Tax Increment Financing: Its Effect on Local Government Finances

by Kenneth A. Kriz

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a widely used economic development and urban redevelopment tool. Local governments use TIF to finance improvement projects by floating a general bond that is paid off using the additional tax revenue generated by the improvement project. Although TIF allows municipalities to creatively finance development projects and can be an effective means of promoting development in blighted areas, public perception of TIF has always been somewhat tenuous. Some have suggested that TIF diverts resources that could be better used elsewhere. Others argue that developers use TIF and other economic development incentives to “play off” cities against one another and make additional profits, demanding incentives even though they would have moved their operations to an area anyway. Finally, some question the effect of TIF on local finances, suggesting that this redevelopment approach may promote increased demand for public services and cause local governments to lose out on the growth in tax base that would have occurred without TIF.

Many practitioners and researchers have struggled with the question of how TIF affects local government finances. The prevailing wisdom usually takes one of two forms: the “pure capture” theory and the “pure attribution” theory. The pure capture theory views TIF as simply a means to redirect public resources to subsidize development. Proponents of this view argue that all development would likely occur without the use of TIF.

In This Issue:

- Tax Increment Financing: Its Effect on Local Government Finances ..................1
- Project Update: Statewide Digital Parcel Map Inventory ................................. 8
- Perceptions of the Environmental Review Process in Minnesota ...................9
- 19th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis ..................................................13
- 2000 Population Change Maps ........................................................................ 13
- The Community Assistantship Program: Connecting the University with Greater Minnesota ..........................................................16
- Project Awards ..................................................................................................22
- Project Update: Bringing INFO-U to New Audiences ....................................23
public subsidy. Therefore, any resources expended on TIF are a pure subsidy to developers. The pure attribution theory sees TIF as a necessary incentive to lure businesses to areas that would likely never be developed, at least for a period of several years. Any resources going to TIF are merely investments that will likely pay off handsomely in the future.

My research takes a different approach to this topic. Using a probability-based analysis technique called Monte Carlo simulation, I investigated the probabilities of a positive financial outcome from TIF. By simulating my model under various scenarios, I was able to answer the following important questions concerning TIF:

1. What is the likely effect of TIF projects on local government financial conditions?
2. Are TIF projects good investments for local governments (i.e., are they likely to produce rates of return that justify their use)?
3. Under what conditions are the best financial results from TIF obtained?

This study was jointly funded by the Minneapolis Planning Department and by a grant from CURA’s Faculty Interactive Research Program. With this support and with the assistance of a graduate research assistant provided through CURA, I was able to compile an annotated bibliography of TIF resource materials for use by the Minneapolis Planning Department, collect and analyze property tax records from Hennepin County and the Minneapolis Community Development Agency, and develop a deterministic simulation model that the city of Minneapolis can use to assess the financial effects of proposed TIF projects.

This article will provide a brief explanation of how TIF works in theory and practice, describe the methodology for the simulation model used to assess the financial effects of TIF projects, discuss the results of this simulation, and offer conclusions and policy implications stemming from this research.

What Is Tax Increment Financing?

How TIF Works. The nature of tax increment financing varies from state to state. In Minnesota, a local government or its designated redevelopment authority determines that an area of (or a specific property in) the community is economically challenged due to some factor or set of factors—although often this determination emerges out of a request by a developer for a subsidy. The local government or other redevelopment authority then goes through a process to designate a tax increment district (TID) that includes the area targeted for redevelopment (in Minnesota there are seven types of districts that can use TIF including redevelopment districts and mined underground space districts). The assessed value of the TID is then “frozen.” This means that all future revenues from properties in the TID are split between two different destinations. Future tax revenues derived from the value of the frozen assessed value continue to go to the various local governments as they did before the TID was designated. However, taxes derived from increases in the assessed value above that frozen value go to the authority in charge of the TID to pay for development costs (the additional revenue is the tax increment). These development costs can include physical development of properties as well as disposition of the properties at below market prices, or write-downs.

Table 1 and the sidebar on page 4 briefly document the history of the use of TIF in Minnesota.

The Economic Impact of TIF. Tax increment financing affects the pattern of both revenue and expenditures for local governments. On the revenue side, TIF mostly impacts the growth rates of assessed market value of parcels of property in and out of the TID, as well as altering the number of properties from which the local government derives revenue for basic city services. On the expenditure side, the increase in economic wealth in the jurisdiction (reflected in the increase in assessed market value) is likely to cause increases in demand for public goods, thereby raising expenditure demands.

In the theoretical model that was developed for this research project, the variables with the most effect on the finances of local government were the following:

- the pre- and postproject growth rates of properties located inside or outside the tax increment district
- the probability that the properties in a TIF district would have been developed without the use of TIF
- the elasticity of demand for expenditures with respect to changes in assessed valuation
- the direct operating subsidy provided by the local government to a TIF district

Study Methodology

The uncertainty inherent in the decision to use TIF mitigates against the use of simple models to analyze financial effects. It is easy to see that if a property is likely to be developed without the use of TIF, the revenue effect for the city is negative. The relevant policy question is, What is the amount of the revenue effect, on average? If it is likely that revenue will be greatly reduced through using TIF, cities may want to consider other means of financing projects, or perhaps not offer the projects full local government support. However, if the implementation of TIF will likely cause only a small loss of revenue or even revenue gains (through increases in the market value of other properties in the jurisdiction), local governments should seek all possible opportunities to use this redevelopment tool.

Three factors make it difficult to predict the fiscal impacts of TIF. First, little research had been done on the effects of TIF on economic development. There have been only a handful of attempts to address the question of relative economic growth rate and the results of these studies are split, with some finding a positive effect on economic growth and others finding no effect or even a negative effect. Second, it is not possible to objectively determine the probability of future development without TIF before the decision is made to use TIF. Finally, it is possible only to estimate future growth rates of properties and the future elasticity of demand for public services. Therefore, these are sources of uncertainty for potential policy prescriptions regarding TIF.

In order to address these issues, I used a Monte Carlo simulation. Monte Carlo simulations were first developed in the 1940s during the Manhattan Project and are currently used in fields ranging from quantum physics to finance. The simulations allow an analyst to predict potential future values for a theoretical model by entering a large number of random inputs and then recording outputs generated from...
Table 1. Tax Increment Financing District Data for Taxes Payable 1974–2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taxes Payable Year</th>
<th>Number of Cities &amp; Towns&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Number of Counties&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Number of Districts</th>
<th>Total Value ($)&lt;sup&gt;c,g&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Retained Captured Value ($)&lt;sup&gt;d,g&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Retained Captured Value (%)&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Gross Tax Increment ($)&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1,495,744,646</td>
<td>3,634,483</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>437,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>2,485,445,784</td>
<td>20,036,557</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>2,689,574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3,386,292,474</td>
<td>26,220,175</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3,181,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3,852,929,963</td>
<td>32,127,149</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3,939,863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4,933,144,413</td>
<td>43,380,473</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5,306,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>5,779,512,957</td>
<td>62,286,066</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>7,418,288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>7,177,174,340</td>
<td>102,280,206</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>11,305,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>9,359,881,660</td>
<td>223,310,857</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>22,489,390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>11,004,551,716</td>
<td>332,367,840</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>35,141,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14,536,408,180</td>
<td>516,587,125</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>58,154,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>16,082,621,847</td>
<td>635,897,231</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>70,761,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>17,748,842,074</td>
<td>800,406,816</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>92,355,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>19,572,677,227</td>
<td>996,907,289</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>117,465,743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>813</td>
<td>21,445,564,357</td>
<td>1,246,503,585</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>154,372,728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>2,334,869,726</td>
<td>182,846,710</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>183,983,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>1,085</td>
<td>2,170,702,186</td>
<td>186,491,610</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>192,295,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>1,169</td>
<td>2,288,404,548</td>
<td>204,893,672</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>230,125,125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1,182</td>
<td>2,485,697,816</td>
<td>210,850,640</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>255,788,716</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1,221</td>
<td>2,443,331,143</td>
<td>215,122,620</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>278,915,518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1,277</td>
<td>2,438,288,925</td>
<td>201,339,456</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>268,517,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>2,527,380,312</td>
<td>203,291,153</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>276,845,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1,397</td>
<td>2,675,215,911</td>
<td>213,579,733</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>286,308,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>2,875,533,806</td>
<td>231,443,783</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>299,942,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>1,617</td>
<td>2,800,208,465</td>
<td>226,048,367</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>299,099,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,670</td>
<td>2,757,609,477</td>
<td>222,853,861</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>301,893,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,673</td>
<td>2,939,641,387</td>
<td>237,008,203</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>314,420,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>418</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,751</td>
<td>3,290,457,920</td>
<td>271,936,968</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>332,942,605</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>1,813</td>
<td>2,581,396,421</td>
<td>193,636,255</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>241,850,617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Minnesota Revenue Department, Property Tax Unit, 2003

<sup>a</sup> Number of different cities and towns with tax increment districts.
<sup>b</sup> Number of different counties that contain tax increment financing districts.
<sup>c</sup> Total value of the cities and towns with tax increment districts.
<sup>d</sup> Value used in determining increment district taxes. It is after the deduction of any captured value shared with the local taxing districts and after the deduction of any captured value contributed to the fiscal disparity pool in the seven-county metropolitan area.
<sup>e</sup> Ratio of retained captured value to total value.
<sup>f</sup> Tax generated by multiplying the local tax rate by the retained captured value. Beginning in 1989, gross tax increment includes local tax rate excess tax increment, which is distributed entirely to the local taxing districts.
A History of Tax Increment Financing in Minnesota

by Joel Michael, Legislative Analyst, Research Department, Minnesota House of Representatives

The Minnesota legislature first authorized use of tax increment financing (TIF) in 1947 as an option for paying the local match for federal housing and urban renewal grants. The first Minnesota TIF district was not created, however, until 1969.

