Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research (NPCR) has been renamed the Kris Nelson Neighborhood Research Program (Nelson Program) in honor of NPCR’s longtime director, Kris Nelson, who passed away in June 2011.

Nelson came to CURA in 1993, with funding from the U.S. Department of Education’s Urban Community Service Program, to run the newly created Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (later renamed Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research) program. Originally designed to support the research needs of neighborhood groups in the early days of the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program, the central commitment of NPCR was to foster neighborhood-driven research. Nelson worked tirelessly to ensure that faculty and students at the University of Minnesota and other Twin Cities colleges and universities responded to the research needs of neighborhoods, rather than merely using neighborhoods as research laboratories.

Before NPCR, neighborhoods often did not have good information about the problems and conditions they faced, much less the resources to investigate their solutions. NPCR provided important research to help neighborhood groups formulate their neighborhood action plans, as well as opportunities for students to apply their skills to neighborhood-driven applied research projects. Projects have covered a range of topics, from housing and economic development to transportation and environmental issues. Since its inception, NPCR has funded more than 450 projects and employed more than 400 students from a range of academic departments to work with more than 200 community organizations.

Over time, the program has broadened the types of organizations eligible for funding and the geographic area served. Originally focused solely on Minneapolis neighborhoods, NPCR branched out to include district councils in St. Paul, and then to inner-ring suburban communities in the Twin Cities. NPCR also expanded beyond neighborhood groups to work with other nonprofit community organizations doing neighborhood development work, such as community-development corporations. The program’s name was changed to Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research several years ago to reflect this wider scope. However, the commitment to neighborhood and place-based research remains.

The Nelson Program’s focus areas, program guidelines, and review criteria will remain the same as those of NPCR. The program matches the research and technical needs of community organizations with student research assistants, who work under the leadership of faculty to carry out community-defined and community-guided projects. The program provides approximately 200 hours of student time (260 hours during the summer) to work on a project. Community and neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Twin Cities metropolitan-area suburbs are eligible. The Nelson Program distinguishes itself from other CURA programs as the only one that is composed of a consortium of 10 metro-area colleges and universities, enabling the program to access a greater pool of resources and expertise from a variety of institutions as well as creating valuable connections to area institutions, students, and faculty.

More information about the program, including application guidelines and an online application form, can be found at www.cura.umn.edu/Nelson-Program.