

Counting on Everyone: Increasing Participation in the 2010 U.S. Census in Minneapolis

by Margaret Kaplan



Photo courtesy of the City of Minneapolis

The Minneapolis Complete Count Committee

Minneapolis is a diverse community, with more than 80 languages spoken in the homes of Minneapolis school children.¹ However, due to concerns about privacy and safety, apathy, language barriers, and a lack of awareness in hard-to-count communities, a potential risk existed that this diversity would not be reflected in the 2010 U.S. Census. History supported this concern. In 2000, a dedicated group of community leaders from across the city were part of the Minne-

apolis Complete Count Committee, but, despite their hard work and dedication, the final U.S. Census mail-in participation rate for the city was 73%, lower than the numbers for both the state (81%) and the country (74%). In addition, not all neighborhoods were counted equally in 2000. Whereas the higher income, predominantly white neighborhoods had response rates in excess of 80%, a large number of poorer and more ethnically diverse neighborhoods in north Minneapolis and south Minneapolis had participation rates well below 50%.²

An undercount in Minneapolis in 2010 would have had serious implications for both the city and the state as a whole. The City of Minneapolis was facing the prospect of receiving an inequitable share of the more than \$400 billion in federal funding that is distributed every year based on Census data.³ The state of Minnesota was facing the prospect of losing a congressional district. According to the Office of the State Demographer, the margin between retaining and losing a district was narrow, and an undercount in Minneapolis could have made the difference.

¹ William D. Green, *Minneapolis Public Schools Three Year Comprehensive Integration Plan and Budget*, June 30, 2009, dpac.mpls.k12.mn.us/uploads/2009_-2011_mpsintegration.pdf.

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Take 10 Map*, available at 2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map/.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Why It's Important," 2010 [.census.gov/2010census/about/why-important.php](http://2010.census.gov/2010census/about/why-important.php).

Through a coordinated Census outreach and engagement effort led by CURA and using the Minneapolis Complete Count Committee as the primary vehicle for outreach, the Census mail-in participation rate for the city of Minneapolis rose from 73% in 2000 to 78% in 2010 (Table 1). Among cities with populations of more than 300,000, Minneapolis had the highest response rate, as well as the largest gain in response rate, in the country. The key to the overall response rate increase rests firmly with the increased response rate from some of the very areas that had the lowest response rates in the 2000 Census. For example, whereas the 2000 response rate in the Harrison neighborhood was 38%, the 2010 mail-in participation rate was 61%. Some tracts in the Phillips neighborhood increased from 40 to 61%, and one of the Dinkytown tracts near the University of Minnesota increased from 47 to 67% (Figure 1).⁴

This article describes the historical context within which the Minneapolis 2010 Census outreach and engagement efforts were undertaken, the outreach approaches used to achieve the gains in Census participation in the city, and the lessons learned from the experience that may have relevance for future Census outreach campaigns, as well as other community outreach and engagement programs more broadly. The work described in this article was supported by the City of Minneapolis and the McKnight Foundation.

Background and Outreach Efforts

This section provides some background about Census outreach efforts and describes the outreach approach used in Minneapolis.

Challenges in U.S. Census Outreach Efforts. The U.S. Census poses some unique problems for outreach and engagement. Because it only occurs every 10 years, the lessons of past outreach campaigns can easily be lost over time. This 10-year gap between Census efforts also causes the momentum built up from the previous Census to be lost by the time the next Census occurs. Community leaders who worked on the Census in the past may have moved on to different organizations or communities. In addition, cities change significantly in the course of 10 years. For example, between the 2000 and the 2010 Census efforts, the city



Creating materials in appropriate languages was an important way to reach hard-to-count immigrant communities. Among youth helped develop posters and flyers to reach community members.

Table 1. U.S. Census Mail-in Participation Rates, 2000 and 2010

	2000	2010	Percent Increase	Percentage Increase 2000–2010
Minneapolis	73%	78%	+5	6.8%
Minnesota	81%	81%	+0	0.0%
United States	74%	74%	+0	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Take 10 Map, 2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map/

of Minneapolis faced the foreclosure crisis, new waves of immigration, and, in the wake of the September 11 attack, a changed relationship between the general public and the government. A final challenge for Census outreach efforts is that, unlike many outreach efforts where immediate feedback on the results is available, Census outreach efforts only begin to show success or failure almost a year into the engagement process, when daily return rates begin to be posted by the U.S. Census Bureau. At that point, little opportunity exists to significantly modify outreach efforts.