Although TIF was born as a way to meet federal matching funds requirements, its actual use took hold and grew only when federal funding for housing and urban renewal began to dry up in the 1970s and the legislature enacted laws permitting expanded and clearer TIF authority. During these early years, TIF was used mainly in Minneapolis, St. Paul, regional centers (such as Duluth, Mankato, and St. Cloud), and inner-ring suburbs as a redevelopment tool—that is, as a means of financing land acquisition, clearing buildings, and installing public infrastructure in so-called blighted areas. By 1979, 57 cities in Minnesota were using TIF; annual increment revenues were about $7.5 million, and $171 million in TIF bonds were outstanding.

The initial laws authorizing TIF use were very general and contained few limits on its use. As its use grew, TIF became controversial in the legislature: concerns were raised that some cities were using TIF inappropriately, taking excessive risks, and capturing counties’ and schools’ property tax bases. During the 1975–1978 legislative sessions, several battles were fought over TIF. On one side were cities, the principal users of TIF. On the other were counties and schools. The latter group fought to impose new restrictions on TIF, such as time limits and percentage caps on its use. The cities won a victory when a bill imposing significant limits on cities’ use of TIF, which had passed the House by a narrow margin, ultimately failed by a few votes on the Senate floor in 1978.

In 1979, the state legislature adopted the Minnesota Tax Increment Financing Act, which replaced five separate laws governing TIF use with one uniform law. This act was largely written by the cities and included milder versions of some of the limits proposed in the 1977–1978 bills. It remains (with many intervening legislative changes) as the basic structure of the current Minnesota TIF law.

Use of TIF by Minnesota cities grew rapidly during the 1980s. By 1990, 297 cities were using TIF; only a few cities were not. Total TIF revenues had grown to just under $200 million per year and $1.4 billion in TIF bonds were outstanding. This was something of a golden era for Minnesota TIF. Cities used TIF to finance not only redevelopment but also housing and economic development projects, uses explicitly authorized by the 1979 act. Indeed, some cities used “excess increments” (revenues above the initial project needs) to fund general city infrastructure such as streets, sewer and water, parks, and community centers.

Legislative concerns about TIF use continued, however. In particular, counties and school districts expressed concern about the cities’ de facto control over their shared tax bases through TIF. The Office of the Legislative Auditor prepared major studies of TIF in 1986 and 1995 and found a number of causes for concern, including whether cities were complying with the TIF law and whether the law was meeting its policy objectives.

In response to these concerns, the legislature in the late 1980s and 1990s enacted new restrictions on TIF use. These laws (the most important ones were enacted in 1988, 1990, and 1995) limited the purposes for which increments could be spent as well as the areas that could be designated as TIF districts, and granted the State Auditor additional authority to audit and review TIF compliance. These restrictions have curtailed TIF use somewhat, although its use has continued to grow. By 2000, increment revenues had reached $300 million per year.

The 2001 Minnesota property tax reform is the most recent chapter in the history of TIF. Although the property tax reform was not explicitly directed at TIF, it had important indirect effects. The reform significantly lowered property taxes overall and specifically on commercial–industrial properties, the primary type of property in TIF districts. Lowering property taxes also reduces increment revenues because they are captured property taxes. More important, the state “took over” the basic education property tax, a major source of increment revenues. This was partially replaced by a state property tax on commercial–industrial properties, but this tax is not captured by TIF. The net result was nearly a 30% (or about $100 million) drop in increment revenues in 2002, the first year of the reform. The overall effect is a significant reduction (slightly less than 20% based on the most current data) in the potential increment revenues. Ultimately, this will make it more difficult to do TIF projects that have higher costs relative to the market value of the assisted developments.

The 2001 Minnesota property tax reform was not explicitly directed at TIF, it had important indirect effects. The reform significantly lowered property taxes overall and specifically on commercial–industrial properties, the primary type of property in TIF districts. Lowering property taxes also reduces increment revenues because they are captured property taxes. More important, the state “took over” the basic education property tax, a major source of increment revenues. This was partially replaced by a state property tax on commercial–industrial properties, but this tax is not captured by TIF. The net result was nearly a 30% (or about $100 million) drop in increment revenues in 2002, the first year of the reform. The overall effect is a significant reduction (slightly less than 20% based on the most current data) in the potential increment revenues. Ultimately, this will make it more difficult to do TIF projects that have higher costs relative to the market value of the assisted developments.

the model. The outputs—which are usually in the form of probability distributions—show the range of potential risks and rewards of decisions based on the theoretical model under study.

In conducting a Monte Carlo simulation for the fiscal impacts of TIF, I created a deterministic model of the TIF decision-making process. I then replaced uncertain variables in the model—the growth rate of non-TIF properties, the effect of TIF on non-TIF properties, the post-TIF growth rate of TIF properties, and the elasticity of expenditures with respect to changes in market value—with random variables drawn from a specified distribution. The uncertain variables and the sources from which the random variables were derived are listed in Table 2.

Along with the random variables, certain parameters were established within the model. Parameters are variables whose values are more certain or more controllable than the uncertain variables. For example, if one were simulating traffic flow on a freeway, one would set as a parameter the number of lanes on the freeway. One can vary parameters, but usually this is done only to analyze policy changes. Initially, the following parameters were set: initial investment into the TIF project, effective tax rate, operating subsidy, pre-TIF growth rate of TIF properties, and discount rate. The initial investment parameter was set at 50% of the TIF market value. In other words, we assume that a $30 million TIF project will generate a $15 million initial market value investment. The city effective tax rate was set at 0.91%, calculated from City of Minneapolis financial
Finally, the operating subsidy was set at zero. Operating subsidies vary widely by project and usually have the characteristics of a loan, repaid out of future tax increment. It should be noted, however, that this assumption likely biases the result of this analysis somewhat in the direction of showing a more positive financial effect from TIF.

The pre-TIF growth rate of the properties that will eventually be part of the TID can be treated either as a parameter or as a policy variable (that is, a variable that can be changed easily by a governmental entity). I treated the growth rate as a parameter and assumed a zero growth rate. (For states such as Minnesota that allow the base to increase by an amount equal to the pre-TIF growth rate, this factor should drop out.) Another variable that can be treated as either a policy variable or a parameter is the discount rate. Again, without any prior knowledge of when projects will be developed, I treated this as a parameter and assumed a 7% discount rate.

The final variable in the model is the probability that a parcel will develop without the use of TIF. I chose to treat this variable as a policy variable. Given that TIF allows local governments to temporarily take properties off local tax rolls, an important question is, which properties should be incorporated into TIDs? For my initial estimates, I assumed a 10% probability of development. This translates into one TIF property being developed without TIF, on average, within the next 10 years.

### Results

The model outlined in the previous section was simulated through 10,000 iterations using the @Risk add-in package for Microsoft Excel. Table 3 and Figure 1 show the results. Table 3 shows descriptive statistics and the distribution of the results. The first column of the table shows the net present value for the project as a whole evaluated at the discount rate of 7% specified above. This column shows that the most likely result (point estimate) of the effect of this $15 million project (with $30 million captured market value) is slightly more than a $5.5 million net financial loss to the local government. (Figure 1 shows that the distribution of results is skewed, therefore it is appropriate to cite the median value as the point estimate.) The mean is statistically significantly greater than its standard error ($p < .001$), meaning that we can say with a high level of confidence that there is a negative financial effect for the local government. Table 3 and Figure 1 also present an estimate of the
distribution of the potential risks and rewards of using TIF. For example, Table 3 shows that there is a 5% chance of a loss greater than $9.4 million and a gain greater than $3.3 million. There is slightly more than a 90% chance of a negative net present value. Figure 1 presents a histogram of the results for a project's net present value. The distribution has a high peak and is positively skewed, with the greatest probability falling around the mean and the vast majority of results falling within a range from -$10 million to +$2.5 million.

