Included in this packet:

- Information about CURA’s programs
- What is Community Based Research?
- Asking good research questions
- Research activities
- Program and eligibility guidelines
- Application tips
- Research Resources
ABOUT CURA

CURA is founded on the belief that partnership between the university and the community is mutually beneficial. CURA pursues our mission by supporting connections between state and local governments, communities, nonprofit organizations, and the University, including faculty and students from appropriate campuses, colleges, centers, or departments. **We work to build an environment that links the skills and wisdom present within every community with the knowledge and academic discipline of a vital urban university.**

Our center is home to a diverse array of community programs that provide a rich, and unique blend of leadership, resources, and technical assistance available to local communities at no cost. Through our research, community-focused programs, and collaborative partnerships, CURA’s community programs create innovative solutions that promote equity and opportunity in communities throughout the state.

These community programs can be used to prepare, frame, or develop background to a Community Based Research project, supplement the research process, or follow up by doing further research or implementation.

Community Programs:

1. **The Kris Nelson Community Based Research Program** connects the community to the University of Minnesota through community-driven applied research. It is a unique opportunity for community organizations to engage with the University to co-create research approaches.  
   **Contact:** C Terrence Anderson, canders@umn.edu

2. **The Community Assistantship Program** connects the University of Minnesota to community organizations and government agencies in Greater Minnesota through community-driven applied research. Also supports statewide research projects.  
   **Contact:** C Terrence Anderson, canders@umn.edu

3. **The Community Geographic Information Systems (CGIS) Program** provides GIS data access, analysis and mapping support and educational and training opportunities to neighborhood groups, community organizations, and local government agencies in Minnesota.  
   **Contact:** Jeff Matson, jmatson@umn.edu

4. **The Neighborhood Partnership Initiative and Artist Neighborhood Partnership Initiative Small Grant Program** makes technical assistance and small grants available to artists or community-based, neighborhood or other place-based organizations located in communities of color and low-income communities in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the surrounding suburbs.  
   **Contact:** C Terrence Anderson, canders@umn.edu

5. **The Neighborhood Organizing & Leadership Program** works to identify, train, and build power with a community of resident leaders working to address local and regional issues they identify as important. It provides formal trainings, 1:1 strategic coaching and campaign support.  
   **Contact:** Ned Moore, moore178@umn.edu

6. **The Community Visualization Program** collaborates with designers, analysts, educators, advocates, students, technologists, artists, and communities to develop alternative practices which can make the work we do with data and images richer, smarter, less complicated, more relevant and more responsive to the needs and interests of citizens traditionally on the margins of policy development.  
   **Contact:** Kristen Murray, kmurray@umn.edu
WHAT IS COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH?

Community Based Research (CBR) brings together the unique knowledge and resources of the community and the university to address questions raised by the community itself. Bringing together diverse perspectives and ways of knowing sheds new light on today’s issues and helps to identify innovative ways to tackle them.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation describes CBR as a “collaborative activity that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths each brings. CBR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action, in order to improve communities and eliminate disparities.”

Source: https://depts.washington.edu/ccph/commbas.html

CBR has three defining characteristics:

1. It brings researchers and community members together to co-labor. For CURA, this means that the project is community driven, and that community members and researchers work together to define the research questions.

2. It seeks to democratize knowledge by valuing and using multiple ways of knowing and methods of discovery. For CURA, this means that academic and community knowledge are valued equally, and that researchers use a variety of approaches to tackle the research questions.

3. Its goal is to inform social action to achieve social change and justice. For CURA, it is most important that the community will use the results to make meaningful policy change.

Source: Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning

CBR benefits everyone involved

CBR helps community organizations get the right information to make informed, data-driven decisions and see new perspectives on issues. It also plugs organizations into the other resources that CURA has in order to fully maximize all partnership opportunities.

CBR gives students opportunities to apply academic learning to real-world situations, which ultimately makes students more well-rounded and employable.

CBR also benefits the wider community by contributing to policy discussions on community and regional levels and by giving other communities an equitable, collaborative research model they can replicate.

CBR has the following impacts*:

- Individuals recognize themselves as experts of their own experiences and the issues they face.
- Organizations have integrated research and organizing strategies and built capacity to advance social, racial and economic justice in their communities.
- Communities have their own knowledge system and infrastructure. They are organized and well informed so they are more strategic and impactful in shaping their strategies for change.
- Institutions are changed as community knowledge gains political legitimacy, informs organizing strategies, research design, evidence generation, and solutions to issues.
- Systems are changed as community identified solutions are implemented, changing material, and social conditions.

