UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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TO: Prospective Capstone Community Partner
FROM: Humphrey School Capstone Faculty
RE: Capstone projects with Humphrey School students

OVERVIEW

The Humphrey School master's degree students complete a capstone project for external community partners as part of their graduation requirements. Under the supervision and guidance of a Humphrey faculty member, each team of students works as a consultant for a community partner to conduct a thorough analysis of a question or problem facing a real-world organization. The team's analysis, findings, and recommendations are presented to the community partner as a professional-quality written report and formal presentation. These projects offer students practical experience using the skills they have developed through our curriculum (policy analysis, microeconomics, statistics, qualitative methods, organizational and financial management, and politics). Past projects have led to meaningful changes in organizations' practices and policies.

The Humphrey School's capstone program is one of the principal avenues for academic outreach and service to the broader community. Each year, Humphrey School students complete approximately 30-35 different capstone projects in support of external community partners from the public and nonprofit sectors.

EXAMPLES OF PAST PROJECTS

- **Needs Assessment** (study to determine needs or gaps between a current and desired outcome): Identified existing internal climate resilience work and identified places for improvement using longitudinal qualitative analysis.
- **Case Study** (in depth study of one city/country/institution to understand their process/outcomes/reforms): Used Zambia as a case study to analyze the challenges and opportunities of using domestic and international legal obligations to better position themselves when negotiating loan terms with International Financial Institutions.
- **Program Evaluation** (systematic inquiry that describes a program's pathway to achieving their goals and assesses the effects of each pathway): Evaluated the participation, environmental impacts, costs and benefits, and stakeholder views of an agricultural water quality certification program.
- **Implementation Analysis** (assessment of how a program is implemented in a specific context to determine appropriateness and likelihood of success): Analyzed the literature, case studies, qualitative interviews and quantitative data to provide recommendations on ways to expand distributed energy resources within a specified territory.
- **Analysis of Barriers** (study aimed at identifying root causes of low participation/engagement in a policy/program): Analyzed program data and documents and interviewed stakeholders to identify barriers to participation in the extended foster care program.
- **Feasibility Study** (evaluation of whether or not a project would be successful at achieving outcomes): To assess the feasibility of an electric car-share program, the team conducted a literature review, interviewed stakeholders, conducted community focus groups, calculated potential greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and mapped out best locations for potential hubs.

Annual project lists that include links to completed reports are available on the Humphrey School's Capstone Projects: Student–Community Partnerships web page. The current list is available at the top of the page and previous years' projects are available under the dropdown "What are examples of previous capstones".

TIMELINE

Capstone projects can be completed in the Spring or Summer semester. There is a half-semester course that precedes the capstone semester to enable students to lay the groundwork for a strong start of the capstone. On average, 30 projects are conducted in the Spring semester and 5 are conducted in the summer semester.

Note that not all projects that are proposed are selected by student teams. If yours is not selected, we can offer it in the next round of proposals if you would like.

Spring Semester	Summer Semester	
Mid-Aug	Late Nov	Deadline for project proposal from community partners
Mid-Sep	Late March	Potential projects are announced to students
Oct	Late March	Students submit their preferences and teams are formed by capstone faculty
Late Oct	Early Apr	All community partners are notified whether their project was selected or not
Nov/Dec	Apr/May	Student teams meet with community partners to develop the scope of work, project plan and memorandum of agreement
Mid-Jan	Mid-May	Semester begins
Mid-May	Mid-Aug	Final paper and presentation are due

COMMUNITY PARTNER RESPONSIBILITIES

An external community partner has three main responsibilities:

1. Give the capstone team your **time**.
   a. Meet with them at least twice during the half semester prep course prior to the start of the project to negotiate and define the project's scope. The team will develop a memorandum of understanding with you.
   b. Meet with the students regularly during the semester to provide feedback and answer questions. Often, weekly meetings of 30-60 minutes are needed in the beginning, but these may become less frequent as the semester progresses. Individual instructors may have different meeting formats that require more or less time. Specific requirements will be discussed with the capstone faculty member once a project has been proposed.
   c. Be responsive to questions and identify a secondary contact person who can fill in if the primary contact is unavailable.
2. Provide the team with the **data and introductions** they need to do the work.
   a. Make sure internal data sources and documents are available at the start of the semester. Arrange non-disclosure agreements if necessary.
   b. Advise students about acquiring external data sources.
   c. Arrange for student access to stakeholders who may serve as an information source related to the project.
3. Provide **feedback** on the deliverables.

a. Be open to new ideas, new ways of doing things, and be careful not to insert your own "solution" into your problem statement. The capstone team works as consultants and partners to bring new solutions and approaches to the project.
b. Read and provide honest feedback on the final draft report.
c. Attend the team's presentation at the Humphrey School or arrange for and attend a presentation at your organization.

Costs. Neither the capstone team nor the Humphrey School requires payment for the project. Reimbursement for project-related out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., postage, survey or transcription costs) is expected from the community partner.

NEXT STEPS

- If you are interested in being a Humphrey School Capstone community partner, please submit a proposal at https://www.hhh.umn.edu/form/proposal-for-student-community-partnership by mid-August (Spring semester projects) or late November (summer semester projects).
- More information about the Capstone Program is available at https://www.hhh.umn.edu/capstone-projects-student-community-partnerships.
- If you have questions, please contact Sarah French, Capstone Program Coordinator (fren0096@umn.edu) or Dr. Angie Fertig, Faculty Director of the Capstone Program (arfertig@umn.edu).

Thank you for considering a partnership with the Humphrey School!