

What is the Hennepin–University Partnership?

Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota have launched an initiative to capture value for both organizations through a more strategic collaboration—connecting the two organizations where mutual benefit can be found. This includes collaboration on important community-based research, sharing of academic and practitioner expertise, and providing students with field experience.

The vision is to make the connection between the State’s premier research institution and largest county more strategic—to build from existing and historical collaborations towards a sustained and productive relationship—connecting where it counts.

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Hennepin–University Partnership Kickoff

A forum to kick off the Hennepin–University Partnership was held on March 1, 2005, with opening presentations from University President Robert Bruininks, Hennepin County Commissioner Linda Koblick, and Commissioner and Chair of the County Board Randy Johnson. The keynote speakers emphasized the importance of this initiative in the context of each organization’s mission, and stated their strong support for building a strategic alignment between Hennepin and the University. Tightened budgets, interest in connecting research with community issues, and demonstrating accountability to the public were mentioned as key reasons for working towards greater alignment. Sandy Vargas, County Administrator, and Tom Scott, Director of the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), also spoke about the importance of the partnership.



Robert Bruininks, Linda Koblick, and Randy Johnson

Photo by Patrick O’Leary

working together to develop resource materials, references, design tools, and case studies.

- **Early Childhood Literacy.** Gretchen Wronka, Hennepin County Libraries, and Scott McConnell, University’s Center for Early Education and Development, talked about joint

efforts in the area of early childhood literacy. This included a description of the joint effort to augment the role of the librarian as a mentor to early child care providers to help children develop early literacy and language skills through the Children’s Readmobile of Hennepin.

The forum included a panel presentation highlighting three collaborative projects during the past few years:

- **Sustainable Design.** John Carmody, University of Minnesota College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, and Phil Eckhart, Hennepin County Environmental Services, described the role of both organizations in the development of a sustainable design guide for institutional buildings. The second phase of the project, which began in January 1999 involved an interdisciplinary team from the University of Minnesota that included building researchers, architects, interior designers, and landscape architects

- **African American Men Project.** Gary Cunningham, Hennepin County NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, and David Taylor, Dean of the University of Minnesota General College, talked about the joint efforts of Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota to research the forces behind poverty, crime, poor health and isolation surrounding African American men ages 18 to 30, and to build partnerships that can lead to improved outcome for African American men.



Photos by Patrick O’Leary

A History of Collaboration

A major step in launching the Hennepin University Partnership was to catalogue existing and past collaboration projects and to assess where opportunities and barriers lie. Kathie Doty, Hennepin County/University of Minnesota Liaison, and Sarah Neuse, Research Assistant, identified and contacted Hennepin and University staff who have been involved in collaborative projects over the past five years to collect descriptive information about each project. A report on this work has been prepared and will be posted on the Hennepin County website at www.co.hennepin.state.mn (to locate the report, do a keyword search for “University collaboration”).

Examples of successful collaborations covering a range of subject areas and types of partnerships that have taken place since 2000 include:

Corrections

Intensive Aftercare Program—The Hennepin County Community Corrections Department worked with the University’s School of Social Work to study factors that lead to successful transitions for youth offenders exiting the Hennepin County Home School Intensive Aftercare Treatment program. The study investigated changes in recidivism rates and risk scores, and also considered perspectives of youth offenders.

Health

Partners in Action for Teen Health (PATH)—PATH is a collaboration between Nellie Stone Johnson Community School, Hennepin County Village Social Services, and the Healthy Youth Development–Prevention Research Center at the University. PATH’s goal is to reduce health risk behaviors and promote healthy development among middle school youth, and includes service learning and health education programs for students, along with outreach and involvement efforts targeting students’ parents and family members. Three service-learning projects have been implemented this year at Nellie Stone Johnson School as a part of PATH.



Photo by Steve Schneider

Human Services

Child and Caregiver Adoption Matching Tools—During the past five years, Hennepin County has been collaborating with Professor Jane Gilgun and her staff at the University’s School of Social Work to create (1) the Caregiver Matching Tool, (2) the Child Matching Tool for Children under 2 Years, and (3) the Child Matching Tool for Children over the Age of Two. In addition, work was done with University staff regarding the measurement of the reliability and validity of the Matching Tools. The University and Hennepin staff also jointly created a Glossary and User Guide, a Self-Survey for Readiness to Adopt, and a Guided Interview for use by adoption home study workers and prospective adoptive parent(s).

Environmental

Pasture Management—The University Extension Service provided funding for 0.5 FTE (full time equivalent) to work with Hennepin’s Department of Environmental Services conservation staff and residents to improve horse waste management, pasture management, and erosion control and restoration/protection of wetlands.

Public Works

Evaluation of the Lowry Avenue Corridor Plan—Hennepin County was responsible for developing a plan for the Lowry Avenue corridor, and the University’s Center for Transportation Studies was engaged to evaluate the planning, transportation and development process.

More About the Hennepin–University Partnership

Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota represent two major public institutions serving Minnesota residents.

The University is one of the most comprehensive public universities in the United States and ranks among the most prestigious. It is both the state land-grant university, with a strong tradition of education and public service, and the state’s primary research university, with faculty of national and international reputation.