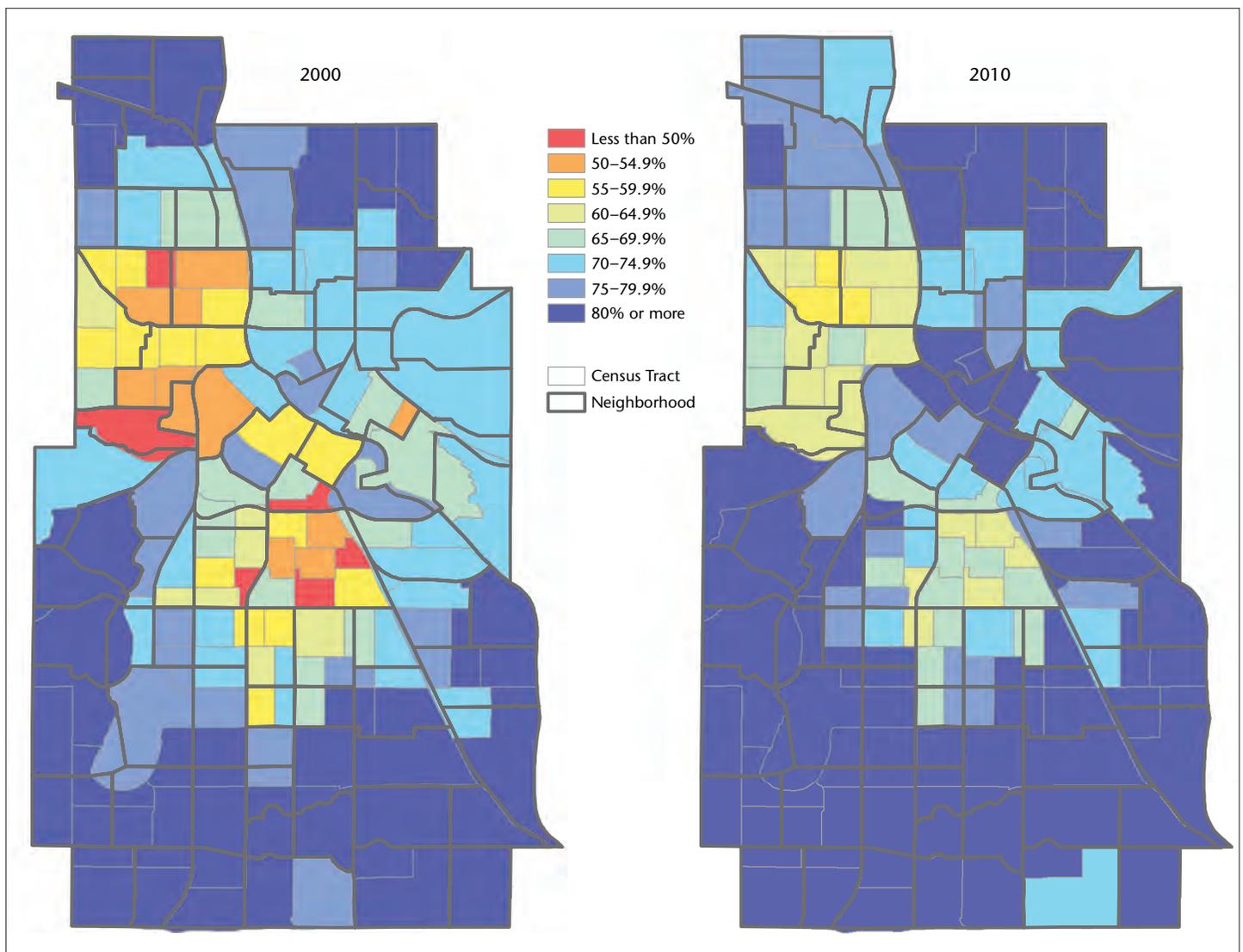
Minneapolis's Commitment to Census Outreach for 2010. Given these issues surrounding the process, Minneapolis was not unique in its concern about the upcoming 2010 Census. Across the country, state and local governments, foundations, and nonprofit organizations were trying to

