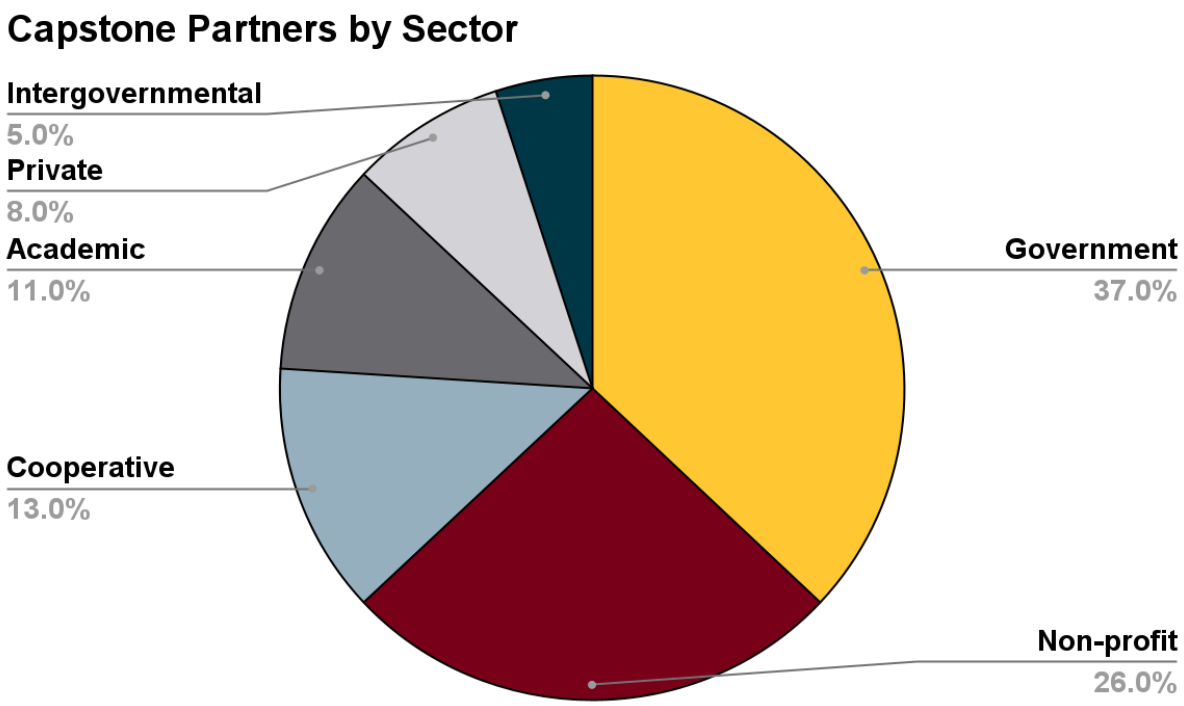
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
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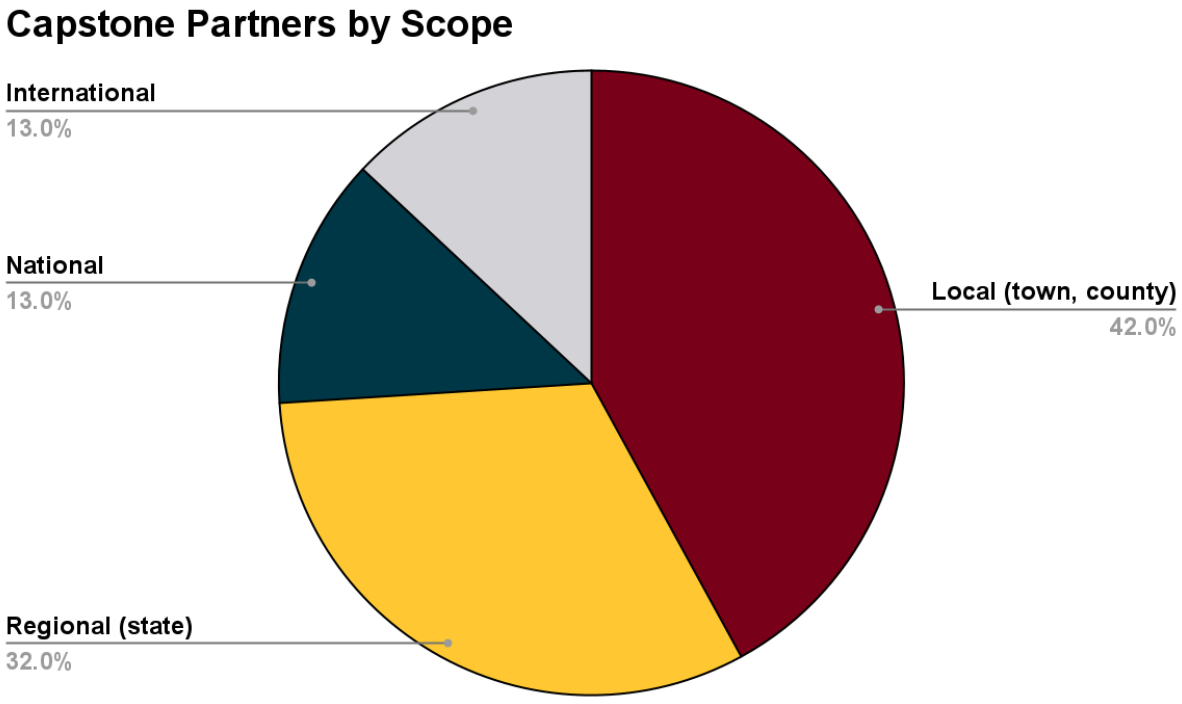
2024-2025 Capstone Project List

