



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



CICEP

INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY UNIVERSITIES  
AWARDS PROGRAM

CASE  
STUDY  
2013

## **Urban Research and Outreach- Engagement Center (UROC)**

## OVERVIEW

The University of Minnesota Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), located at the historic intersection of Plymouth and Penn Avenues in North Minneapolis, is a place-based organization that catalyzes mutually beneficial, results driven community-University partnerships. UROC is a place-based unit on the forefront of the University's "urban agenda" that leverages University resources and efforts to maximize a positive impact on Minnesota's urban core as part of the University's 21st Century land grant mission.

Now in its fourth year, UROC's research and outreach activities are guided by core principles of alignment, partnership, access and accountability, excellence, equity-mindedness focused on three, community identified priority areas: economic and community development, health and wellness, and education and lifelong learning.

UROC works to build innovative and respectful collaborations that also serve as new models of urban community development. An early, major collaboration was the Broadband Access Project (BAP) a three year, \$3.6-million initiative to improve high-speed internet (broadband) access, awareness, and use in four federally designated poverty zones in Minneapolis and St. Paul. The project supported development and enhancements of 11 community-based public computer centers for underserved populations, including African-Americans, Latinos, American Indian, and Asian and African immigrants. After over 90,000 visits and 15,000 hours of workshops and classes, the BAP project was transferred as planned to its community partners in 2013.

Current research and outreach projects include: the UROC community-engaged Job Creation Team; action research on juvenile sex trafficking, violence prevention and mortgage foreclosure; a two- year commitment to building partnerships to address childhood trauma; door-to-door survey work for the Northside Achievement Zone's (NAZ) Promise Neighborhood project, and a contract with NAZ to develop new modules for the Family Academy pipeline of family education.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UROC's Northside Job Creation Team (NJCT) is a collaboration representing some of the major stakeholders in North Minneapolis including UROC, City of Minneapolis, Governor's Industrial Job Commission, Minneapolis Public Schools, the African American Faith Community, Pillsbury United Communities and the local business community. The team researches and identifies businesses that could potentially attract public/private investments in North Minneapolis with the goal of creating sustainable living wage jobs in or near the Northside. At present, North Minneapolis's unemployment rate is 16.8 percent—9.2 percentage points more than Minnesota's unemployment rate of 7.6 percent. NJCT is working with a local processor of fresh fruit and vegetables on a business relocation strategy that could result in fuel and utility savings for the company, while reducing North Minneapolis employment by 1.4 percent. Other projects include feasibility assessments of the manufactured home, office space and packaging markets for the North Minneapolis area.

Business Development Services (BDS) works with pre-venture, new start-up, and established businesses to help them master business fundamentals, build capacity, improve their performance and profitability, increase innovation, enhance learning, and develop the leadership skills used by successful business executives. Part of the University's Office of Business and Community Economic Development, BDS leverages the internal resources and assets of the University in coordination with the resources and expertise of external community partners to meet the needs and interests of business clients. BDS builds on BCED's established strengths in management and technical assistance to small businesses, expanding to provide additional educational, legal, and accounting resources/tools; workshops and seminars; and training and direct coaching support. Support services cover three key functional areas: training and education, capacity development programs, and consultative services.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH

UROC-based Minnesota Urban Area Health Education Center was established in fall 2009 to strengthen the connections between the health professions programs at the University of Minnesota and the North Minneapolis community. The AHEC works along a continuum to increase the number of health professionals providing primary care in the community. This includes supporting youth with an interest in health careers and creating opportunities for current health professionals to work in underserved areas throughout the Twin Cities.

## EDUCATION

Throughout the summer of 2013, UROC is leading data collection for a community survey on behalf of Minneapolis-based Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Promise Neighborhood. The study tracks changes within the north Minneapolis community as NAZ dramatically scales up its work to prepare children to graduate from high school ready for college, starting before birth. The work is supported by a \$28 million Promise Neighborhood grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

NAZ's external evaluation team from Wilder Research hired UROC to serve as the field site to collect data from a representative sample of more than 400 households. UROC hired and trained 16 college students and recent graduates as survey takers. Many have connections to the Northside and all have gained valuable skills and a deeper knowledge of the community.

UROC-based researchers with the University of Minnesota Center for Early Childhood and Education (CEED) are developing pre-school parenting strategies for the Northside Achievement Zone's Family Academy. Family Academy programs deliver high-impact strategies to parents aimed at building a culture of academic achievement in the home. Targeted to parents of preschoolers, the academy's 4-5 Ready to Succeed! Project focuses on the development of school readiness skills in children, while emphasizing the role of parents in building a supportive and successful environment for educational, social and behavioral success.

UROC represents the University's commitment to long-term relationships with its urban neighbors designed to transform both communities and the ways in which they can work together toward the common good. UROC's initiatives have both direct and indirect economic impact for North Minneapolis businesses and residents alike. Programs like Business Development Services and Northside Job Creation Team have direct economic impact for local business and residents by aiding local business development and bringing more jobs to the area. Programs on education and community health have an indirect economic impact for the community members by providing training, aiding their education, and providing high quality health services.