One of the questions that motivated this study was, under which conditions would the local government stand the greatest chance of reaping a positive financial impact from TIF? My theoretical model indicates that one of the most important variables in determining the financial effects of TIF is the probability that the parcel will be developed without the use of TIF. For the second simulation, I varied the probability of development. It appears that overoptimism about the financial effects of TIF should be a larger concern among policymakers. Table 4 shows the simulation results assuming various probabilities of development. There are at least two striking results from these simulations. First, even if there is a zero probability of development without the use of TIF, the median net present value is negative (approximately -$2.7 million). Even when there is no chance of future development, there is only a 30% chance of a positive financial outcome for the local government. Increases in the probability of development up to 10% produce additional expected financial losses. However, another interesting result is that the point estimate of the loss converges toward a stable amount with probabilities of development greater than 10%. This means that after the likelihood of development exceeds a certain amount, the negative financial effect becomes somewhat constant. Therefore, the most likely range of losses on a $15 million TIF project is somewhere between $2.5 million and $6.5 million.3

Another area of potential policy importance is the length of time that the TIF district is allowed to capture incremental revenue from the properties in the TID. As stated earlier, redevelopment districts in Minnesota that use TIF are allowed to capture increment for a period up to 25 years. However, in other states (and for other types of districts in Minnesota), the time limits differ. The impact of this policy decision on local government financial condition is shown in Table 5. Table 5 presents the results for the base case of a 25-year TIF capture and an alternative 10-year TIF capture. The mean and median results are significantly greater for the 10-year capture limit. This suggests that time limits might be an effective tool for easing the financial burden of TIF imposed on local governments.

Conclusions
This study illuminates at least four important points about the effect of TIF on local government finances. First, given a realistic set of policy assumptions, TIF most likely produces a net financial loss to a local government. Only when the probability of development without the use of TIF is low and the positive effects of TIF on property values both inside and outside of the TIF district become extremely high can a TIF project be justified in financial terms.

Second, although the first conclusion holds, there is nonetheless a nonzero probability of a positive financial impact. A single point estimate simply does not capture enough information for local decision makers to form an opinion about the financial effects of TIF. If events work in its favor, the local government can expect a small financial gain from TIF. In short, TIF may be best thought of as a large financial investment by local governments.

3 The point net present value estimate at a 50% probability of development is -$5.4 million, which is not statistically significant at accepted levels ($p = .06$).

---

Table 4. Simulation Results Using Various Probabilities of Development without the Use of TIF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>5%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>15%</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>-$12,321,560</td>
<td>-$14,751,320</td>
<td>-$14,819,260</td>
<td>-$15,650,000</td>
<td>-$15,844,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>-$731,762</td>
<td>-$3,403,023</td>
<td>-$4,799,224</td>
<td>-$5,636,793</td>
<td>-$6,184,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th Percentile</td>
<td>-$6,503,458</td>
<td>-$8,864,896</td>
<td>-$9,530,695</td>
<td>-$10,036,310</td>
<td>-$10,262,460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median</td>
<td>-$2,792,405</td>
<td>-$4,534,838</td>
<td>-$5,456,075</td>
<td>-$6,028,800</td>
<td>-$6,418,760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95th Percentile</td>
<td>$11,741,790</td>
<td>$6,576,034</td>
<td>$2,809,655</td>
<td>$413,554</td>
<td>-$1,163,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Burnsville’s Heart of the City project, a mixed-use commercial and residential development on Nicollet Avenue, is being constructed through the use of TIF funds.
that may have a small chance of financial reward.

Third, even if a TIF project produces net financial gains in the long run, in the near term TIF will likely cause negative financial effects. Although projects with positive expected net present values should be implemented, a policy of widespread use of TIF may be unsustainable from a financial standpoint. The ultimate question for elected local officials is whether TIF projects expected to have long-term positive financial effects can be implemented in the face of other short-term budget demands. Those seeking to justify the use of TIF on the basis of nonfinancial rewards should be prepared to address how these rewards might offset the financial losses from the use of the particular incentive.

Finally, we can now say a bit more about those circumstances that will lead to a profitable project from the local government’s perspective. These circumstances include low probability of development without TIF and a short certification period.

As this study demonstrates, local governments face significant financial risks when they implement TIF projects, but that they can potentially reap financial rewards. Currently TIF is an open policy option for community and economic development in most states, and it will likely remain so for many years to come. However, much further research is necessary to provide context on the decision to use TIF.

Epilogue: Is There a Future for TIF in Minnesota?

During the 2001 legislative session (after the bulk of the research for this article was complete), the Minnesota State Legislature proposed and the governor signed a bill changing the way that primary education is funded in the state. The principal effect of the bill was to “remove” the basic general education levy from the local government property tax. An unintended consequence of this change was to remove one significant financial participant from tax increment districts (before the changes, school district levies constituted an average 34% of the local property tax levy).

Many observers have speculated that this change has struck the death knell for TIF in Minnesota. Previously, cities and counties wanting to use TIF shared the burden of financing TIF with school districts, each providing about one-third of the financial value. Now with the majority of school district finances coming from sources other than the local property tax, cities and counties will have to participate with nearly all of the necessary revenues for the project. Other economic development tools—such as the property tax abatement incentive authorized by the Minnesota legislature in 1997 (Minnesota Statutes 2001, §469.1813)—may be more attractive for local governments.

Education finance reform may well have struck a blow to the use of TIF in Minnesota, but there are at least a couple of ways that local governments can still employ TIF. First, a local government could simply enlarge the district that uses the financing tool. A district with a larger geographic area would allow a jurisdiction to capture more resources to use for the project. Second, although property taxes are currently the only authorized source of tax increment funding in Minnesota, it is neither inconceivable nor unprecedented for local governments to use other tax increments to finance economic redevelopment. For the moment, TIF in Minnesota may not be dead, but only in hiatus.

Kenneth A. Kriz is assistant professor of public finance at the School of Public Administration, University of Nebraska at Omaha. He was assistant professor of public and nonprofit management at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the time the research for this article was undertaken. His current research focuses on municipal debt management, economic development policy, and transportation finance, along with the use of alternative estimation techniques in public finance. He teaches courses in public sector economics, public finance, and statistical analysis.

The research upon which this article is based was supported in part through a New Initiative grant from CURA. These grants support projects that are initiated by faculty, community organizations, government agencies, or students and that are not appropriate for consideration under another CURA program. For full results of this research project, see Kenneth A. Kriz, “The Effect of Tax Increment Finance on Local Government Financial Condition.” Municipal Finance Journal 22 (2001): 41–64.

Many local governments, counties, and state agencies would like access to up-to-date parcel maps to assist with engineering work, tax assessment, zoning, environmental inventories, and a variety of other applications. Having the maps in digital form is particularly desirable because it permits rapid updating, allows other data layers to be added, and facilitates GIS applications like producing letters addressed to adjacent property owners. Until recently, no one had a good idea which counties maintained digital parcel data, which hampered the sharing of such data and resulted in unnecessary duplication of effort and inconsistency among data sets. A recent CURA project has changed all that.

The Statewide Parcel Data Inventory Research Project is an ongoing effort to track which Minnesota counties maintain digital parcel data. The inventory identified existing digital parcel systems across Minnesota and compiled information on the method of parcel data development, the frequency of maintenance, data development standards and distribution practices, key contacts for acquiring data, remonumentation efforts, and more. Sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the project was conducted in cooperation with CURA, which acted as the lead research organization, and the University of Minnesota’s Center for Transportation Studies (CTS), which administered the research project. Data was collected and organized by Pro-West & Associates, Inc.

Figure 1 provides an overview of digital data capacity among Minnesota counties based on the inventory. Of the 86 counties in the state that responded to the survey, 54 (63%) are creating digital parcel maps. In well over half of those counties (33 of 54), parcel work is nearing completion. Many of the remaining 21 counties are in the process of initiating digital parcel mapping projects. Most of the 32 nondigital counties are small and rural. Detailed survey results, including maps with summary data for 22 additional questions in the survey, are available for each county at http://rocky.dot.state.mn.us/SPMI/.

In addition to reducing redundant efforts in parcel data development among counties, cities, and state agencies, the inventory is intended to foster improved working relationships and increased knowledge exchange. It is also hoped that the project will facilitate increased uniformity of data, standardized information, improved methods of data access, automated data exchange, and sharing of best practices.

The inventory is current through early 2003. Plans are in place to update the inventory on an annual basis, ideally by having government agencies update their own digital parcel development status information online. The current Web version of the inventory is in portable document format (PDF) and not amenable to this approach. If you identify errors or omissions in the current version that need to be corrected, however, contact Jay Krafthefer at MnDOT at jay.krafthefer@dot.state.mn.us.

![Figure 1. Digital Parcel Map Data Capacity among Minnesota Counties, 2003](http://rocky.dot.state.mn.us/SPMI/.

---

**Project Update:**

**Statewide Digital Parcel Map Inventory**

In addition to reducing redundant efforts in parcel data development among counties, cities, and state agencies, the inventory is intended to foster improved working relationships and increased knowledge exchange. It is also hoped that the project will facilitate increased uniformity of data, standardized information, improved methods of data access, automated data exchange, and sharing of best practices.