Summary:

The Capstone Program at the Humphrey School in academic year 2024-2025 (spring & summer)

- involved **7** HHH faculty,
- overseeing **28** capstones,
- involving **105** students,
- collaborating with **36** distinct partners.





The following Capstone Projects encompassed a minimum of **13,230** hours of student-led work.

Spring 2025

Human Rights

Faculty: Amelia Schindelar
Projects: (3)

Know Your Rights When Being Approached By Or Interacting With Law Enforcement

This project includes curriculum developed for middle and high school students to learn about their rights and how their rights apply in interactions with law enforcement.
Community Partner: No More Names Initiative
Team: Lindsey Clayton (MHR), Ciera Hansen (MHR), Ru'gene Scriven (MHR)

Closing the Gap: Human Rights Education and its Relevance for Future Professionals

This study analyzes the integration of Human Rights Education (HRE) in higher education contexts in India and Japan, using a mixed-methods approach encompassing content analysis (policy documents), interviews, and statistical mapping. The findings indicate limited implementation of HRE, often found confined to specific disciplines and lacking institutional support. At the same time, several promising practices emerged, including interdisciplinary program models which expand HRE efforts beyond law and political science disciplines; flexible HRE course options that support cross-departmental access to HRE; experiential learning opportunities such as internships, practicums, and field study; and faculty and student engagement through research centers funded by universities. The paper provides recommendations suggesting enhanced implementation could occur when higher education stakeholders recognize their respective commitments to HRE align in some way with global projects (e.g., the World Programme for Human Rights Education and SDG 4.7), supporting inclusive, rights-based education.
Community Partner: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
Team: Hosai Kakar (MHR), Nilofar Painda (MHR), Sophia Mai (MDP), and Mrasin U (MDP)

Third Project Report Not Available

Global Policy

Faculty: Eric Schwartz
Projects: (3)

Advancing Gender-Inclusive Responses to Climate-Driven Displacement

Climate change is a rapidly growing cause of displacement globally with the impacts of it most keenly felt by marginalized groups. The Women's Refugee Commission is a research and advocacy organization working to ensure women's and girls' voices are included in humanitarian policy and practice. Given the intersection between climate change and displacement, they are well-suited to improve gendered analysis in climate-driven displacement policies and practice. Reviewing academic and gray literature highlighted the challenges of describing the differential impacts of climate change and the relative lack of gender-inclusive and intersectionality in programming and policy. These interact with existing vulnerabilities for displaced people, particularly women and girls to increase risk. Interviews

with professionals in humanitarian and development practice and research also revealed responses to climate change and displacement are often responsive short-term investment with a lack of investment for proactive long-term solutions. In response to this, the Women's Refugee Commission should expand their focus to include those left behind as climate degrades, strengthen intersectional gender analysis in displacement studies, increase involvement of women and girls in climate resilience policy development, and use their research to address the lack of representative disaggregated data in climate-displacement research.
Community Partner: Women's Refugee Commission
Team: Jasmine Adam (MURP), Luc Gudmundson (MPP), Ural Kafle (MURP), Catheryn Kightlinger (MPP), Fatima Omar (MPP)

Mercenaries in the Battle Space: Identifying the Evolution and Emerging Trends of Global Private Military Companies

