

**Building stronger
urban communities**

in partnership with North Minneapolis

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

Executive Summary

UROC is a place-based research center situated in a North Minneapolis neighborhood approximately five miles west of the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UMTC) Minneapolis campus. Place-based attributes provide unique opportunities for reciprocal engagement through proximity, connection, and trust, but carry with them the obligations of accessibility, inclusion, accountability, and transparency.

The mission of UROC is to *link the University of Minnesota in vital public partnership with urban communities to advance learning, improve quality of life, and discover breakthrough solutions to critical problems.* The vision of UROC is to transform the ways the University and communities work together.

Projects conducted through UROC advance the community-identified priority areas of health and wellness, economic and community development, and education and lifelong learning. Further, projects must be action-focused and must have been initiated in collaboration with community partners, with outcomes intended to benefit all partners, as well as the broader public.

Academic and intellectual contributions

UROC's contributions to the academic community cannot be quantified with typical metrics because its mission and scope of work are not defined by a particular academic discipline. However, its contributions to the wider University community—contributions tied to testing, measuring, and refining models of reciprocal engagement—are significant. By being a place where engagement can occur, UROC makes four key contributions to the University and wider community:

Legitimacy and reciprocal engagement

UROC's mission and approach were developed through engagement with the community. The engagement process created opportunities for UMTC to both confront its legacy in North Minneapolis and also establish groundwork for new relationships with the community that are built on accountability, transparency, and "being a good neighbor." UROC encourages and supports others in cultivating partnerships that will have mutual benefit for all parties, and aims to both disseminate research findings and act on those findings.

Proximity and trust in University-community engagement

UROC's North Minneapolis location is an essential characteristic of its research infrastructure. Physical location in a community creates opportunities for new exposures and deepened connections between the University and North Minneapolis communities. UROC's public spaces also provide a bridge to the University in that they provide space for meetings, art exhibitions, workshops, or contemplation. UROC's public spaces break down the formidability of the "ivory tower," making the University and its research resources accessible to the local community.

Academic training and scholarly development

UROC's physical presence in North Minneapolis provides a home base for researchers. As a University office building, UROC provides workstations, meeting spaces, and connectivity with the Internet. Research teams can "land" at UROC and operate for the duration of their project while having access to both University and local community resources. UROC's new Engaged Research Lab will provide even more opportunities for exchange of ideas and perspectives, the development of new collaborations.

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Model-building and scholarly dissemination

A key function of UROC is to develop and test models for engaging with communities in mutually-beneficial partnerships to co-create solutions to some of our biggest challenges. To do this, UROC generates dollars to support specific projects, studies its own work, conducts documentation and evaluation activities, and has begun publishing its processes and findings.

Signature research projects are the focus of multiple forms of dissemination activities including reports; public meetings and special events; videos, brochures, newsletters, websites, and other visual representation of data; news media coverage; and academic and peer-reviewed publication.

By offering legitimacy, proximity, and logistical support, UROC serves as vital infrastructure that makes community engaged research possible and accessible to more researchers and students on the UMTC campus.

Impact and value to the University and broader Minnesota communities

UROC's community based location, our vision of transformation and focus on a research and outreach cyclical connection is unique. The work to create an integrated university unit that is well positioned in the community has been an intentional process through which we align with and take leadership in pursuing university engagement goals/plans, and demonstrates to the community a commitment to the land grant mission.

In addition, UROC takes educated risks, embracing urban topics that are often the most difficult.

UROC is persistent in the projects we commit to, a persistence that also leads to sustainability and impact. Our signature projects are built to discover root causes. The way we work allows for community, students, and faculty to all have input and to have the unique assets they bring shared and valued.

Finally, UROC is seen as a "neutral space" for tough community discussions to happen. We host community meetings at the request of the governor, support local media responses to local stories, hold critical conversations and share gallery space with artists of color. All of these events and projects provide real and positive connections between communities and the university.

Alignment with University mission and strategic plan

UROC is an UMTC-wide research center that reports to the University of Minnesota Executive Vice President and Provost through the system-wide Office for Public Engagement. UROC's mission and work was designed to advance the UMTC's University's threefold mission of research and discovery, teaching and learning, and outreach and public service. UROC leadership participated in the process creating the current strategic plan adopted by the board of regents in the fall of 2014. In particular, UROC contributed to and aligns with the vision to "capitalize on our location and build a culture of reciprocal engagement" with the goal to "partner with the communities of people in the state of Minnesota to benefit the common good." UROC leverages its location, as well as its campus and community connections to produce publicly-engaged research models and research results in support the University's mission and strategic plan.

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