*Adapted from Data Center Research for Justice

For more research tools: http://www.datacenter.org/research-tools/research/
WHAT MAKES A GOOD RESEARCH QUESTION?

Keep in mind that research cannot tell people what to do, but it can gather information about the present that helps people make decisions about the future. To gather information about the present, focus your research questions on studying facts and conditions, not on what “should” be. Frame them as “what is” or “what are” questions; stay away from “what should” or “how do we” questions.

Why do this? Because until you know what is happening now, you can’t say what should happen in the future.

Instead of asking, “How do we improve our community’s housing stock?” ask questions like:

- What is the neighborhood’s housing stock?
- What are the demographics of people living in the community?
- What housing (re)development has occurred in the last 5 years?
- What government programs are available for housing (re)development?
- What are similar communities doing to improve their housing stock?

DEFINE YOUR KEY TERMS

Research questions often use words like “neighborhood improvement,” “equity,” or “underserved populations.” But those words could mean a variety of things, each of which would completely change the meaning of your research. You must define these terms in your application.

For example, “equitable park use” could mean a variety of things, including:

- all people in the area are using the park with the same frequency
- all people in the area are using the park exactly as often as they want to
- all people can access the park and its amenities, regardless of their economic status
- all people can access the park and its amenities, regardless of ability/disability
- all people are satisfied with the park and its amenities

Now that you’ve got your research questions, it’s time to pick the right research activities [methods].
TYPES OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

SURVEY

When would you use it? When you want to gather information from a large number of people. Surveys can be used to identify issues or build support for your work.

What would you get out of it? Short, one-time qualitative/quantitative data from many people

Benefits? It can be relatively cheap and straightforward once you identify the right questions.

Drawbacks? It is a one-time interaction, so you can’t get any contextual information or follow-up clarification. Response rates are often very low. Designing questions that make sense to all types of people can be difficult. Language and translation can be an issue. Depending on how the survey is administered it can take a lot of time and people power.

Keep in mind:

- Surveys can be done in person or online.
- Writing good surveys is hard, so make sure to pilot your survey before distributing it.
  - Get help thinking about the order and wording or questions and answers.
  - Only ask questions that are absolutely necessary, especially if they’re personal.
- Online surveys tend to have very low response rates, so try to take advantage of situations where people are already gathered and create a quick one-page paper survey to collect the data you need. Incentives help as well!

Great resource: University of Wisconsin Extension. Collecting Evaluation Data: Surveys
http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/G3658-10.PDF

Great resource: DataCenter, Participatory research Kit: Creating Surveys

NORTHSIDE COMMUNITY RESPONSE TEAM

“African American Homeownership Survey”
Students: Alyssa Chiumento and Andrew Tran

CURA’s guidance and support on the North Minneapolis African American Housing Opportunity study provided the academic credibility to a very important and needed community survey. CURA recognized, as had the North Minneapolis African American community, that many well-intended programs and initiatives were failing to reach a large part of the community. The development, implementation, and resulting report from this survey created a new foundation from which future investments and policies will be made in North Minneapolis.

- Jeff Washburne, Executive Director
City of Lakes Community Land Trust
**Interviews and Focus Groups**

**When would you use it?** When you want more in-depth information

**What would you get out of it?** In-depth, two-way qualitative information from a small number of people

**Benefits?** It allows you to get more rich contextual information from respondents, and allows for follow-up questions and clarification. It also allows for non-native English speakers to fully express themselves if you use a translator.

**Drawbacks?** It can be hard to get people to come to an interview or focus group. It is also time consuming and expensive, especially if you are transcribing and/or coding all of the interviews. It also requires building good relationships with interviewees.

**Keep in mind:**
- Interviews can be done with individuals or with groups of people.
- Focus groups are a unique type of group interview where six to eight people from similar backgrounds are interviewed about a specific topic. Themes from each focus group are later compared to find overlap and differences.
- Group interviewing may be particularly important for learning about attitudes, outcomes or impacts from non-native English speakers in the community.


Surveys and interviews are considered “obtrusive” methods for collecting data – you have to bother someone to get your information! There are other approaches for collecting data that are “unobtrusive” and worth thinking about.
**OBSERVATION**

When would you use it? When you want to observe people’s behavior, or how a program or activity works  
What would you get out of it? Information about people’s behavior or the context of an activity  
Benefits? It is easy to do and doesn’t require you to directly interact with many people.  
Drawbacks? People may act differently if someone is watching them, so you may not get an accurate picture. You also have to make sure you are interpreting what you see correctly, and not misinterpreting things because you are an outsider.

Keep in mind:  
- Plan carefully what needs to be observed, how you would document the observations, and who from your community should do the observation.  
- Collect your data consistently.  
- Counting is an important type of observation!  
  - Making observations during regular time intervals (like monthly or quarterly) can produce powerful data on outcomes or impacts over time.