This report examines the evolving role of private military companies (PMCs) across diverse geopolitical contexts, with particular attention to their growing influence in shaping global defense paradigms. It is structured around five regional contexts—Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. An additional thematic category on emerging trends, explores operational and logistical scopes, state affiliations, and legal environments that facilitate PMC activity.
In Europe, Russian-affiliated PMCs dominate, using complex logistical and operational networks to avoid sanctions while providing regime security in Africa and beyond. In Asia, Chinese PMCs safeguard Belt and Road Initiative investments, capitalizing on new legal frameworks and relationships in Central Asia. The Middle East continues to serve as a historical and contemporary hub for PMC activity, with nations like the UAE and Turkey seeking cyber capabilities and advanced weaponry to assert geopolitical influence. Africa emerges as a focal point for PMC deployment due to its resource wealth, state fragility, and anti-colonial sentiment, largely accommodating Russian and Chinese actors. In Latin America, Colombia serves a dual role—both as a supplier and sponsor of PMC personnel across diverse missions ranging from anti-narcotics to humanitarian interventions.
The final section addresses emerging trends, including the new image of PMCs, their expanded functions beyond traditional combat roles, and rising concerns around human rights, civilian harm, and accountability. The report notes the fragmented and underdeveloped state of existing scholarship, highlighting the need for further research into the ethical and strategic implications of PMC proliferation.
Community Partner: The Stimson Center
Team: Morgan Nicole Coleman (MHR), Jack McGregor (MPP), Rosalyn McIntyre (MPP), Alice Shaw (MPP)

Third Project Report Not Available

Science, Technology and Environmental Policy (STEP)

Faculty: Steve Kelley
Projects: (7)

City of Minnetonka: Evaluating the Impact of Natural Resources Ordinances

This report serves as a summary of an evaluation of resident perceptions on the City of Minnetonka's natural resources ordinances. This report includes results of an online survey sent out to residents asking questions directed at gaining a better understanding of residence experiences on local regulation. Specifically, it focused on understanding perceptions before and after recent housing developments that needed to adhere to City of Minnetonka's tree and wetland ordinances. To ensure a comprehensive understanding of perceptions, residents

were asked questions about benefits and challenges faced with preserving trees and replanting trees on their property, as well as installing a wetland buffer or enrolling property into the city's wetland conservation easement program. To enhance the meaning of resident responses, additional findings on evaluation ecosystem services were analyzed to give guidance on future communication with residents regarding the benefits of the city's natural resources and ecosystem services.
Community Partner: City of Minnetonka
Team: Kevin Krantz (MS-STEP), Rose Milless (MS-STEP), Jennifer Wickre (MPA)

Assessing the Prospects for Minnesota-Produced Sustainable Aviation Fuel

The aviation sector contributes about 4% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Ritchie, 2024). Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) remains the only viable option for meaningful decarbonization in the near term. Minnesota is uniquely positioned to produce SAF in-state because of its existing partnership with Delta Airlines through the Minnesota SAF Hub, its thriving agricultural industry, and its proven interest in investing in decarbonization. There are four relevant pathways to produce SAF in Minnesota: Hydroprocessed Esters and Fatty Acids (HEFA), Alcohol-to-Jet (AtJ), Gasification with Fischer-Tropsch Synthetic Paraffinic Kerosene (FT), and Power to Liquid (PtL). The agricultural pathways, HEFA, AtJ, and FT, are the most technologically mature. The carbon intensity score for each pathway varies heavily by the feedstock. Soy, winter oilseeds, fats, oils, and greases (FOG), corn, forestry residue, and agricultural residues are the primary feedstocks considered for Minnesota-made SAF. Additionally, each pathway will require hydrogen, water, and land use. Energy and infrastructure considerations remain a challenge to production and will require greater investment to create the fundamental resources necessary for producing SAF in the state. Funding also remains a barrier, as SAF currently costs 2 to 10 times more than traditional jet fuel and is not expected to reach price parity at scale. Policy change, especially related to permitting processes and tax incentives, will be necessary to support SAF production in the short and long term. This report identifies seven areas for recommendation: research and development, pathway prioritization, foundational investment, funding barriers assessments, water concerns, and sustainable economy promotion.
Community Partner: Minnesota Department of Commerce
Team: Casidy Anderson (MS-STEP), Meghan Anderson (MS-STEP), Sophia Lackens (MHR)

Low Carbon Emission "Green" Iron Production in Minnesota

Steel is essential to modern life, used in everything from infrastructure to transportation. Yet the industry that produces it is one of the most polluting in the world, responsible for approximately 7 to 9 percent of global carbon dioxide emissions. As the push to decarbonize grows stronger, new technologies are emerging to replace the traditional blast furnace (BF) method with lower-emission alternatives such as electric arc furnaces (EAFs), which use direct-reduced iron (DRI) as feedstock. This shift presents a major opportunity for Minnesota. Northeastern Minnesota is rich in iron ore and has long supplied taconite pellets to steelmakers in other states. But as the industry transitions from BFs to EAFs, which cannot use taconite in its current form, Minnesota must adapt. Developing the capacity to convert taconite into DRI would significantly reduce emissions while adding more value to local resources. With demand for BF-grade pellets declining, in-state DRI production could help economically revitalize Iron Range communities and position Minnesota as a leader in clean ironmaking. This paper explores whether Minnesota has the resources, infrastructure, and industry interest to support a DRI facility. While the state has key inputs such as iron ore, water, and natural gas, limited renewable electricity and environmental permitting challenges remain. Realizing green iron in Minnesota is not just technological issue; it requires navigating complex political, social, and environmental dynamics. Addressing legacy harms from mining

