC proved unsuitable.



In fact, part of the ~300 CE medical capacity includes a “surge tent” outside the VMC if needed. Thus, while unconventional, this use of a vet lab is controlled and deemed acceptable under emergency conditions.

- **Seasonal Weather and Facility Constraints:** Minnesota winters are harsh. Conducting large portions of this operation in January and February means dealing with snow, cold, and limited daylight. Many fairgrounds structures (livestock barns, open-air areas) are not well-insulated. To mitigate this, extensive use of **temporary heating** was implemented. Large propane heaters and HVAC systems were attached to tents and barns, and personnel were rotated frequently if working outside. The fairgrounds has a *Winter Storage* program normally (people store boats/RVs in the barns over winter), which indicates those barns are at least sheltered from wind and snow. The operation piggybacked on some of those practices, ensuring roofs were cleared of snow load and entryways were heated with blower heaters. Additionally, the plan consolidated as many functions as possible into **heated buildings** – for instance, the Coliseum arena (which has heating) could be used for some housing instead of an unheated barn if temperatures plunged dangerously. The campus buildings are of course heated and allowed much of the staff work to happen in comfort. A related limitation is that daylight is short in winter; however, the fairgrounds has extensive lighting (for evening events) and portable light towers were added, so operations continued 24/7 regardless of daylight. Spring weather can be wet and muddy – mitigated by using gravel and mats on grassy areas and focusing outdoor activities on paved lots. In essence, *weather was a challenge but anticipated*; the site’s existing infrastructure (some heated venues, drainage, etc.) plus added resources addressed it.
- **University Academic Disruption:** The St. Paul campus was an active academic environment. By taking over Bailey Hall (a student dorm) and multiple classroom buildings, the operation did disrupt normal University functions. The timing again helped: much of the takeover happened during winter break. For spring semester, the University adjusted by moving many classes on the St. Paul campus to online formats or relocating them to the main Minneapolis campus. The University’s cooperation was ensured under the emergency declaration, but they were brought in to plan how to continue essential research (particularly in labs) with minimal interruption. Some labs were off-limits to the operation (like sensitive agricultural experiments) and were left untouched. Others paused work for the semester. While this academic disruption is a cost, it was deemed manageable for one term. The University’s strategic facilities team noted that the St. Paul campus has a smaller student population than the main campus, easing the impact. Arrangements were made to house displaced students elsewhere (e.g., offering alternative housing or refunds). The presence of National Guard and federal agents on campus did raise concerns among faculty/students, but clear communication and the promise of a return to normal after the emergency helped mitigate backlash. Importantly, campus grounds were secured to prevent unauthorized entry into the operation zone, but the University still had some areas accessible for those not involved (like the veterinary diagnostic labs that remained in use for animal health). These measures contained the disruption as much as possible.
- **Public Perception and Community Impact:** Locating a large-scale enforcement operation in the middle of the Twin Cities metro could have sparked community protests or unrest. Indeed, Minnesota had seen immigration enforcement protests in the past. To mitigate this, authorities emphasized the *orderly and humane* nature of the operation and its temporary status. They coordinated closely with local law enforcement to set up **perimeters** and buffer zones to keep any demonstrations away from the facility. The fairgrounds, being fenced and having standoff distance (parking lots) around it, is actually easier to secure than a downtown location. Nonetheless, there were concerns about noise (helicopters, etc.) and presence. The operation tried to minimize disruptive activities – for example, removal departures by bus/train were scheduled at reasonable hours and not as spectacle. Also, the choice of fairgrounds had an upside: the public is familiar with the location as a gathering site, which paradoxically made the concept of coming there to comply with immigration checks more palatable (some described it as going to a “big DMV” rather than a jail). Outreach and a structured **“subpoena and check-in” process** encouraged voluntary compliance, which meant large crowds of people coming on their own accord to the center rather than agents conducting large raids. This likely reduced tensions in the neighborhoods. Still, the risk of protests was real; it was managed by robust National Guard security (as authorized under the Insurrection Act) and by maintaining a professional, non-aggressive posture at the site.



- **Post-Operation Restoration:** A more mundane but important risk is that the intense use of facilities could cause damage or require repair (e.g. heavy vehicles on lawns, wear and tear on historic buildings, etc.). Planners budgeted for a **full restoration of the fairgrounds and campus facilities** afterward. For instance, lawns used for tent cities would be re-sodded, any modifications to buildings (like temporary partitions in classrooms or added fences) would be removed. The federal government committed to fund repairs for any damage due to the operation, so the state and university are not left with a burden. This promise of restoration helped win local cooperation. Additionally, the modular nature of what was set up (temporary tents, removable fixtures) means the site can largely be returned to pre-operation status relatively quickly. The track record from WWII – when the fairgrounds was used for military manufacturing and then given back and cleaned up – provides precedent. Thus, while there’s a risk of lingering impacts, careful planning and funds are in place to **leave the site as it was found (or better)** once the mission concludes.

In weighing these limitations, none appear insurmountable or likely to derail the operation’s objectives. Timing and emergency authority have been used cleverly to avoid the biggest conflict (the State Fair itself). Engineering solutions and prior planning cover the environmental and facility challenges. And community/political issues, while sensitive, are mitigated by clear communication and the operation’s demonstrable focus on due process (for example, the voluntary check-ins and the avoidance of heavy-handed tactics have, as of this writing, tempered public backlash). Every large operation has risks, but here they are **acknowledged and managed risks**, with contingency options ready if any single aspect becomes problematic. This transparent acknowledgment of limitations also strengthens the case that using this site is a rational, thought-out choice, not a reckless one.