plan for outreach for the 2010 Census, while at the same time were facing a struggling economy and tight budgets. As a whole, local governments allocated fewer resources to the 2010 Census effort than they had in 2000. Cities such as Boston, Atlanta, and Pittsburgh had allocated no money to Census outreach efforts as late as fall of 2009.⁵ By contrast, in December 2008 the Minneapolis City Council approved funding support for 2010 Census outreach efforts. Even before this funding was secured, Minneapolis began its work on the 2010 Census, starting with city efforts in 2006 to redraw Census tracts to more closely align with city neighborhoods. The redrawn tracts acted both as a tool for matching hard-to-count areas with place-based organizations and as a means of ensuring that the

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Take 10 Map, available at 2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map/.

⁵ "Many Cities Lack Funds for Census," *The Washington Times*, 13 October 2009.

Figure 1. U.S. Census Mail-in Participation Rates in Minneapolis, 2000 and 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Take 10 Map, 2010.census.gov/2010census/take10map/

final data were meaningful to the local community-based organizations.

Once Minneapolis allocated funds to the Census outreach effort, a method needed to be identified that would best use those resources to ensure that the communities that had been the most undercounted in the 2000 Census participated in the 2010 Census. Rather than hire a city staff member to lead the Census outreach efforts, Minneapolis chose to contract with CURA to lead the Census outreach and engagement efforts. With a 40-year history of working with the community and as a past collaborator with the city of Minneapolis, CURA was uniquely positioned to coordinate engagement efforts. The rationale was that CURA, a trusted organization with relationships throughout the community, would be able to reach out to organizations in a different way, as opposed to one government agency

telling community members that they should trust another government agency. One of the lessons of the 2000 Census in Minneapolis was that trusted community voices and trusted community-based organizations were the key to reaching hard-to-count communities. In addition, CURA staff could bring a different set of skills and expertise to the table. The Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing program within CURA coordinated the 2010 Census outreach project. Contributions made by CURA ranged from efforts by work-study students to technical assistance from CURA staff across its programs.

2010 Census Outreach Methodology. The primary vehicle for outreach to communities about participating in the 2010 Census was the Minneapolis Complete Count Committee (CCC; see sidebar, p. 23). All CCC members, even those who did not regularly attend

committee meetings, were active in leading the 2010 Census campaign and were connected through trainings and collaboration with CCC members and CURA organizers. Members of CCC worked to actively recruit additional committee members to fill gaps in representation; in addition, CCC was an open committee that anyone was welcome to join at any point in the process. City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County, and U.S. Census Bureau staff attended CCC meetings in a listening and advisory role. Monthly CCC meetings were hosted by a different organization each month and took place throughout the city, rather than in city offices, which created a greater sense of ownership of the committee by community members.

Beginning in May 2009, the committee used four strategies in its 2010 Census outreach efforts:

- ▶ **Developing tailored target messages that tapped into individual communities' unique interests and utilizing outreach strategies that were culturally relevant and connected to community centers and everyday activities.**

Because the Census as an abstract concept is difficult to generate enthusiasm around, outreach messaging linked the Census to the issues that people cared about the most, whether it was education, civil rights, transportation, housing, social services, or some other issue. Because the Census affects political representation and funding, messaging promoted community investment in the Census by logically linking community-identified concerns and participation in the Census.

- ▶ **Promoting the Census continually at community events and through community media, as well as through countless community meetings, trainings, forums, and many outreach and action days, including canvass events covering the hardest-to-count communities.** Outreach events were structured around the places and spaces that were the heart of the community, and outreach workers distributed Census forms and materials at churches and mosques, marketplaces, businesses and restaurants, bus stops and street corners, schools, campuses, and parks. As an example, a Census outreach event was held at a local salsa dancing night in Dinkytown, an event that generally draws a crowd of around 250 predominantly Latino community members from across the city. By creating a partnership with the event coordinators, as well as providing incentives for individuals to bring their completed Census forms to the event (in this instance, free admission to a popular event in exchange for a completed form), hundreds of people were exposed to Census messages (and more than 60 completed forms were collected). The use of these types of incentives, including Census promotional items and food, throughout this effort brought people into contact with community Census volunteers who could then follow up with community-centered messages. Both community partners and CCC spent a year taking the message about Census participation out into the community through these types

of venues. The amount of work the committee was able to accomplish was only possible because such a large number of leaders and organizations from multiple undercounted communities took ownership of the Census campaign.