and ensuring inclusive stakeholder engagement will be essential, and supportive policy and sustained collaboration are necessary for Minnesota to lead in this next phase of steelmaking.
Community Partner: Minnesota Department of Commerce
Team: Nuzhat Fatima (MS-STEP), Jason Janisch (MPA), Md Mursalin Rahman Khandaker (MS-STEP)

Envisioning a High Load Growth Future: Data Centers

The electric industry has maintained relatively stable levels of electricity growth over the past few decades. However, some utilities are now forecasting increasingly large spikes in electricity demand, due in particular to artificial intelligence (AI) and data centers. This report utilizes a combination of interviews with energy industry experts and quantitative and qualitative analysis to help Connexus understand the technical and policy landscape surrounding data center development in Minnesota. Based on these interviews and research this report identifies opportunities and challenges associated with data center-driven load growth and makes recommendations on how Connexus can realize these opportunities and address these challenges.
Community Partner: Connexus Energy
Team: Andrew Peterson (MS-STEP), Bernardo Perez (MPA), Daniel Zuckerman (MS-STEP)

Policy Landscape For Rural Utility-Scale Solar Deployment: A Comparative Policy Analysis of Four US states

As utility-scale solar systems continue to expand across the United States, rural agricultural communities are increasingly at the forefront of land use decisions that will shape the renewable energy transition. While these large infrastructure projects offer significant climate and economic benefits, their sizable footprint and perceived impacts on farmland, rural character, and local autonomy can create significant resistance. This capstone report provides a comparative policy analysis of four states, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and New York, to examine how both local and state policies affect the deployment of utility-scale solar and align with community values, environmental protection, and agricultural preservation.
The report identifies policies and practices that balance the needs of solar developers with the priorities of communities in which that are sited. Key areas of focus include zoning and local regulatory processes, community benefits and participation, and strategies for minimizing land use impacts through dual-use approaches such as agrivoltaics or ecovoltaics. The analysis is based on review of state regulatory frameworks, ordinance reviews, and specific case studies that illustrate how policy tools have been implemented in both supportive and restrictive ways. Findings emphasize that well-crafted policy instruments, such as specialized zoning districts, vegetation and agricultural mitigation plans, solar scorecards, and community benefit mechanisms, can be designed to align with community values and foster more mutually beneficial and environmentally integrated approaches to utility-scale solar development. This report aims to support the ongoing efforts of the Great Plains Institute and the PV-SuCCESS project to develop a comprehensive decision-making framework for solar development that integrates science-based environmental factors with the sociocultural priorities of Midwest communities.
Community Partner: Great Plains Institute
Team: Michael Fogarty (MS-STEP), Conor Henneberry (MS-STEP), Taylor Hohensee (MS-STEP), Molly McMullen (MS-STEP), Leo Ndiaye (MPP)

Community Engagement at Great River Energy

This capstone project, conducted in partnership with Great River Energy, examines strategies to enhance community engagement, especially around clean energy initiatives, internal coordination, and stakeholder involvement. Utilizing a mixed methods approach that included interviews with GRE staff and stakeholders, observations, and focus groups, our research

identified key barriers such as low participation, inconsistent communication, and the challenge of sustaining long-term relationships, particularly with students. Our findings emphasize the importance of meeting communities where they are through accessible education and early involvement, reducing awareness and logistical barriers, and supporting cultural and social inclusivity through targeted outreach. Our report also highlights the need for consistency in project operations, including uniform visuals, cross-divisional communication, and consistent project communication plans, to improve transparency and information sharing. Recommendations include addressing participation barriers through early engagement and tailored messaging, providing mentorship to students, and forming partnerships with high school organizations such as FFA chapters to support professional and workforce development. Overall, this project advocates for a consistent and strategic approach to community engagement that encourages longterm trust, boosts community participation, and aligns internal practices with community needs, supporting the transition of GRE's members to clean energy.
Community Partner: Great River Energy
Team: Alyssa Kennedy (MS-STEP), Chloe Olson (MS-STEP), Krystal Binversie (MS-STEP)

