



Organizer Roundtable Resources: The Role of Research in Effective Campaign Strategy

The Alliance for Metropolitan Stability held an Organizer Roundtable on April 22, 2009, that brought Twin Cities organizers together to discuss the **Role of Research in Effective Campaign Strategy**. This roundtable provided an opportunity for organizers to discuss the role research can play in community campaigns, and to ask questions of local research experts.

Jeff Corn, community programs assistant at the [Center for Urban and Regional Affairs](#) (CURA) shared his program's resources for community organizations interested in research. CURA was designed to connect the community with University of Minnesota's expertise in community-based research. CURA's research programs include Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (research assistance for neighborhood organizations and community development corporations in the metro area), Communiversity (project support for nonprofit and government agencies), and the Northside Seed Grant program (project support to neighborhood-initiated and -guided programs in north Minneapolis).

CURA works to strengthen community capacity for research. With request for proposals offered to community groups three times a year, the community-based research programs are designed to meet the needs of the many community organizations that lack the time or skill set to engage in effective research. Many reports resulting from these research partnerships are available for free at the [CURA website](#). CURA also participates in a new U of M resource on [program evaluation](#).

Andrea Lubov, retired economist and member of [Jewish Community Action](#), spoke about her experience conducting statistical research for the [Stops for Us](#) campaign in making the case for the Hamline, Victoria and Western stations on the Central Corridor LRT. From her [analysis](#), the Metropolitan Council made computational errors in an effort to comply with an outdated federal model called the Cost Effectiveness Index.

Andrea pointed out that the statistics used in the Stops of Us campaign will not be available from the upcoming census, which will be completed in 2010. With 2000 census allowed people to access information on population, age, race and ownership down to the individual census block level. State and federal aid is allocated based on this data. However, in the 2010 census, the federal government will be using the [American Communities Survey](#), which pulls small samples from cities with 20,000+ people every year. This will give researchers a faster, but less detailed picture of individual communities.

Geoff Maas, geographic information systems (GIS) manager at the [Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy](#) (MCEA), spoke about his experience with creating and communicating research for environmental campaigns. He emphasized the importance of creating informative graphics and maps to use to communicate campaign goals. "Maps have a certain authority to them," said Geoff.

For example MCEA used Minnesota Department of Transportation data to map bridges and their sufficiency ratings, on top of legislative districts. MCEA then compared legislators' votes with the votes of their constituents to make a stronger case for funding the transportation bill, which passed in 2008. Geoff explained that MCEA used and combined data in ways that the state departments did not, allowing it to create original and powerful arguments.

Geoff also explained how research can also help policy be proactive. For instance, MCEA mapped the virus VHS (which is like “the Ebola virus for Freshwater Fish”). The map showed that the virus was not yet in Minnesota, but was in water transit routes that continue to Minnesota, and could be carried to the state in ships’ ballast water. Therefore, MCEA is campaigning for policies around ballast water scrubbing and other proactive measures to prevent disease spread.

The organizers present also asked questions and discussed challenges they struggle with. Themes that emerged from the discussion included:

- understanding the purpose and value of how and why to use research and evaluation,
- the lack of a centralized clearinghouse or wiki as a starting point for community-based research,
- defining a problem that can be researched or solved ,
- difficulty in finding existing information without manipulating data,
- the political and semantically charged nature of data,
- the skepticism of marginalized and minority populations towards research in their communities,
- getting the data out of the ivory tower and into the hands of community members,
- being aware that public agencies we depend on for research lack staff, equipment and training,
- being aware of the disconnects between researchers and management, and
- the prohibitive cost of some research software (although foundations may defray the cost and [TechSoup](#) sells used software to nonprofits).

Diane Dube of the [Community Development Clinic](#) at William Mitchell Law School also shared some of her legal and research resources, including the [Minnesota Justice Foundation](#), which matches students with pro bono opportunities, and a variety of [clinics](#) at William Mitchell.

Additional resources and suggestions for research and data were also shared, including:

- [U.S. Census Bureau](#)
- [American Fact Finder](#)
- [Metro GIS](#)
- [Minnesota Department of Administration](#)
- [Minnesota State Demographic Center](#)
- [Minnesota State Auditor](#)

One of the most interesting resources offered at the roundtable was [Minnesota 3-D](#). Created by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development and CURA, this is an easy-to-use online mapping tool that allows users to create their own maps using a variety of data sets.

Organizer Roundtables are one of the Alliance’s strategies to build a network of organizers that work on issues related to growth and development in the Twin Cities. Roundtables are led by and for organizers and are held monthly at the Alliance’s offices in Minneapolis. Please check our web site at www.metrostability.org for upcoming roundtables.