- ▶ **Connecting with the community through Census outreach materials delivered in the languages spoken in Minneapolis.** One of the significant gaps in Census outreach efforts that CCC identified was the lack of effective promotional materials presented in the various languages spoken in Minneapolis, and in particular a lack of any Census promotional materials in Somali and Oromo. Staff at CURA and CCC members created materials such as flyers and posters in Somali, Hmong, Oromo, and Spanish. Not only were the materials useful on a local level, but, due to the lack of availability of such resources on the federal level, other states used the Somali posters as a template for their outreach materials. Committee members and CURA staff also partnered with local community-based media outlets to arrange interviews and announcements with key local radio and TV outlets, such as La Invasora, KMOJ, and Somali Voices, as well as multiple Somali TV shows. This strategy included both free and paid media to fill some of the gaps in the U.S. Census Bureau's media strategy.
- ▶ **Leveraging individual outreach efforts.** Some of the most valuable efforts within the Minneapolis Census participation campaign connected individual CCC volunteers directly to community members. Several organizations received financial resources to do direct outreach in the community using a variety of methods tailored to individual communities. Organizations used small targeted grants, provided by the City of Minneapolis and administered by CURA, to fund outreach activities for some of the hardest-to-reach constituencies. For example, Twin Cities Community Voicemail conducted individual outreach to members of the homeless community at shelters and soup kitchens, whereas other organizations, such as Mad Dadds, focused on street outreach events. Other efforts included a joint door-knocking in the Phillips community by La Asamblea Derechos Civiles and Somali

The Minneapolis Complete Count Committee

The Minneapolis Complete Count Committee was formed in 2009 through the mayor's office on the advice of the city council, but operated independently. Community leaders from across the city of Minneapolis, representing some of the hardest-to-count communities, came together to form the committee. The committee, cochaired by Sarah Hernandez of the McKnight Foundation and Saeed Fahia of the Confederation of Somali in Minnesota, included individuals representing more than 60 organizations, including those as diverse as Shiloh Temple, Asian Media Access, La Asamblea Derechos Civiles, the Confederation of Somali in Minnesota, Mad Dadds, Hope Community, CHANCE, Main Street Project, and Twin Cities Community Voicemail. The committee was formed as an action committee with a focus on sharing strategies and resources, as well as creating collaborative activities and outreach efforts. It developed as its mission statement "to lead a city-wide outreach campaign in our communities to ensure that everyone in Minneapolis counted in the taking of the 2010 United States Census" with a vision "to build trust around the Census and ensure that each Minneapolis neighborhood and community feels that they matter, were represented, and that Census activities targeted them."

Action Alliance. Another organization, Asian Media Access, concentrated its efforts on the schools.

Sharing Census Outreach Strategies and Lessons Learned

The Minneapolis outreach efforts both drew on and contributed to broader Census outreach and engagement efforts within the city, county, state,

and nation. Along with regular coordination with Hennepin County and the U.S. Census Bureau, CURA became connected to national outreach efforts through the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. The Leadership Conference had identified 13 areas across the country as the focus of their efforts. Although Minneapolis was not one of those areas, because of its connection to the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, CURA was able to access its resources and tap into national conversations about Census outreach efforts. On a local level, CURA coordinated with two organizations to share information, strategies, and resources: the Civic Engagement Table, which provided training and organized a door-knocking event in North Minneapolis; and the Main Street Project, which was working in both urban and rural areas.

In January 2010, CURA and the Main Street Project hosted a Census Training and Leadership Conference. The conference was held in English, Somali, and Spanish simultaneously, and included more than 100 community leaders, many of whom had not previously been involved in Census efforts. The conference was also an opportunity for CCC members to lead conversations and training sessions about the importance of the Census and about strategies that worked. These conversations and sessions provided opportunities for new connections to be made; some of these connections facilitated the building of relationships with additional organizations and leaders, who in turn were able to coordinate and support outreach efforts in hard-to-count areas of the city.