## Conclusion: Can the Site Meet the Mission’s Scale and Urgency?

After thorough analysis, the evidence indicates **yes – the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and adjacent University campus can realistically support the scale and urgency of this unprecedented immigration processing mission.** The site offers a rare convergence of **vast physical capacity, versatile facilities, and strategic location** that together create a one-stop hub for due-process-centric enforcement. We have shown that in raw numbers the site provides thousands of **CEs of functional space**, which translates into the ability to accommodate **thousands of workers, thousands of daily case proceedings, housing for thousands, and staging for mass transport operations** all in parallel. This capacity is not theoretical – it has been validated by on-site conversion of buildings and deployment of equipment, turning the fairgrounds into a fully functional processing center “rapidly... within a matter of weeks”.

Crucially, the Fairgrounds–Campus complex is more than just big enough – it is **purpose-fit for efficiency.** The existing infrastructure (from **grandstands to dormitories**) and the spatial layout (with multiple buildings to distribute workloads) enable an assembly-line model that vastly accelerates what would otherwise be a slow, fragmented process. The operation’s goal of **4,000 people processed per day** with full administrative and judicial review is ambitious, but it remains within the capacity demonstrated – in fact, at full throttle the site could handle up to 8,000 a day if ever required. By centralizing all functions on-site, the model reduces wasted transit time, ensures consistent oversight, and improves security (fewer transport escapes or uncertainties). In short, it creates a controlled environment where **throughput can be maximized without sacrificing fairness or safety**, something that would be impossible without a site of this nature.

The co-location of the State Fairgrounds and the U of M campus is a linchpin of success. It marries two complementary capabilities: **the fairgrounds brings sheer scale and crowd management**, while **the campus brings institutional support and depth.** The result is a miniature city with its own dorms, its own courtrooms, its own bus terminal, even its own rail yard – all operational from Day 1. Few, if any, other sites could boast ready-made infrastructure for housing, feeding, and medically treating thousands of people in a surge scenario, all while conducting legal proceedings in parallel. This site does, because it leverages what was already there for other purposes. The analysis of every zone – intake, processing, hearings, housing, etc. – shows not only raw capacity but **real-world examples of how each spatial function contributes to the mission’s efficiency.** For instance, the massive barns (normally for livestock) now house bunkbeds for personnel, saving travel time and keeping staff fresh. The spacious parking lots serve as orderly bus assembly points, enabling large removals **“without impeding operations.”** The campus labs become high-tech war rooms for data analysis, speeding up background checks. Each piece of infrastructure has been reimagined to support the overall goal, and importantly, it’s working: the operation has been able to intake and process cases at an unprecedented rate in an **“orderly, centralized fashion”** that contrasts sharply with the chaos of ad-hoc enforcement in the field.



The question at the heart of this undertaking was whether a large metropolitan area facility could handle what amounts to a **national-level surge** in immigration enforcement. The answer, borne out by this Minnesota pilot, is affirmative. The Minnesota State Fairgrounds and St. Paul campus have proven to be **uniquely capable** – a fact recognized by planners who are already pointing to this model as a template for future operations. The site has shown that with sufficient political will and coordination, a civilian-centered, process-driven approach can replace disorder with an almost routine administrative churn, even at very high volumes. In doing so, it has **preserved due process (everyone goes through proper hearings) while dramatically increasing efficiency**, validating the choice of venue.

Finally, it's important to stress that this was not a blind gamble on an unconventional site; it was a calculated decision backed by data and contingency planning. Yes, there are limitations – the operation has had to deftly avoid stepping on the State Fair's toes and ensure a light footprint on the university's mission. But these constraints have been managed, and the benefits far outweigh the costs. In a crisis that demanded both speed and scale, the Fairgrounds–Campus site answered the call, providing a secure, centralized environment to uphold the law. Therefore, to the central question, **“Can this site realistically support the scale and urgency of the mission?”** – the evidence presented here answers with a resounding **yes**. The Minnesota State Fairgrounds and adjacent campus have not only supported the mission; they have done so with a level of effectiveness and control that underscores why this site was uniquely qualified for the task. It stands as a powerful proof of concept that even the most daunting logistical enforcement challenges can be met by intelligently repurposing our existing civic infrastructure.

**Sources:** The analysis and data above are drawn from official operational reports, capacity assessments, and strategic plans prepared for this initiative. Notable references include the *Inventory and Functional Capacity Analysis* detailing CE calculations, the DHS *Strategic Plan for Immigration Enforcement and Deportation Processing* outlining the integrated site utilization model, and the *Restoring Lawful Governance in Minnesota* report describing the establishment of the processing center and its unprecedented capabilities. These documents, alongside historical data on the fairgrounds and campus facilities, substantiate each claim made in this paper. All assumptions (such as persons per CE or throughput rates) were based on standard space-planning metrics or explicitly footnoted in the source material to ensure transparency. In conclusion, with the combination of physical assets and careful planning, the Minnesota State Fairgrounds and University campus have proven to be a **capable and well-justified choice** for handling a mission of this magnitude. The success of this site in meeting surge targets will likely inform how large-scale immigration enforcement is approached in the future, demonstrating that, when needed, our civic infrastructure can be transformed to uphold the rule of law efficiently and humanely at scale.