The inventory is current through early 2003. Plans are in place to update the inventory on an annual basis, ideally by having government agencies update their own digital parcel development status information online. The current Web version of the inventory is in portable document format (PDF) and not amenable to this approach. If you identify errors or omissions in the current version that need to be corrected, however, contact Jay Krafthefer at MnDOT at jay.krafthefer@dot.state.mn.us.
Perceptions of the Environmental Review Process in Minnesota

by Beth A. Anderson and Terence H. Cooper

The Minnesota Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) of 1973 established a process for reviewing impacts of major public and private development projects. Companion legislation created the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board, which was authorized to determine which proposed projects would be subjected to an environmental impact statement (EIS) to assess their potential environmental effects.

During the 1980s, the Environmental Quality Board’s powers were decentralized and decision-making authority regarding the necessity of an EIS was given to the responsible governmental unit—generally a city, county, or state agency. To aid the responsible governmental unit in determining if a proposed development project requires an EIS, the Environmental Quality Board implemented the environmental assessment worksheet (EAW), an information-gathering tool intended to help the responsible governmental unit assess the environmental impacts of proposed development projects and determine if they have the potential for significant environmental effects.

Mandatory EAWs are required throughout the state of Minnesota for certain development projects. Responsible governmental unit personnel who complete EAWs have various backgrounds, education levels, and degrees of understanding of the environmental assessment process. In addition, political pressures and economic incentives may influence a responsible governmental unit’s decision about whether or not to require an EAW for a project and whether or not the project poses significant environmental impacts that suggest the need for an EIS.

Few comprehensive assessments have been conducted regarding the perceptions of individuals who read, write, collect data for, or comment on EAWs. A 1994 study by the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy reviewed a sample of 77 EAWs in Minnesota written between 1990 and 1992. The study found that mandatory EAWs are mandatory for some development projects in Minnesota, including the construction of animal feedlot facilities with a capacity of 1,000 animal units or more. In other cases, the responsible governmental unit determines whether or not to require an EAW.
review thresholds do not exist for many types of development projects, that few EAWs lead to an EIS, and that responsible governmental units are often reluctant to order an EIS even if the project has the potential for significant environmental effects. The authors recommended that mandatory review thresholds be reviewed biannually and that EAWs include analysis of a range of alternatives to the proposed project. In 2000, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency conducted a series of citizen focus groups to document public perception of the current environmental review process. Of the 65 citizen participants, most felt that public participation in the environmental review process is limited by the lack of information available to citizens, that there should be an instrument between the EAW and the EIS, that analysis of alternatives to proposed projects would be beneficial to the EAW process, and that clarification of technical terms would be useful. Finally, during the summer of 2000, the Environmental Quality Board brought together key stakeholders to review and offer suggestions for improving the environmental review process in Minnesota. Participants expressed concern that the EAW is insufficient for evaluating project impacts and that no one really knows what constitutes a “complete” EAW. Others noted that there are limited checks and balances to ensure that the responsible governmental units do their job and that environmental review often is used as a tool to derail development projects.

The objective of the study on which this article is based was to analyze the perceptions of individuals in the public and private sectors who read, write, collect data for, or comment on EAWs, and assess how their perceptions affect the environmental review process. Because these individuals are ultimately responsible for implementing Minnesota Environmental Policy Act mandates, understanding their perceptions of and concerns about the environmental review process is important to evaluating the consistency and effectiveness of the process across the state. This project was partially funded by a grant from CURA's Faculty Interactive Research Program, with additional funding from the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate at the University of Minnesota.

Study Methodology

This study involved the use of three written questionnaires, as well as interviews with several key respondents and observations of a meeting of the Environmental Quality Board's Special Advisory Committee. The objective of Questionnaire One was to collect data on the amount of time individuals are involved with the EAW process, what their understanding of the process is, and how they feel about the process. Questionnaire One was sent to local governments in cities with populations greater than 5,000 (a total of 126), county governments (a total of 87), state government agencies (a total of 15), and environmental consulting firms (a total of 62). Of the 290 questionnaires distributed, 128 were returned for a response rate of 44%.

Respondents to Questionnaire One were asked if they would be interested in further participation in the study, and a total of 70 expressed interest. The objective of Questionnaire Two was to ask more specific process questions about the Environmental Quality Board, about whether or not the public is well informed of development projects, and about the petition process that is used by the public to initiate the EAW review process. In addition, because Questionnaire One did not ask if the respondents were from city government, county government, state agencies, or environmental consulting firms, Questionnaire Two asked such questions to aid in interpretation of responses across these stakeholder groups. Of the 70 participants who were sent Questionnaire Two, 53 responded for a response rate of 76%.

Personal interviews were conducted with six respondents to Questionnaire Two to gather more in-depth qualitative data, such as perceptions of the effectiveness of the EAW process. Four of these individuals were from state government, one was from local government, and one was from an environmental consulting firm. Because the majority of respondents to Questionnaire Two represented local units of government, more individuals from state government were chosen for personal interviews to balance out the number from local and county governments. There also was a need to limit the amount of travel required to conduct the interviews and individuals from state government were more accessible.

In 2002, we observed several Special Advisory Committee meetings held by the Environmental Quality Board. The purpose of the Special Advisory Committee—members of which include developers, law firms, and environmental groups that have been involved in the EAW process—was to provide feedback to the board concerning the performance of the environmental review process. We obtained information for our study from notes we took during the meetings, as well as from minutes and audiotapes of the meetings. Questionnaire Three, which was created to gather additional data on the EAW process from members of the Special Advisory Committee, consisted of the same questions asked during the personal interviews. Of the 11 members of the Special Advisory Committee who were asked to complete the questionnaire, 6 returned it for a response rate of 55%.

Results

Questionnaire One. Of the 128 respondents to the first questionnaire, 90% reported that they had earned a bachelor’s or master’s degree, and 72.5% said they had been employed in the environmental field for more than 10 years. The majority were male (83.7%) and the average age was 45.3 years.

When asked what percentage of their work time involves EAWs and how long they have worked with EAWs, the vast majority of respondents (81.3%) indicated they spend less than 10% of their total work time with EAWs, and most (59.8%) have less than 10 years of experience working with EAWs. When asked if working with EAWs is a positive part of their job, 58.2% answered yes. When asked why, the most common reason was that the EAW process gives them more detailed information about development projects and helps to assess the impact of development on the natural environment. Among those who responded no (41.8%), the most common reason was that the review
process and its purpose are not well understood by the public, and that the process as a whole is difficult to understand, follow, and carry out.

**Questionnaire Two.** Of the 53 respondents to Questionnaire Two, 76% reported that they work in local or county government, 15.1% in state government, and 9.4% in private industry. More than 90% of the respondents reported that they have a bachelor's or master's degree, and 78.8% said they have been employed in the environmental field for more than 10 years. Roughly 85% of respondents were male and the average age of respondents was 48.3 years.

When asked whether they felt Environmental Quality Board oversight of responsible governmental unit decisions should be reestablished in some form, nearly three-fourths (72.9%) answered no. The main reason they gave was that responsible governmental units are doing a good job by themselves and therefore do not require oversight. As one respondent stated, “Local units of government are sufficiently sophisticated to perform environmental review.” Conversely, those who believed oversight should be reestablished thought that this would create greater consistency in how the EAW process works. One such respondent commented that oversight is needed because “there are [responsible governmental units] doing lousy work and not meeting rule requirements with no repercussions.”

Respondents were asked whether they felt the general public is adequately informed about development projects in the area. Nearly three-fourths (74%) said yes. Those who believed that the public is not being adequately informed indicated that information about projects is not readily available to the public. One respondent noted that “in some cases the review documents are hurriedly prepared by developers and there is no desire by them to involve the public.”

When asked if they feel the petition process available to the public to initiate an EAW is an important part of the EAW process, the majority of respondents (60.8%) said yes, with many noting that it is an important vehicle for public access in development decisions. However, many respondents also noted that this tool was often used by the public to delay or stop development projects. As one respondent explained, “The petition process is an important tool, however, petitioners should be aware that an EAW is not a pass or fail exercise—it is best used to generate accurate information to be used by decision makers.” Among those respondents who feel the petition process is not an important part of the EAW process, many indicated they feel this way because the process is being used by the public to delay or stop development projects. One such respondent noted, “It is a public not-in-my-backyard (NIMBY) tool, not an environmental awareness tool.”

**Personal Interviews and Questionnaire Three.** Personal interviews were conducted with six individuals who responded to Questionnaire Two and six members of the Special Advisory Committee responded to Questionnaire Three. Because the questions asked in the personal interviews and on Questionnaire Three were the same, responses from both have been combined in this section. The 12 respondents included 4 state agency staff members, 3 environmental lawyers, 2 local or county government staff members, 2 nonprofit environmental organization representatives, and 1 environmental consulting firm staff member.