Final Thoughts

The 2010 Census outreach efforts in Minneapolis were not without gaps and frustrations. Both CCC members and CURA staff were sometimes frustrated by the challenge of trying to relate a grassroots community approach built by community members to the approach and materials that were developed by the U.S. Census Bureau without local input. The financial and human resources available also limited the amount of work that could be done. In addition, even though the city council and the mayor had chosen carefully



Outreach action days, such as a door-knocking event in the Phillips neighborhood, were a key strategy for reaching the hardest-to-count neighborhoods.

to represent the diversity of the city in initially forming CCC, some outreach and engagement gaps remained, and some communities became engaged very late in the process. However, despite these gaps, CCC, the City of Minneapolis, and CURA achieved not only an effective collaboration, but significantly contributed to the more than 6% increase in Census participation for Minneapolis in 2010 over 2000 levels. Ultimately, Minnesota retained its eighth congressional district by a margin of 8,739 people.⁶

Beyond the participation numbers, the 2010 Census outreach and engagement efforts in Minneapolis created connections between community-based organizations, CURA, and the City of Minneapolis. Even though the City did not itself lead the outreach efforts, an evaluation of the outreach process showed that community partners felt a stronger connection to the City of Minneapolis as a result of the work, as well as a stronger sense of the relevance of city government in addressing community concerns. On a community

⁶ Sharon Schmickle, "Census Numbers Released: Minnesota Retains All Eight Congressional Districts," *MinnPost*, 21 December 2010. Available at www.minnpost.com/stories/2010/12/21/24398/census_numbers_released_minnesota_retains_all_eight_congressional_districts.

level, organizations that had never connected in the past had the opportunity to work with each other, creating the potential for future collaborations.

Based on the outcomes of the 2010 Census outreach effort in Minneapolis, the 2020 Census outreach effort can build on lessons learned. Components of the 2010 effort that should be replicated in 2020 are a focus on community ownership of Census outreach, strong city financial and staff support, engagement with local media, direct grassroots outreach, and targeted messaging and materials. Areas that could use additional resources in 2020 include more dedicated financial resources to community-based organizations, additional staff capacity for communications and media, enhanced efforts to engage policy makers in Census outreach efforts, and continued investment in developing relationships with underrepresented constituencies across the city.

Margaret Kaplan is operations director for the Minnesota Center for Neighborhood Organizing, a program of CURA.

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Project Updates

To keep our readers up-to-date about recent CURA projects, this issue of the *CURA Reporter* features capsule descriptions of several newly completed projects. The projects highlighted in this issue were made possible through one of CURA's four community-based research programs, which provide graduate student assistance for community-based applied research projects, program planning and development, program evaluation, and other short-term projects. These projects represent only a portion of those that received support from CURA and its partners during the previous year.

■ **The Northside Healthy Eating Project: Transportation Access to Affordable Fresh Produce.** NorthPoint Health and Wellness Center is a multi-specialty medical, dental, and mental health center and human-service agency located in north Minneapolis. North Minneapolis has been described as a food desert, and its residents lack access to healthy foods. In north Minneapolis, a disproportionately low number of African American households have access to vehicles compared with more affluent neighboring portions of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Although a few large-scale grocers are located within driving distance, a substantial portion of north Minneapolis residents are not able to set out in a vehicle to purchase groceries for themselves and their families. Sarah Swingley, an urban and regional planning graduate student at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, developed methods for improving access to fresh and affordable produce via transportation. The results are being used to guide in planning and implementing a transportation strategy to improve access to affordable fresh produce in North Minneapolis. **Program:** Northside Seed Grant

■ **Medical Needs and Healthcare Services for the Somali Community in the Twin Cities.** The Confederation of the Somali Community in Minnesota is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit mutual-assistance association created in 1994 by Somali leaders to assist in meeting the self-sufficiency needs of Somali refugees.