Hennepin County is the most populous county in the State with about 22% of the state’s estimated 2002 population and ranks 15th in the nation in population. It includes the State’s largest city, Minneapolis. Hennepin’s mission is to enhance the health, safety and quality of life of its residents and communities in a respectful, efficient and fiscally responsible way.

In late 2004, Hennepin and the University decided to take collaboration to a new level—making the connection between them more strategic and comprehensive. The two organizations are engaged in a sustained effort with the objective of changing the way employees of both organizations

approach their work. On Hennepin County’s side, this change will mean that managers and other employees that are planning and developing new ways to approach their work will think about what the University may have to offer that will make their work ‘smarter’ by tapping into:

- ▶ Content expertise from academic specialists
- ▶ Student labor including both undergraduate and graduate students
- ▶ Research capabilities from one the top research institutes in the county

From the University perspective, more strategic collaboration will be evidenced by faculty, directors, and other key personnel accessing nearby Hennepin County for:

- ▶ Access to a ‘living laboratory’ for research purposes
- ▶ Practitioner expertise from those responsible for delivering public services
- ▶ Quality community engagement experiences for their students and faculty

The long-range goal is to achieve better results for both organizations as they strive to serve the community.

PARTNERSHIP Vision and Goals

Vision

A strategic alignment between the State’s primary research university and the State’s largest county that results in benefits to the community—connecting where it counts.

Goals

- ▶ **Create knowledge:** Conduct joint research on issues of mutual interest
- ▶ **Share Expertise:** Explore opportunities to share both academic and practitioner expertise
- ▶ **Students:** Find more opportunities for students to gain from enriched learning experiences and to build community awareness into future workforce
- ▶ **Operational Efficiencies:** Share best practices around the operation of large institutions, including combining functions to achieve greater efficiency

Upcoming Events

Two major collaborative events are planned for the summer and fall:

Roundtable on Children’s Mental Health—July 20

Cari Michaels, University of Minnesota Center for Excellence in Children’s Mental Health, and Jamie Halpern, Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Area, have been working jointly to plan a roundtable meeting to find logical connections between two organizations in the important area of children’s mental health, and to begin to structure work in areas of mutual interest.

Boys Reading Event—September 28

Hennepin County Libraries is working with the University’s Office of System Administration to sponsor an event to promote boys reading. The editor of “Guys Write for Guys Read” and popular author, Jon Scieszka, will speak at this event, which will include a discussion of the consequences of declining literacy among boys, its impact on society, and successful public and private responses to these trends.

Workshop: Research Methods for Measuring Economic Impact of Transit Improvements

A Roundtable and Technical Workshop discussing the methodologies used in evaluating the impact of transit corridors was held on June 15, 2005, at the Humphrey Center on the University's west bank campus. The Workshop was jointly sponsored by Hennepin County and the University of Minnesota, and reflects both organizations' interest in research on the economic and community impacts of rail transit and bus rapid transit projects.

The purpose of the event was to explore various methods that have been used in other parts of the country to measure the impact of the addition of a major transit improvement on the surrounding community. Commissioner Peter McLaughlin and Associate Dean Ed Goetz gave opening remarks, indicating their interest and support for stronger collaboration between Hennepin County and the University. The rest of the morning workshop included presentations by national experts in measuring economic and community impacts: Robert Cervero, University



of California Berkley, Gerrit Knaap, Director of the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education, University of Maryland, Gary Folye, Director of the Office of Planning and

Analysis for Metra, the Chicago area commuter rail authority and Cheryl Thole, Research Associate, National Bus Rapid Transit Institute, Center for Urban Transportation Research, University of South Florida. At an afternoon session, local transit and planning experts convened to discuss how the metropolitan region might think about conducting important research on economic and community

impacts of rail transit and bus rapid transit projects planned for the metropolitan region.

Next steps are for both organizations to determine their interests in research on economic and community impacts related to the Hiawatha light-rail line, and then to discuss how Hennepin and the University might collaborate to achieve research objectives.

Notes from the Hennepin–University Liaison

The first six months of acting as the Hennepin County/University of Minnesota Liaison has been very exciting, and also quite challenging. One of the strengths of this initiative is that it was created with strong support and clear strategic direction from the highest levels of both Hennepin County and the University. As the Liaison, I report to Richard Johnson, Deputy County Administrator, and Tom Scott, Director of the University's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA). In addition, I work closely with Commissioner Linda Koblick, who has lead responsibility for this initiative from the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. Commissioner Koblick provides strong guidance and strategic direction, and works tirelessly to challenge Hennepin County to find smart ways to engage with the University. I also work with the office of the Senior Vice President of System Administration, Robert Jones, which facilitates project implementation and further reinforces the strength of the University's commitment to a strategic alignment with Hennepin.

The initiative is off to a strong start, with the completion of the cataloguing of existing and past collaborations and the identification of several new initiatives. These tasks came about as a result of suggestions and input heard as I met with managers and faculty members in my first couple of months on the job, and I continue to expand my contacts in both organizations as a way of learning about new ideas for collaboration.

The next six months will focus on moving forward with new collaborations in the areas of children's mental health and measuring economic and community impacts of light rail. In addition, we will be following up on other suggestions for tactical support in the areas of contracting (streamlining the contracting process), and expanding ways to connect students with internships. As always, input and suggestions are very welcomed, as well as requests for assistance in making connections. I encourage those with ideas for new collaborations to contact me for support, or just to communicate your successful connections.



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