When asked whether they thought the EAW process is an effective screening device to determine the need for an EIS, one respondent stated, “The EAW is effective but it has flaws. It isn’t a perfect process, but I think it can be effective.” Another commented,

> It can be. As a worksheet it is less useful. As a real assessment with discussion of alternatives and a more thorough analysis than questions and answers, it would serve the purpose.

A few respondents noted that the way the EAW is practiced today differs from the purpose delineated in the state statute; consequently, they questioned how effective the EAW is as a screening device. One noted,

> The problem in stating that it is an effective screening device is that the EAW purpose is different today than what the law intended it to be. The question [is]: is the EAW process effective today; not particularly, in the sense that few EAWs result in an EIS.

Respondents were asked, “If the legislature decided to abolish the Minnesota EAW process, could local and state responsible governmental units assess the need for determining if the project will have a significant impact on the environment without the tool of an EAW? Why or why not?” The majority of respondents said it is unlikely that responsible governmental units would be able to assess the impacts of projects without the EAW process and that another tool would have to replace the EAW. One stated, “No, not all [responsible governmental units] look at the issues comprehensively and [they] don’t understand the technical environmental issues, and therefore, they should not be making the decision of whether or not the project should go forward to an EIS.” A similar answer was provided by another respondent, who concluded,

> No, they do not have the expertise or the statewide view [of the] law. Environmental damage impacts more than just a local agency. Quality, consistency, cumulative analysis, and watershed impacts can be significant.

Another respondent disagreed, however, saying,

> Yes, because sufficient experience with the process or comparable experience through zoning and planning is there. However, smaller RGUs [responsible governmental units] may be more challenged. Regardless of size, the key is whether resources are committed to the effort.

In general, respondents noted that responsible governmental units can differ in terms of background and experience, and therefore assessment capability would differ greatly without the tool of the EAW.

**Summary of Results.** This section briefly summarizes responses across all questionnaires and interviews.

**Experience and the Environmental Assessment Worksheet.** Overall, the majority of respondents to all the questionnaires and personal interviews felt that the EAW is a positive process because it generates real information about development projects. However, some noted that the EAW is time consuming and complicated to understand. Those respondents who said the process is negative tend to work in local units of government and are involved in the process infrequently. Whether
respondents ultimately felt that the EAW process is positive or negative and despite whatever difficulties they might have previously encountered with the process, nearly all believed that their understanding of the process is adequate.

Public Involvement. Many respondents felt that the petition process is an important component of the EAW process because it is an avenue for public involvement. However, many criticized the process because it is being abused by citizens to delay or stop project development. The majority of respondents to Questionnaire Two felt that the public is adequately informed about development projects. However, personal interview participants and Special Advisory Committee respondents to Questionnaire Three believed that public involvement in the EAW process is limited.

Responsible Governmental Unit Consistency. The respondents to Questionnaire Two said that responsible governmental units are performing their job effectively. However, concerns were raised about inconsistency among responsible governmental units based on the personal interviews and the responses of Special Advisory Committee members. A suggestion made in the personal interviews and Special Advisory Committee questionnaire was that responsible governmental unit personnel should attend Environmental Quality Board workshops to learn about the EAW process and its purpose and to earn certification for a fixed period of time. This, it was believed, would ensure understanding of the process and encourage sound environmental decisions.

Education. Respondents believed that the Environmental Quality Board needs to be the leader in educating all parties about the environmental review process to ensure efficiency, consistency, and positive feelings about the process. One suggestion made by many respondents is providing more education about the environmental review process to all parties involved. In addition, some respondents noted that the Environmental Quality Board Web site should be more user-friendly and helpful. For example, a list of frequently asked questions should be posted on the site and links should be provided to additional resources.

Conclusions

The Environmental Assessment Worksheet process is an effective tool to ensure that better policy decisions are made about projects that have the potential to affect Minnesota’s environment. However, the process is neither as efficient nor as effective as it could be. Policy needs to adapt to the times and it is time for the policy backing the EAW process to change. Policy makers must recognize that the purpose of the EAW as intended by state statute is not being fulfilled. The EAW has become a full-fledged tool for documenting environmental impacts rather than, as intended by statute, “a brief document prepared in worksheet format which is designed to rapidly assess the environmental effects which may be associated with a proposed project” (Minnesota Rules 4410.1000, Subd. 1). The statute ought to reflect this change in how the EAW process is currently practiced. As one respondent commented, “The state needs to decide what the EAW is going to be for. Are we going to do things to make it a screening device the statute now says it is or are we going to give up on it being a screening device and adapt it so it is a review in itself?” This is the question policy makers need to answer.

Responding to the complexity issue raised by our research will require better education of all participants in the EAW process. The Environmental Quality Board Web site should include information to assist EAW preparers, aid citizens who wish to participate in the EAW review process, and educate all participants of the importance of environmental review for development projects. Providing easy access to information that addresses the questions most frequently asked by EAW preparers can significantly reduce confusion about the environmental review process. When citizens have a better understanding of their role in public participation, they will be less likely to participate in the process simply to delay a project. Education of developers and responsible governmental units would also help to counter their perception that public participation only stalls worthy projects. Finally, information in the press on the value and importance of environmental review would help to improve the overall image of the EAW process.

The Minnesota Environmental Policy Act was written during a time when polluted rivers were catching fire and oil was being spilled on pristine beaches. During the last 30 years, the ability of policy makers to understand the direct and indirect impacts of development projects and the complexities of environmental effects has increased substantially. Does the policy backing the EAW process reflect the complexity of environmental impacts? An EAW is intended to look only at a finite parcel of land at one moment in time. Ironically, however, the EAW process itself has moved away from a brief assessment of environmental effects to a more substantive review. This is likely due both to increased knowledge about the delicate environmental web and to the fear of moving on to the EIS process, which is more costly and time consuming. Regardless of the reason, state policy needs to reflect this change in emphasis.
Acknowledging that the EAW has evolved into a substantive review document would make clearer to participants the purpose of the process and help to ensure that the significant environmental effects of a proposed development project are assessed completely and accurately.

Beth A. Anderson was a graduate research assistant in the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate at the University of Minnesota with a master of science degree in soil science in fall 2002, and has applied to be a volunteer for the Peace Corps in agriculture.

Terence H. Cooper is a Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor in the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate at the University of Minnesota. This project was partially funded by a grant from CURA’s Faculty Interactive Research Program, with additional funding from the Department of Soil, Water, and Climate at the University of Minnesota. The Faculty Interactive Research Program at CURA was created to encourage University faculty to carry out research projects that involve significant issues of public policy for the state and that include interaction with community groups, agencies, or organizations in Minnesota. These grants are available to regular faculty members at the University of Minnesota and are awarded annually on a competitive basis.

2000 Population Change Maps

The state of Minnesota population change maps on pages 14 and 15 are based on 2000 U.S. Census data, and show percentage change and absolute change in population in the state from 1990 to 2000. The percentage change (shaded) map shows data at the minor civil division level, which includes cities, townships, and unorganized territory). Calculations were made after accounting for boundary changes that occurred during the 1990s. The absolute change (dot) map shows growth and loss of population across the state. Each dot represents approximately 50 people. Calculations of growth or loss were made at the census tract level. Outside of the Twin Cities area, dot locations were adjusted to the block level. Some manual adjustments were made to remove dots from lakes, parks, and other public lands or to move them closer to highways and lakes. In more remote areas of the state, dots may summarize a population scattered across a wide geographic area.

We are pleased to announce that poster-sized wall map versions (17 by 22 inches) of these maps are being created through a joint effort of CURA, the Department of Administration (Minnesota State Demographic and Land Management Information Centers), and the Cartography Lab in the University of Minnesota’s Department of Geography. The wall map versions will be printed in four-color to improve legibility and will include major water features and selected major roads and highways. Ordering information for wall maps will be posted on CURA’s Web site at http://www.cura.umn.edu once the maps are available, and will also be included in the Fall 2003 issue of the CURA Reporter.

19th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis

The 19th Annual Conference on Policy Analysis will be held Tuesday, October 21, 2003, at the Earle Brown Continuing Education Center on the University of Minnesota St. Paul campus. The theme of this year’s conference is “Policy Analysis for the Challenges Ahead.” Sponsored by the Economic Resource Group, the conference provides an opportunity for analysts and policy makers to explore timely topics that reflect the importance of analysis in formulating policy decisions in government. For more information, visit www.cce.umn.edu/government/policyanalysis.
Percentage Change in Minnesota Population, 1990–2000

Absolute Change in Minnesota Population, 1990–2000

One dot represents 50 persons gained
One dot represents 50 persons lost
The Community Assistantship Program: Connecting the University with Greater Minnesota

by Monica Siems

This fall, CURA’s Community Assistantship Program (CAP) begins its sixth year placing University of Minnesota students in research assistantships with community-based organizations throughout Greater Minnesota. The achievement of five years in operation and the completion of nearly 120 applied research projects throughout the state (Figure 1) provide an opportune moment to reflect on CAP’s history, mission, successes, and future challenges.