Great resource: University of Wisconsin Extension, [http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-5.pdf](http://learningstore.uwex.edu/assets/pdfs/g3658-5.pdf)

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**INVESTIGATING SECONDARY SOURCES**

When would you use it? When it is available  
What would you get out of it? Information about your research topic or community  
Benefits? It is easy to do and doesn’t require you to directly interact with many people.  
Drawbacks? Secondary sources don’t always exist, or aren’t always available.

Keep in mind:  
- Secondary data sources include information that has already been collected for a different and/or broader purpose.  
  - Examples: information from administrative records, vital records, and surveys that are conducted for purposes other than program evaluation.  
- For example, data on recycling in a neighborhood might be available from Eureka Recycling. Data on the percentage of children who live in the neighborhood and attend neighborhood schools may be available from the school district. You wouldn’t need to collect this data yourself, so it is called a best practice.

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**LITERATURE REVIEW AND BEST PRACTICE STUDY**

When would you use it? When you want other-thinking, research, programming or activities to inform your research  
What would you get out of it? Data and ideas about your research subject and/or similar organizations, programs, or environments where work has been successful.  
Benefits? Can prevent you from ‘re-inventing the wheel’ and be an actionable source of ideas and approaches.  
Drawbacks? Can be time consuming and difficult to focus if you don’t have a clear idea of what you are looking for. Figuring out how to apply what’s worked in other places to your situation is challenging.

Keep in mind:  
- The purpose of a literature review is to analyze a segment of a published body of knowledge through summary, classification, and comparison of research studies, reviews of literature, and theoretical articles.  
  - The clearer your research question is the more relevant your literature review.  
- The purpose of a best practice study is to look at a technique, methodology, behavior or idea that has been confirmed to reliably lead to a desired or optimum result.  
  - The term “best” is problematic. Who defines best? Is “good” good enough? How do you know that the positive impact had anything to do with the best/good practice?  
  - It’s often also helpful to learn from what doesn’t work, so if your research turns those examples up don’t ignore them.  
  - The context of a best practice is critical to thinking about if it can work for you.
A WORD ON EVALUATION PROJECTS

Generally, program evaluation is not eligible for CBR projects. Instead, students could develop and test evaluation tools and help train organization and community members to evaluate their own programs. This capacity-building has a much longer-lasting effect on the organization and empowers people to assess their own progress and organizational development in an ongoing fashion.

“Adapting the Community Capitals Framework (CCF) to Identify the Impact of St. Paul’s District Councils”
Student: Carly Lykes-Frostman
Report Link: z.umn.edu/11p8

The District 2 Community Council is the second largest of the seventeen St. Paul community councils, serving the northeast corner of the city. All district councils in St. Paul, with District 2 in the lead, sought assistance from CURA in identifying and measuring the impact of their various activities and programs. Carly Lykes-Frostman, a public policy student, worked with district council stakeholders to look for common values and activities and identified the Community Capitals Framework as a structure to map out program outcomes and indicators. The research resulted in an evaluation resource guide for use by district councils.

We really appreciated CURA’s sponsorship of this research project on evaluation. The process created a very usable toolkit that district councils will use to continue this work and incorporate into our existing workplans. The toolkit can also serve as a framework for district councils to collaboratively develop evaluation systems.

- Lisa Theis, District 2 Community Council Community Organizer
PROGRAM AND ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

There are two CBR Programs available to applicants, each with different eligibility guidelines. Both programs provide graduate or undergraduate student assistance for applied research projects, program planning, evaluation capacity-building, and other short-term projects. Student assistantships are generally 10–20 hours per week for three to four months.

1. **Kris Nelson Community Based Research Program (Nelson Program)**—Available to community and neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis and St. Paul, and to community organizations and government agencies in Twin-Cities metro area.

   **Impact Areas:**
   1. **People and Places** - Builds the leadership and power of low income communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, seniors, people with disabilities, youth, renters, or other historically excluded communities. Addresses a local community issue, need or opportunity.
   2. **Organizations** - Supports the capacity of community-based, neighborhood or other place-based organizations to more effectively and equitably engage and involve the diversity of their community into the leadership of their organization or activities.
   3. **Collaborations** - Builds strong networks and relationships within and/or among diverse cultural or geographic communities.
   4. **Systems** - Changes systems, practices, initiatives, and policies that lead to greater racial, social, and economic equity.

2. **Community Assistantship Program (CAP)**—Available to community organizations and government agencies in greater Minnesota and projects that would serve the entire state.