Municipal Fleet Electrification Opportunities Study

This project is in collaboration with the City of Coon Rapids Sustainability Office and Connexus Energy. The report is tailored to the City of Coon Rapids and offers a comprehensive examination of electric vehicle (EV) adoption at the municipal level. The goal of this report is to primarily present a business case for anticipated financial implications and opportunities available to the city through specific and actionable scenario analysis. Secondarily, this report will present limited environmental impact analysis as it relates to the Coon Rapids Energy Action Plan goal of reducing 35% of greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
Community Partner: City of Coon Rapids & Connexus Energy
Team: Jonathan Barcenas (MS-STEP), Audrey Clark (MURP), Joseph Hertenstein (MPA), Thom Sandberg (MURP)

Leadership & Social Policy

Faculty: Jeannie Entenza
Projects: (3)

Reviewing the Current State of Community-University Partnerships

This report reviews the state of university-community partnerships in the United States through the lens of the University of Minnesota's Resilient Communities Project (RCP) and its affiliation with the EPIC (Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities) Network. University-community partnerships have become vital for addressing complex local challenges while offering students applied learning experiences. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, this study includes a comparative analysis of nine EPIC-N programs and a literature review of similar initiatives outside the network to evaluate RCP's position and potential for growth. The research investigates how such programs are structured within universities, how partnerships are formed and maintained, and what evaluative tools are used to measure success. Findings highlight significant variation in program governance, project selection processes, and sustainability strategies, with successful initiatives often striking a balance between institutional goals and community responsiveness. The report also identifies gaps in long-term impact evaluation, funding stability, and challenges to faculty engagement. COVID-19 further shaped the evolution of these programs by accelerating the adoption of hybrid collaboration models. Based on these insights, the report recommends that RCP limit its mission or codify its differences, strengthen community and faculty networks, enhance project deliverables, develop quantitative metrics to support existing qualitative metrics, and provide feedback to the EPIC

Network about supporting best practices. These steps will position RCP to serve community partners better, demonstrate value to university stakeholders, and lead the ongoing development of impactful university-community collaborations.
Community Partner: Resilient Communities Project, University of Minnesota
Team: Alex Matson (MPP), Andrew Jaunich (MPA), Eddie Napoli-Quisling (MPP)

Public Assistance Benefits in Minnesota: An Examination of DHS Appeals

This paper explores data from Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Appeals Division to uncover patterns that could contribute to the high dismissal rates in Minnesota of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medical Assistance (MA). The authors were given access to appeals data for these programs for January 1 to December 31, 2024. The authors utilized linear probability models as well as geospatial analysis to inform our key findings and recommendations. From these analyses, the authors found that both county and program type influenced the likelihood of an appeal's dismissal, as well as the type of dismissal issued. Different geospatial patterns were also found across types of dismissals. Due to these findings, it is recommended that DHS extend appeals timelines, simplify the appeal process, identify duplicate clients, continue to investigate dismissals by incorporating demographic and county characteristics, and provide standardized bias training for appeals judges.
Community Partner: Minnesota Department of Human Services - Appeals Division
Team: Brian C. Begin (MPA), Brittany Duffy (MPA), Lillian Norman (MPP), Noah Peterson (MPP), Dylan Weaver (MPP)

State of North Minneapolis Report

The history of North Minneapolis has influenced its current state of development and as it continues moving forward, members of the community and local stakeholders need a shared understanding of the current status of economic development in North Minneapolis. Destination Northside Coalition, a group of organizations committed to the long-term economic prosperity of North Minneapolis, empowered the capstone team to create a report that will serve as a resource to inform residents of North Minneapolis and visitors to the area that may not be aware of what economic development activity is in progress and planned within the community. The State of North Minneapolis Report explores ongoing and planned economic development projects and initiatives in North Minneapolis and identifies and evaluates what barriers are limiting further development in the area. These projects and initiatives were assessed through interviews, observation, and secondary research to determine how they align or conflict with comprehensive economic development strategies for North Minneapolis, specifically the Minneapolis 2040 Plan and the Northside Forward Plan. The degree of alignment and key barriers are captured in themes on economic development strategy, residential landscape changes, financial and economic constraints, and political and community-level challenges. The culmination of this work is presented in recommendations that focus on supporting local developers, mitigating the negative impacts of large-scale development projects, bridging the gap between resident and business needs with planning visions, and fostering cross-sector collaboration.
Community Partner: Destination Northside Coalition
Team: Alejandro Caceres-Aranda (MPP), Justin Carlson (MPA), Monica Guendy (MDP), Shizhuo Ma (MPP)

Urban and Regional Planning

Faculty: Peter Brown
Project: (3)