Statements from two former participants in CAP projects summarize the impact of this small program: “The University is well-equipped to provide technical help and formulate ideas and solutions to community development challenges,” but “without the infrastructure of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs and the CAP program, I don’t think the goal of having an engaged university is possible.”

The latter statement is from Ann Ziebarth, a University of Minnesota faculty member who served as a consultant to the community-based organization Centro Campesino and as a mentor/supervisor to a University graduate student who worked on a housing study for the organization.1 Reflecting on her experience with CAP, Ziebarth said, “How else would a grassroots organization of migrant farmworkers in south-central Minnesota have found me, a faculty member interested in rural housing issues, in the Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel within the College of Human Ecology?” Ziebarth’s project illustrates the valuable linking function CAP

1 For copies of reports generated from any CAP project cited in this article, contact Monica Siems at 612-626-7537 or siems005@umn.edu.
performs by connecting communities and the University. Although the premise behind CAP is simple—connect communities that need low-cost research assistance with University resources that can help them achieve their goals—the process can be quite complicated given both the University’s size and complexity, and the number and variety of community-based organizations throughout the state.

How CAP Works

All CAP projects are initiated by communities. Three times per year, CAP issues a request for applications from interested community organizations in Greater Minnesota. Deadlines are chosen to allow program staff enough time to review proposals, recruit students, and engage in fundraising before the beginning of each academic term or summer session when projects typically begin. The program tries to reach as many community-based organizations as possible by distributing the call for applications to a wide variety of recipients via e-mail, with a request that they share the message with other potential applicants. After CAP receives completed applications, a committee composed of University faculty and community representatives from throughout the state reviews the proposed projects based on several criteria: (1) the feasibility of the project being completed by a student in a limited amount of time (typically one semester or during the summer), (2) the value of the project in terms of providing a meaningful learning opportunity for a student, and (3) the significance of the project in terms of helping the community achieve its goals. The committee also determines whether the project is more appropriate for a graduate or an undergraduate student, as well as how many hours it would likely require.

Once projects are approved by the committee, funds must be raised to cover the costs of a student’s salary and benefits (health insurance and tuition remission for graduate students). To achieve this goal, CAP relies on a substantial pool of funds that CAP can use to leverage additional support for projects. The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships and the Initiative Funds are major contributors to projects within their geographic regions, and other community foundations or development organizations are contacted on a project-by-project basis when a project appears to match their goals. In addition, CAP partners with the University of Minnesota Extension Service and colleges at the University whose students are frequently placed in CAP projects. Finally, many participating communities contribute funds toward the costs of the project.

These are rather labor-intensive fundraising methods. Funding for projects is often shared among many different partners. As a result, CAP is able to support many more projects than it could if it limited itself to those it could fully fund through existing grant monies. This strategy is also effective during tight fiscal times. During the summer of 2003, for example, CAP received an unprecedented 22 applications from communities. By requesting smaller sums of money from more funders, CAP ultimately was able to fund 18 (82%) of these projects, more than might be expected given current economic circumstances.

Once funding for a project is secured, a position description for the project is posted on University-wide student job boards and relevant college and department Web sites. Interested students complete and submit an application, which is sent to the CAP office for tracking and is then forwarded to the community organization. The organization is responsible for creating a search committee, reviewing applications, interviewing selected candidates, and choosing which student to hire. The depth of the University’s talent pool becomes clear to many community organizations at this point in the process. Pat Stumme, director of the Minnesota Extension Service for Freeborn County and the key contact for a CAP project with the Freeborn County Restorative Justice program, explains, “We had abundant applicants—it was almost overwhelming, but it allowed us to sift through to find someone who met our needs.” The student ultimately hired for the project, Nadja Hogg, had experience in research methods such as survey design and interviewing, and as a student in the dual-degree Master of Social Work/Master of Public Policy
program at the University, was “up to speed with the focus of the program.” Hogg also had what Stumme calls a “get-to-it” personality; by the time she arrived for her first day of work, Hogg had already begun a literature review on restorative justice to prepare herself for the project. Once the community organization selects a student, he or she is hired through the University’s payroll system, a work plan is drafted by the student and his or her community supervisor, and the project begins.

**What CAP Does**

One of the most remarkable things about the Community Assistantship Program is that there are few topics related to community development that a CAP project has not considered at one time or another. When the program discovers new topics, it welcomes project proposals that engage them. A recent breakdown of 104 CAP projects undertaken from 1999 to 2002 illustrates CAP’s engagement in a wide variety of topic areas (Figure 3).

Not surprisingly, CAP’s focus on serving Greater Minnesota communities has led to a slight concentration of efforts on issues related to the environment, including agriculture and food systems, forestry, natural resources, and tourism and recreation. The frequency of projects in these topic areas reflects CAP’s focus on serving the needs of its rural constituency. Much of the economic opportunity in rural Minnesota depends on the state’s considerable natural resource base—the soil, water, trees, and prairies that support agriculture, forestry, and tourism businesses and which in turn provide a livelihood for main street business owners who depend in large part on individuals and families who earn their living from the land. Thus, many communities request assistance from CAP for projects that combine agriculture, natural resources, or tourism with economic development. For example, one CAP project employed Petr Bilek, a student from the University’s Carlson School of Management, who surveyed public and private food services in southeastern Minnesota to see what might influence these organizations to buy foods produced locally rather than buying from traditional wholesalers. This study was intended to raise awareness about the issue of preserving local food sources and ways of life to help maintain local communities. Bilek analyzed the survey results and found that the major concerns of food purchasers in the region included consistency in quality and supply, especially with regard to health standards and year-round supplies of seasonal products such as vegetables, and the cost of obtaining food locally as opposed to through their current suppliers. This information helped producers understand what kinds of products and distribution systems they should develop to appeal to these institutional food purchasers and contributed to the establishment of the Southeast Minnesota Food Network, which now provides one-stop ordering of locally produced foods for restaurants, buying clubs, food cooperatives, grocers, and institutions.

The Woodlands Cooperative, an organization of woodland owners in east-central Minnesota, engaged College of Natural Resources graduate student Dennis Smith in a CAP project to assess landowner interest in joining the co-op and to identify resources for co-op members. Smith created a database of loggers who offer sustainable methods of logging and related services such as thinning and spraying. This database will help woodland owners select forest service providers who can ensure that minimal damage is done to the woodlands when timber is harvested and that the retail value of the wood harvested is maximized. Smith also researched potential outlets for certified sustainably produced wood products. In another project, Jianchong Zhu, a student in the College of Liberal Arts, surveyed Rockford

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 2. Major Partners of the Community Assistantship Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Entities that help publicize CAP assistantship opportunities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Types of entities that have received CAP research assistance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major providers of financial support for CAP</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Rural Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota State Arts Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Office of Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Sustainable Communities Network (MnSCN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota Extension Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous CAP participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Denotes current funding sources for the Community Assistantship Program.
residents to determine their desires for businesses and services in the downtown area. City officials are using the results of this survey to shape plans for a main street revitalization project, which they are pursuing with the help of redevelopment grants. A review and analysis of literature on community-based tourism conducted for the Zippel Bay Citizens’ Group by Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs student Kelly McPeek helped the group formulate plans to increase tourism-based economic opportunities for residents in the Lake of the Woods region while protecting the assets that bring visitors to the region.

Rural communities face other issues and challenges that are not as directly related to agriculture, natural resources, or tourism, and CAP has increasingly found itself engaged in areas such as healthcare and human services. Past CAP projects have dealt with such topics as the cost of educating healthcare service-provider employees, the effectiveness of out-of-home placements and residential treatment for children, and the cost effectiveness of a restorative justice program. Applications for studies like these, which help local authorities make wise decisions about how to invest their resources, are being received by CAP with increasing frequency during this time of substantial cuts in Local Government Assistance funds. During this past summer, CAP has placed students with the public health or community health services of two county consortia (Quin County, consisting of Kittson, Roseau, Marshall, Pennington, and Red Lake in northwestern Minnesota; and Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, and Pipestone counties in southwestern Minnesota) to assist in the development of community health services plans mandated by the Minnesota Department of Health. Among the students’ duties in these projects will be identifying and prioritizing the greatest public health needs to help the agencies direct their resources appropriately during the next four years.

Finally, students hired through CAP have conducted research in areas of community development or quality of life enhancement that are less tangible, yet still important to rural communities. During the past five years, CAP has received and supported research requests from historical societies and other organizations interested in documenting and preserving the experiences of community residents, and has recently begun receiving requests for assistance on research relating to the development and support of arts programs for rural communities. There also has been a steady demand for research on the needs of the increasingly diverse populations of many rural communities and on how communities are responding to increased diversity in general.