   The **Mary Page Community-University Partnership Fund** supports CAP students working on community identified and requested research projects, honoring the spirit of “community-driven” work between the land-grant University and the communities they serve. The Regional Partnerships facilitate Community-University projects in the areas of sustainable agriculture and local food, natural resources, tourism and resilient communities, and clean energy.

   If your proposal addresses these issue areas it will be considered for funding through the Mary Page fund. Should a decision be needed among proposals of equal merit, special consideration will be given to projects in southwest Minnesota.

**Application Process**

1. Complete a [CURA Community-Based Research Programs Application Form](#) for each research project you would like assistance with.
2. Submit applications via e-mail to curacbr@umn.edu
3. Your application will be reviewed and you will be notified within 3-4 weeks of the committee’s decision regarding your application.
4. If approved, a job description is developed by CURA, approved by the community organization, and posted online for students to see.
5. Students apply on the University of Minnesota's online job application website and the community organization reviews those applications.
6. The community organization chooses interview candidates, schedules the interviews, and selects the student.
Application Deadlines

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<th>Project Dates</th>
<th>Submission Date</th>
<th>Notification Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spring Semester: Jan - May</td>
<td>See the CURA website</td>
<td>See the CURA website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer Semester: Jun - Aug</td>
<td>See the CURA website</td>
<td>See the CURA website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall Semester: Sep - Dec</td>
<td>See the CURA website</td>
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Need help thinking through this application?

CURA staff can help you through the application. We strongly encourage you to contact the appropriate program director below before submitting your application. We want to help you make your proposal the best it can be!

- C Terrence Anderson (612) 624-8988, canders@umn.edu
APPLICATION TIPS

When we review your application, we look at three areas:

THE COMMUNITY

- Clear problem or opportunity statement
- Who does the research benefit and how?
- How will the people it benefits be involved in the process?
- How will the results be used? What will their impact be?
- Other partners and context
- Projects that benefit low wealth communities and communities of color get priority

THE STUDENT

- Is the student’s role clear and doable?
- What will the student gain from the experience?
- What skills/background/experience do they need?

THE RESEARCH

- Addresses a specific research question
- Fit between research question and student activities
- Doable with the time and resources available
- Availability of data
- General applicability
- Keep to 3-5 pages not including cover page
RESEARCH RESOURCES

Places to Download Data

- **American FactFinder** FactFinder is the main place to find census data (including ACS data) in tabular form. You can download summary files or download individual tables for different census themes. Download TIGER/Line shapefiles (census tract and blockgroup boundaries) for specific years [here](#).
- **Minnesota Geospatial Commons** multiple data sets for different organizations around the State of Minnesota. Find the data sorted by source or by category.
- **IPUMS** This data resource, hosted at the University of Minnesota's Minnesota Population Center, allows access to microdata, which is data collected on households and individuals. Access is free, but you need to register for an account before beginning.

Online Mapping Tools

- **Social Explorer** Social Explorer's Demographic Maps give you online access to 2010 U.S. Census data and 2005-2009 American Community Survey data by census block group, census tract, and county. Data can be viewed in maps and a variety of reports can be downloaded in several formats, including Excel tables. Data from earlier years of the Census and ACS are also available.
- **OnTheMap** This tool provides data on jobs and workers, including wages, job sector, distance and direction traveled to work, and demographics of workers. Geographic areas can be analyzed based on where workers live (home, or commutershed) or where they work (work, or laborshed). Maps can be exported as PDFs or images, and data can be downloaded in several formats, including Excel tables and shapefiles.
- **Minnesota Geographic Data Clearinghouse** MCDC is a portal to a variety of state-wide mapping services and data.
- **Ramsey County Online Maps and Data** Ramsey County makes a variety of data about physical features in the county available online, including depth to groundwater, parcel boundaries, and schools. Historic aerial images are also available.
- **Hennepin County GIS** Hennepin County hosts several interactive maps including a Park Locator, Road Construction Locator, a Property Map, and an Election Results map.
- **City of St. Paul GISmo** St. Paul hosts several online mapping tools that allow you to map information about heritage preservation districts, canopy (tree) cover, public art, and many other things.

Other Mapping and Data Resources

- **Borchert Map Library** UMN's map library is located in the lower level of Wilson Library and maintains a large collection of print maps. In addition to this collection, the library also hosts the Automated Cartographic Information Center, which includes several computers with ArcGIS software available for patron use.
- **Minnesota Compass Neighborhood Profiles** Minnesota Compass compiles Census data into reports for Twin Cities neighborhoods, as well as metropolitan area cities, Minnesota counties, and the state as a whole. Data files can also be downloaded.

GIS Software

- **ArcExplorer** Free GIS software!