Meeting Communities Where They Are: City of Minneapolis 2040 Plan Community Re-Engagement

This report addresses community re-engagement surrounding the Minneapolis 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The City of Minneapolis Department of Community Planning and Economic Development (CPED) engagement efforts significantly stalled after 2019 due to staffing changes in the City, the murder of George Floyd, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Our capstone project aimed to re-establish community connections and learn preferred methods to engage with community groups and sustain long-term relationships. Our report synthesizes the academic literature on community engagement and peer city engagement practices, which highlight the importance of diverse and adaptable engagement methods, transparency, and accountability to community input. Our team conducted interviews with community engagement practitioners in Minneapolis and organizational leaders from the Native American, Youth, and African American communities. Our qualitative analysis revealed four key findings: 1) community members have minimal understanding of the 2040 Plan and its impact; 2) community leaders feel City action on identified priorities is lacking; 3) the lapse in engagement weakened the meaningful relationships built during prior planning cycles; and 4) navigating changing city dynamics within the comprehensive planning period poses challenges for both City staff and community members. Based on these findings and peer city analysis, we recommended both lower and higher cost interventions. On the lower cost end, we recommend CPED attend events already happening in the community, leverage existing community organizations as trusted partners, and break down complex plan information into understandable pieces. Our higher-cost recommendations include seeking funding for a dedicated full-time community engagement specialist within CPED and determining preferred engagement methods and frequency of communications with each community. There is a critical need for CPED to do continuous community engagement. Our report and accompanying one-pagers provide both a theoretical framework and the community perspective for this ongoing engagement to occur.

Community Partner: City of Minneapolis, Department of Community Planning & Economic Development

Team: Ann Seigfreid (MURP), Elizabeth Kirsner (MURP), Kaytlyn Danielzuk (MURP), Will Yetvin (MPP)

Pathways to Place: Activating Downtown Chaska's Paseo Network

The purpose of this project is to support the City of Chaska's vision to create a vibrant downtown and activate its paseo network, while maintaining the City's historic charm and small town feel. The Capstone Project Student Team conducted a literature review, interviews, and site observations to identify key placemaking themes and approaches. The research reflected a similar set of overarching objectives that support comfortable and accessible environments, community gathering spaces, and community identity and cohesion. The Project Team provided the City and Downtown Business Alliance (DBA) with recommendations that outline implementation strategies to make the downtown paseo network a more frequently visited destination for residents and visitors. The Project Team's findings offer a practical framework that other communities can use to transfer underutilized alleys into walkable infrastructure that connects downtowns and supports commercial district growth.

Community Partner: City of Chaska

Team: Noah Faldet (MPP), Erik Hanson (MPA), Asma Jihad (MURP), Ian Klein (MPP), Lily Sugimura (MURP)

Grand Rounds Missing Link: Path to the Future

This report examines implementation strategies for completing the "Missing Link" in Minneapolis's historic Grand Rounds trail system. For over 140 years, a persistent three-mile gap in Northeast Minneapolis has prevented the completion of this 50+ mile regional trail

network that attracts more than 14 million annual visitors. With $5.5 million in newly secured funding and design concepts being shown for public review in 2025, this analysis focuses on three critical trail segments that require strategic attention to determine recommended phasing for the project. The St. Anthony at Highway 88 segment offers the most direct connection to existing trail infrastructure but faces traffic management challenges at the New Brighton Boulevard intersection. While the 33rd Avenue Corridor was previously considered the preferred route, our evaluation suggests the 27th/29th Avenue corridor presents a more viable alternative due to improved residential connectivity, transit access, and green space opportunities. The most complex implementation challenge exists at the BNSF Railroad Crossing, where coordination with multiple stakeholders including the MPCA, railroad operators, and property owners will be essential throughout the planning, construction, and maintenance phases. The project navigates an area characterized by active industrial land use, diverse stakeholders, and unique geographical constraints. This analysis concludes with providing actionable recommendations for bridging this final gap between the Northeast and Mississippi River segments.
Community Partner: Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board
Team: Sneha Arunkumar, Frances Birch, Jackson Matthies, Meaghan Schneid

Urban and Regional Planning

Faculty: Nichola Lowe
Project: (3)

Transforming Urban Logistics with Cargo E-Bikes

Electric bicycle (e-bike) availability and popularity has increased rapidly over the past decade. E-bikes require less effort and are easier to operate at a higher speed than traditional bicycles, so e-bikes present a new lower barrier to using bicycles and stronger competition against other transport modes. As a reaction, there has been wider adoption of e-bikes, even in cities that lack the highest employment and population densities. This report aims to provide a first analysis of the feasibility and likelihood of e-bike adoption for commercial fleets in the Twin Cities.
Community Partner: Civilized Cycles and Towerside Innovation District
Team: Ethan Buss (MURP), Danica Dosmann (MURP), Soren Dunn (MURP), Madeleine Logeais (MURP)