What CAP Accomplishes
Community Assistantship Program staff are confident that the program succeeds in achieving its goals of providing an important service to communities and valuable opportunities to students. Evaluation data gathered at the end of CAP projects support this assertion, with 100% of 65 community supervisors who responded to an evaluation questionnaire saying they would recommend CAP to a colleague and 92% of the 54 students who responded saying they would recommend the program to a friend. In addition, 96% of supervisors report being satisfied with the performance of their CAP student and 98%
characterize the information or product they received from the student as “useful” or “very useful.”

Helping Communities to Achieve Their Goals. The Community Assistantship Program also tries to assess in more detail the benefits it provides to communities, students, and faculty involved in projects. For the community, the major question is: What gets done with the research conducted by the CAP student after the project term ends? Although staff limitations prevent extensive follow-up with communities, anecdotal evidence gathered over the years provides encouraging examples of CAP’s impact. For the Freeborn County Restorative Justice Program, for instance, Pat Stumme made it clear that there was “no way” the research on the program’s cost effectiveness could have happened without CAP. The program’s staff do not have the time to conduct such research which, Stumme points out, is a catch-22: “The work that would sustain us, we don’t have time to do.” Student assistant Nadja Hogg’s research showed an average cost of $325.50 per case in the restorative justice program, as compared to a cost of $1,006.64 per case in the traditional court system, as well as a significant difference in recidivism costs ($110,730.40 for traditional court cases versus $4,026.56 in the restorative justice program). The county attorney’s office, which oversees the restorative justice program, plans to present Hogg’s work to the Freeborn County Board and hopes that it will help make the case that the restorative justice coordinator should become a permanent county staff position (it is currently funded entirely by grants). Stumme notes that the impact of the restorative justice program can’t be measured in financial terms alone. “This work not only saves county money, it also makes a difference in [youth offenders’] lives. How do we assess that?” Because the intangible impacts of community programs are often so hard to assess, Stumme and others hope that Nadja Hogg’s research on the cost savings achieved by the program will help sway county commissioners when they consider the county’s overall corrections budget.

Ann Ziebarth, the faculty member who assisted with Centro Campesino’s Migrant Worker Housing Study, also calls attention to the intangible benefits that can result from CAP projects. When asked what impacts the project has had on the migrant worker community, Ziebarth replied, “I wish I could say that we have built 15, 30, 100 units of housing; that we’re digging a hole, or that people are moving in.” She acknowledges that this goal hasn’t been achieved yet, but explains, “if [Centro Campesino] ultimately builds housing units, the project will have been a real success. But if they are unable to build housing in five years, it’s still a success,” in part because of the increased awareness of the issue of housing for migrant workers that has resulted from CURA’s dissemination of the project results. Through CURA, Centro Campesino also was able to partner with Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER), which arranged to have the project report translated into Spanish and distributed through their Web site. The project was publicized through a press conference held in Faribault and has been covered by Minnesota Public Radio and the Minneapolis Star Tribune. As a result, Ziebarth says, the community of migrant workers is feeling more empowered and is actively moving toward its goal of building cooperatively owned housing for migrant workers in key communities in southeastern and south-central Minnesota. Ziebarth also notes that Centro Campesino’s study is having an impact in the policy realm, with the Farmers Home Administration expressing a new willingness to talk about cooperative housing models, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) broadening its idea of farm work from fieldwork only to include processing, and the Housing Assistance Council considering the differences between year-round employment in the meat processing industry and the intense seasonal nature of vegetable packs.

Providing Faculty the Opportunity to Broaden Their Research Horizons. Ziebarth also serves as a great example of how the CAP program can impact faculty, just as faculty can benefit community organizations by sharing their expertise. Ziebarth says that she has long been involved in rural housing issues and has been interested in migrant housing, but has not been able to conduct research on this topic because she doesn’t speak Spanish and because the migrant community is tight-knit and highly mobile. This CAP project gave her the opportunity to connect with the issue and, as a result, has channeled her research agenda in a new direction. She reports that she has presented the study results at three professional conferences to date and has completed a draft manuscript that is under consideration for publication in an academic journal. Ziebarth also has incorporated the study results into her course on rural housing issues and has invited the architectural firm working with Centro Campesino to speak to her.
class. She suggests that many faculty members are probably like her in that they are interested in community-related public policy issues, but don’t have the resources, time, or connections to pursue those issues themselves.

**Providing Students with Enriching Real-World Experiences.** Through their participation in CAP projects, students can also see significant results in their academic and career development. Mesut Akdere, a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development, has presented the results of his CAP-supported study for the Montevideo Cultural Diversity Council at an academic conference and has had a manuscript summarizing the results of his research accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Community Development*. As someone who is preparing for an academic career, Akdere knows that having the opportunity to present and publish a study on which he was the lead researcher significantly enhances his job prospects. Like other CAP participants, Akdere also recognizes the less tangible benefits of community-based research. He explains that he takes pride in the fact that the Montevideo Cultural Diversity Council has implemented his recommendation to include a representative from the Lower Sioux (Dakota) Native American community at Granite Falls, a community the council had wanted to include in its study but had not previously included in its own membership.

Akdere also has shared the results of his applied research projects with classmates and faculty in his college. He returned to CURA this past summer to help assess the impact of graduate research assistants on community development, a project cosponsored by the Graduate and Professional Student Assembly (GAPSA). Akdere will survey and interview past student participants in CAP and in Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR), another CURA program that connects communities in Minnesota (in this case, Minneapolis and St. Paul) with University of Minnesota students and faculty. One missing piece of information program staff hope to gain from this study is a sense of how many CAP research assistants have found that their projects have influenced their career direction and opportunities.

**Helping the University Fulfill Its Land Grant and Outreach Missions.** Many comments gathered by CAP staff informally or through evaluations over the years have pointed out that the very act of connecting University of Minnesota resources to community needs is itself an accomplishment worthy of note. As the statement from Pat Stumme in the introduction to this article suggests, CAP illustrates that the University plays a role in Greater Minnesota. In addition, CAP enhances the University’s reputation for contributing to the public good. But CAP’s networking function goes beyond providing good public relations for the University, as shown by the examples of the Montevideo Cultural Diversity Council and Centro Campesino. The Centro housing project is particularly impressive in the web of connections it has generated. In this particular case, Kathryn Gilje, a University of Minnesota graduate, had previously worked with CURA on immigrant housing issues. Gilje later joined Centro’s staff and applied to CAP for research assistance. Through CAP, she was matched with Jimmy Byun, a graduate student in the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences, and with Ann Ziebarth in the College of Human Ecology. Ziebarth, in turn, was connected with Centro’s contracted architect, who helps her share the project story with her current students, bringing the project full circle.

**Looking Ahead**

As CAP enters its sixth year, program staff have plans that are both simple and ambitious. The program will continue as it has in the past, but it also has room for growth. One of the program’s goals is to increase people’s awareness of CAP and its importance to both the communities of Greater Minnesota and the University. In addition to managing projects, staff are spending increasing amounts of time on public relations and fundraising efforts and on more systematic program assessment. Program co-coordinator Jan Joannides has begun a new initiative with collegiate deans and development directors to set up endowments to which alumni can contribute to support students in their colleges working on community-based research projects. Other new funding sources are continually being sought as major foundation partners see new limits on their giving due to current economic conditions.

Administrative funding for the CAP program—which has been provided over the years by the University of Minnesota’s Rural Development Council, the University central administration, the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, and the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships—remains somewhat uncertain beyond the next few months due to recent budget cuts at the University. However, it is clear that no one wants to see the program go away. Program staff are also exploring institutional partnerships that might help facilitate CAP’s mission, especially with the University of Minnesota Extension Service, which represents the University’s strongest presence in Greater Minnesota and which has staff who have firsthand knowledge of community needs. Many requests for CAP assistance already come from Extension educators submitting applications on behalf of community organizations they work with, and this past summer four projects were used to pilot a new model that links students with Extension educators in the community who can act as their faculty mentors. By building these and other connections within and outside of the University, CAP staff look forward to the next five years and another 120 projects.

**Monica Siems** shares the coordinating duties for the Community Assistantship Program with Jan Joannides. Prior to joining CAP in 2002, she served as the statewide coordinator for the University of Minnesota Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships, and previously worked for the Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture. Siems is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Religious Studies. **Nicole Flis**, a senior in the Carlson School of Management’s marketing program, also contributed to this article. She works as a marketing intern for the CAP program.
Project Awards

To keep our readers up-to-date about CURA projects, each issue of the CURA Reporter features a few capsule descriptions of new projects under way. The projects highlighted in this issue are made possible through CURA’s Faculty Interactive Research Program (FIRP). All six projects involve significant issues of public policy and include active participation with communities, groups, or organizations in Minnesota. These projects represent only a portion of those that will receive support from CURA and its partners during the coming year.

This year there was an unusually large number of exceptional proposals to FIRP, and CURA’s resources were sufficient to cover only four. Fortunately, CURA’s funds were supplemented by generous grants from the Graduate School and the Council on Public Engagement (COPE), providing support for two additional projects. Both CURA and the faculty researchers are grateful to Victor Bloomfield (Dean of the Graduate School) and Professor Edwin Fogelman (Chair of COPE) for their assistance.