Minnesota Co-operative in Planning: Proposed Graduate Workshop, Certificate, and Co-op Models

Across the United States, graduate programs in planning are facing enrollment challenges, coupled with a projected increase in industry labor demand. This report proposes a sponsored Master's degree path integrating student skill development and work experience with a host employer. The Humphrey School has a timely opportunity to strategically address converging institutional and workforce needs in Urban and Regional Planning. Guided by APA national priorities and state chapters, the planning profession is actively pursuing greater racial inclusivity and representational diversity. Employers increasingly recognize the ethical and practical value of a planning staff that reflects community demographics. This confluence creates a compelling space for collaboration on degree frameworks that effectively and intentionally address these intersecting challenges. This report first examines the state of the planning profession, then provides our team's positionalities stating how our lived experiences play a role in our recommendations and research. Then, the report outlines the research and development process. Motivated by recommendations, experiences, and visions of the planning profession shared by educational and industry leaders, we propose a two-weekend writing

workshop, a two-semester specialized certificate, and a two-year co-operative model in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning program.
Community Partners: American Institute of Certified Planners, American Planning Association, Bolton & Menk, Metropolitan Council, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Hennepin County, Ramsey County, SRF Consulting
Team: Conor Kennett (MURP), Kate Lowisz (MURP), Rashid Mfinanga (MURP), Shelley Pacheco (MPP), Shoua Salas (MPA), Emma Verkuilen (MURP)

Building Community Resourcefulness Through Engagement in Morton, Minnesota

This capstone project explores how the small town of Morton, Minnesota, is building resourcefulness - not just resilience - in the face of increasing flood risk. Grounded in a framework developed by MacKinnon and Derickson, we focused on four elements of local adaptive capacity: resources, technical knowledge, local knowledge, and recognition. Our work included site visits, facilitated community workshops, and analysis of infrastructure and emergency planning needs. Focusing on the social dimension of this issue, we supported community-led strategies that build upon Morton's rich knowledge base and social cohesion. Our findings emphasize that flood mitigation in Morton must center local leadership, prioritize actionable tools for individual and collective preparedness, and seek systems of support that recognize the needs and ingenuity of rural places. This project offers a model for rural engagement that builds long-term resourcefulness by honoring the community's deep commitment to place and its creative problem-solving power.
Community Partner: City of Morton, Minnesota, and the University of Minnesota Extension Southwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership
Team: Morgan Bliss (MURP), Christine Hokkala-Kuhns (MPA), Ted Jessup (MURP), Andrew Peterson (MPA)

Development Practice (MDP 5200)

Faculty: David Wilsey
Projects: (2)

Rio Convention Synergies Toolbox

The Global Mechanism from UNCCD commissioned the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs Capstone Team to conceptualize a strategy or tools to raise awareness regarding synergies between the three Rio Conventions. The three Rio Conventions (UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD) were established in 1992 during the Rio Earth Summit due to the increased concern regarding the environmental impact of industrialization and human activities in the 20th century. The three Rio Conventions were designed to address interrelated issues with complementary approaches to restore humanity's balance with nature. However in practice, the work of the Rio Conventions has become siloed, with narrower focuses within limited scopes of their respective mandates. The Minnesota Capstone team developed a toolbox that synthesizes indicators in each Rio Conventions' primary instruments, which are the Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets for UNCCD, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plan (NAPs) indicators and sectors for UNFCCC, and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Adaptation Plan (NBSAPs) indicators for the CBD. Elaborating the areas of synergies through a Venn diagram and these indicators, the toolbox provides an intuitive depiction of synergies for stakeholders. Furthermore, the toolbox is also equipped with a Path to Projects page, explaining the national and intergovernmental agency process for project development to help users orient to the process and stakeholders that can benefit from using the toolbox.
Community Partner: Global Mechanism for the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

Team: Karim Y. Darboe (MDP), Luna N. Iman (MURP), Rebekah Montgomery (MDP)

Neighborly Ventures: Empowering Cross-Cultural Entrepreneurship in St. Peter, Minnesota through Inclusive Community Practices