■ Baby Space Expansion Project. In 1998, a group of community members, service providers, community program directors, and University faculty collaborated to establish BABY’S SPACE, an educate center in Phillips neighborhood that provides full-day infant–toddler care and parent support services. Based on anecdotal evidence of the center’s success in promoting healthy cognitive and emotional development in children, the model is being expanded to four additional community-based childcare centers in Hennepin County that serve high-risk, impoverished, inner-city infants and toddlers. Terrie Rose (Institute of Child Development) and Amos Deinard (Pediatrics) will evaluate the effectiveness and impact of integrated childcare and family support services on child development, child maltreatment, and family outcomes. With support from Hennepin County and the Bush and McKnight Foundations, the pair will document over time the cognitive and emotional development of children enrolled in the Hennepin County childcare centers in relation to several factors: childcare services, maternal employment, life events, and service level. The study will attempt to determine what prevention and intervention strategies work, with whom, and under what conditions, with the goal of promoting best practices and supporting the creation of policies that provide effective and essential services for very young children and their families.

■ Quality Jobs and Full Employment for Minnesotans. Growth & Justice, the Jobs NOW Coalition, and Project for Pride in Living share a concern with how to facilitate economic growth in Minnesota while ensuring economic justice through jobs that pay a living wage. In an effort to address this issue, Ann Markusen (Urban and Regional Planning Program) will collaborate with the three organizations to investigate a series of central questions on job creation and job quality. Markusen will synthesize the current academic literature and research by think tanks, states, localities, and community groups around the country related to three issues: (1) how to identify and create good jobs and career paths; (2) which economic and workforce development approaches appear to work; and (3) the effectiveness of alternative economic and workforce development strategies, especially when long-term fiscal consequences are taken into account. The research will focus particularly on potential conflicts among the goals of full employment, quality job creation, and fiscal responsibility. The goal of the project is to suggest effective public policy initiatives for workforce development that have broad appeal.

■ Evaluation Capacity-Building in Minnesota’s Nonprofit Agencies. The increasing demand for program evaluation during the past decade has created a dilemma for nongovernmental organizations, school districts, and other nonprofit agencies. On one hand, targeted evaluation data can provide helpful evidence about what is working in an organization and what is not, and such process information can help the organization better fulfill its mission. On the other hand, funding agencies with strict accountability requirements may place nonprofits in the challenging position of showing that money spent has led to desired outcomes, something that is both difficult and costly to measure. Unfortunately, the two types of evaluation information are rarely the same and staff constraints, funding needs, and demands for accountability mean that outcome evaluations typically dominate in nonprofit organizations. Jean A. King (Educational Policy and Administration) will engage in case studies of program evaluation development in several Twin Cities agencies—two social service and two educational—from 1990 to the present, and will use an interactive “democratic deliberative” approach to examine capacity building as a way to address the evaluation dilemma. Through the systematic development of infrastructure and organizational evaluation processes, evaluation capacity-building has the potential to resolve the evaluation dilemma by systematically gathering data for both purposes—process and outcomes—in a timely and cost-effective manner.

■ Subprime Lending and Foreclosure in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Promoting homeownership among low-income, disadvantaged, and underserved groups is a cornerstone of housing policy at national, state, and local levels. However, subprime or “predatory” lending—which includes various types of fraudulent, deceptive, discriminatory, or unfavorable lending practices—can turn homeownership into a financial nightmare, jeopardizing the financial stability of families and entire neighborhoods. Jeff R. Crump (Housing Studies Program, Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel) will examine the causes and consequences of subprime lending in the Twin Cities. Three main questions will be addressed: (1) What is the spatial distribution of subprime loans in the Twin Cities? (2) How do the characteristics of lenders, borrowers, and neighborhoods explain the spatial distribution of subprime lending? (3) What is the relationship between subprime lending and foreclosures in the Twin Cities? Data will be jointly gathered with the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, and the study will include several community partners active on housing issues. The study will suggest public policies that might address subprime lending.

■ Persistence of Antibiotics in Minnesota Surface Waters. There is growing concern about the release of antibiotic compounds into aquatic environments because of their potential to damage ecosystems and to breed
antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Recently antibiotics have been identified as pollutants in Minnesota surface waters. Information regarding the fate of antibiotics in the environment is key to risk assessment and to evaluating the need for improved water treatment processes. Working with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Metropolitan Council Environmental Services, and the United States Geological Survey, William Arnold (Civil Engineering) will investigate antibiotic degradation rates and mechanisms in surface waters through a combination of laboratory and field experiments. These community partners are responsible for the introduction and monitoring of antibiotics in Minnesota waters and may play future roles in enforcement of regulations. This research will develop experimental protocols for determining the environmental persistence of antibiotics and provide information valuable to determining the need and extent of potential regulations.

- **Lifestyle Choices and Land-Use Transportation Policy.** Traffic congestion and urban sprawl are pressing issues in many metropolitan areas in the United States, including the Twin Cities. In the Twin Cities metro area, the Metropolitan Council has supported smart growth design and other planning initiatives to reduce auto reliance and decrease congestion. However, the ability of using land-use policy to affect travel is largely unknown because existing research has not adequately considered the effect of household lifestyles and preferences on travel decisions. Kevin J. Krizek (Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs) will work with planners from the Metropolitan Council and Metro Transit to analyze the 2001 Twin Cities Travel Behavior Inventory dataset. Traditionally these data are used to forecast regional transportation demands. Krizek will attempt to identify different lifestyles of households (combinations of household choices of residential location, work status and location, vehicle ownership, and daily activity and travel scheduling). Careful attention to how lifestyle decisions unfold and the role that attitudinal preferences play may help future transportation planning efforts better design land-use transportation initiatives to achieve their objectives in the Twin Cities.

---

**Project Update: Bringing INFO-U to New Audiences**

INFO-U is a free, 24-hour phone and Internet information service maintained by the University of Minnesota Extension Service. The 650 prerecorded messages and online documents offer practical information to the public on a wide variety of subjects, including parenting, food safety and nutrition, money management, community living, home maintenance, pest control, gardening, and environmental issues.

In an effort to serve Minnesota’s growing Latino/Latina population, INFO-U project coordinator Debby Newman partnered with the nonprofit Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) in 1999 to bring INFO-U to Minnesota’s Latino/Latina communities. As a result of the collaboration, a Spanish-language version of INFO-U was launched in 2000. Since then, more than 4,000 people have used the phone service to hear recorded messages in Spanish about migrant workers, obtaining a driver’s license, food safety, taking ESL courses, and more than 10,000 visitors have accessed INFO-U’s Spanish-language Web site.

The response to the Spanish-language service prompted Newman to apply for assistance from CURA’s Community Assistant Program (CAP) to hire Somali and Hmong students to initiate similar efforts in their respective communities. Students have conducted focus groups, created culturally sensitive translations of INFO-U material, and promoted the service within their communities. The subject matter, phone scripts, and online documents for each community are based on recommendations obtained from focus group participants, community-driven assessment studies supported by CURA, and Extension Service needs and asset assessments in each of the targeted communities. The Extension Service, with support from CURA, is continuing to create culturally sensitive audio scripts and online documents in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.

The English- and Spanish-language versions of INFO-U can be found on the Web at http://www.extension.umn.edu/info-u/.

For phone access to the service in English, Spanish, Hmong, or Somali, call 612-624-2200 in the Twin Cities metropolitan area or 800-525-8636 in Greater Minnesota. Follow voice instructions to make your selections.

For more information about INFO-U or this project, contact Debby Newman, INFO-U coordinator, by at 612-624-3263 or at dlnewman@umn.edu; or Fred Smith, coordinator of community development programs at CURA, at 612-625-0508 or at smith009@umn.edu.

---

*Bringing INFO-U to new audiences (from left to right): Jose Ramirez, a master’s student in applied economics in the College of Agricultural, Food, and Environmental Sciences; Ong Xiong, a student in the College of Education and Human Development’s teaching licensure program; Debby Newman, INFO-U project coordinator; and Jamal Abdulahi, an engineering major in the Institute of Technology.*
The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) is an all-University applied research and technology center at the University of Minnesota that connects faculty and students with community organizations and public institutions working on significant public policy issues in Minnesota.

The CURA Reporter is published quarterly by the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs to provide information about its programs and projects. This publication is available in alternate formats.

Thomas M. Scott, director  
William J. Craig, associate director  
Michael D. Greco, editor

Layout and production by Mori Studio  
Figures prepared by Jeff Matson  
Printed by University Printing Services

Send correspondence to the editor at:  
Center for Urban and Regional Affairs  
330 HHH Center  
301—19th Avenue S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Phone: (612) 625-1551  
Fax: (612) 626-0273  
E-mail: cura@tc.umn.edu  
Web site: http://www.cura.umn.edu

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.

Printed with agribased ink on recycled paper, including 20% post-consumer fiber.