The St. Peter Capstone Project aims to design an inclusive and responsive entrepreneurial support model for St. Peter Good Neighbor Diversity Council (SPGNDC) tailored to the unique economic and cultural landscape of St. Peter, Minnesota. This project focuses on understanding the local context, exploring the intersection of identity and support in entrepreneurship, and learning from peer models to develop practical recommendations. The capstone group started this journey searching for resources to understand St. Peter's local economic and cultural landscape as it is essential knowledge for designing a relevant and inclusive entrepreneurial support model. The city's mix of long-term residents and recent immigrants presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly due to the lack of centralized and culturally attuned support systems.
Community Partner: St. Peter Good Neighbor Diversity Council
Team: Osahon Akpata-Tanious (MPP), Thaise Constancio Temoteo (MDP), Sally Elfishawy (MDP), Farah Mohamed (MPP)

Summer 2025

Leading Organizational and Community Change

Faculty: Jeannie Entenza
Projects: (4)

Contemporary Practices in Nonprofit Technology Use and Management: An Exploratory Data Analysis

This capstone paper presents an exploratory analysis of nonprofit technology adoption and management, leveraging NTEN's Tech Accelerate self-assessment dataset and a structured literature review. The study examines technology readiness across five domains, leadership, infrastructure, engagement, organizational culture, and emerging technologies, using data from over 1,200 nonprofit organizations. Key findings reveal that participants who complete multiple assessments tend to show improving technology risk levels, and cohort organizations in NTEN's Nonprofit Tech Readiness program have outperformed peers since 2024. Self-assessment scores declined across all questions post-2021, for unclear reasons that could warrant further inquiry. The analysis identifies organizational characteristics, including staff size, budget, technology investment, and founding decade, as strong predictors of technology risk, with smaller and newer organizations facing greater challenges. Recommendations include further investigating indicators that the Tech Accelerate instrument can help organizations improve technology management practices, expanding data collection, enriching organizational metadata, evolving the assessment instrument, and leveraging the curated literature catalog to inform future NTEN programming. The literature review contextualizes findings using academic and practitioner sources related to questions with the highest and lowest risk flag percentages in each category. The paper concludes that nonprofit technology adoption requires integrated approaches that align digital tools with mission.
Community Partner: NTEN
Team: Nick Bovee-Gazett(MPA), Jason Samuels (MPA)

Strategies Addressing Health Disparities in Minnesota's Black Communities

Our capstone project examined strategies to address persistent health disparities affecting Black communities in Minnesota, with a focus on improving cardiovascular outcomes through

enhanced community–clinical linkages. While Minnesota is often ranked among the healthiest states in the nation, Black Minnesotans have a shorter average lifespan and are more likely than White Minnesotans to be hospitalized for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Partnering with the University of Minnesota Extension, our research used a mixed-methods approach that included a literature review, observation of a community listening session, and in-depth interviews with Community Health Workers (CHWs). The analysis identified structural barriers to positive health outcomes—including underfunded programs, workforce shortages, and systemic racism—while also highlighting effective interventions, such as hub healthcare models, faith-based initiatives, and frameworks that connect clinical care with community resources. Interviews with CHWs underscored the importance of trust, culturally relevant communication, access to high-quality healthcare, and the importance of health literacy. Recommendations to the University of Minnesota Extension for improving outcomes include strengthening trust-building practices, expanding shared infrastructure, developing inclusive data systems, securing sustainable funding partnerships, leveraging technology to improve coordination, and investing in community-rooted models such as care hubs and CHW networks. By centering community voices and aligning resources with culturally informed practices, these strategies aim to close gaps in care, improve patient engagement, and reduce chronic disease disparities.
Community Partner: University of Minnesota Extension
Team: Hannah Lichtsinn (MPA), Tracy Pederson, (MPA), Jonathan Rogers, (MPA), Aaron T. Rose (MPA)

Disrupting the Disparities: A Political Determinants of Health Approach to Birth Justice in Minnesota

This project identified potential strategies to reduce racial disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes for Black and American Indian communities in Minnesota using a Political Determinants of Health framework. Through a synthesis of the literature, we defined structural racism, discrimination, and the resulting toxic stress as central drivers of adverse outcomes. The analysis examines how obstetric racism, limited access to culturally concordant care, and systemic neglect of community-based approaches compound risks for mothers and infants. Evidence demonstrates that midwives, doulas, culturally grounded models of care, and targeted mental health supports can mitigate these disparities. Case studies of community-based birth justice models show how women and community-led organizations are building alternative models of care that improve outcomes. Policy analysis identified twenty-one policy levers for potential advocacy by the Birth Justice Collaborative themed around systemic racism and: healthcare disparities, socioeconomic disparities, and chronic stress. Findings informed the development of a tactical policy advocacy roadmap outlining priority areas, sequencing, and action steps.
Community Partner: Birth Justice Collaborative
Team: Inderia Falana (MPA), Kirsten Lidyaev (MPP), Alexis Walstad (MPA)

Fourth Project Report Not Available.