The medical and healthcare needs of Somali people residing in the Twin Cities have not been well examined. The key research focus for the study was to determine whether a discrepancy exists between medical needs and available healthcare services within the Somali community. Ifrah Mohamed, a graduate student in the School of Social Work, conducted a literature review and held interviews and focus groups with Somali residents. The results are being used to advocate for different or improved services to meet the healthcare needs of the Somali community. **Program:** Communiversality

■ **Social-Media Use and Evaluation in Nonprofit Organizations.** The Minnesota Council of Nonprofits was founded in 1987 to meet the increasing information needs of nonprofits and to convene nonprofits to address issues facing the sector. The past five years have revealed a new era in the United States and around the world—the era of social media. Because of the popularity and viral use of social media, nonprofit organizations have begun to invest time and money into using social-media tools, often with little to no understanding of the potential impact on their organizations. Many nonprofits believe that their social-media use is positively impacting the organization, but they have no understanding or knowledge in how they can measure this. Kristin Cici, a doctoral student in evaluation studies, developed and administered an online survey of Minnesota nonprofit organizations and conducted phone interviews with staff from these organizations. Project findings will be shared with the community through a variety of means, such as trainings, seminars, webinars, and conference sessions. In addition, an e-handbook will be created that highlights best practices for evaluating social media. **Program:** Communiversality

■ **Farmland Preservation in Minnesota.** Farmers' Legal Action Group, Inc. (FLAG) is a 24-year-old nonprofit law center that has helped many thousands of independent family farmers succeed in their struggle to maintain their livelihoods and stay on their land. FLAG

believes it is important to develop statewide policies that will preserve agricultural lands throughout Minnesota. Currently, laws affecting farmland preservation are a patchwork of local, county, and state laws. Colin Cureton, a public policy graduate student in the Humphrey School, compiled research and reviewed primary documents regarding selected Minnesota counties on transfers of land from agricultural to nonagricultural use. Project findings were used to propose a model legal framework to create a consistent, effective plan to protect the natural resource that is Minnesota's agricultural lands. This project will be used to assist the State in devising a broader strategy to preserve rapidly diminishing farmland, particularly on the urban fringe. **Program:** Community Assistantship Program (CAP)

■ **Clinton-Grace-Beardsley School Greenhouse Project.** For several gardening seasons, students of Clinton-Grace-Beardsley (C-G-B) School in west central Minnesota have been involved in a community-school garden in which they grow vegetables for the senior-citizen meal programs in town. The success of this project, through which 136 youth in 2008 and 150 in 2009 raised two dozen different kinds of vegetables in amounts sufficient to provide a meal for at least 30 senior citizens at a time, produced a positive reaction in both the school and in the community. This initial success led to the need to research the feasibility of a greenhouse at the C-G-B School site. Molly Eagan, a graduate student in the College of Design, worked with the Center for Sustainable Building Design to research siting, sizing, lighting, and heating issues and to develop a schematic design for the greenhouse. This research is being used to advocate for building an attached greenhouse at C-G-B School that will benefit students both nutritionally and educationally. **Program:** Community Assistantship Program (CAP)

■ **West Broadway Farmers' Market Study.** The West Broadway Business and Area Coalition works to change the

economic conditions of North Minneapolis by engaging in activities designed to transform West Broadway into a place where neighborhood residents have access to goods, services, and amenities to meet their social and entertainment needs. The coalition planned to start an outdoor urban market in the summer of 2011 and needed research assistance in site selection, successful business models, and available funding sources. The new market will provide economic development opportunities for local farmers and entrepreneurs and provide improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy food options. Alicia Uzarek, an urban and regional planning graduate student at the Humphrey School, researched potential sites, business models, and vendors for the market. The results are being

used to identify funding opportunities and inform how to create the market. **Program:** Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research (NPCR)

■ **Public Parking in a Minneapolis Neighborhood in Transition.** The Corcoran Neighborhood Organization (CNO) is a citizen-participation organization that strives to strengthen, improve, and protect the unique character, livability, and social fabric of the neighborhood. The supply, demand, and cost of public parking have become central issues in the public conversation about the dense urban development under way on sites to the west of the Lake Street/Midtown light-rail transit station. These sites are currently vacant, underutilized, and/or used for temporary surface parking, reflecting

the established “suburban” land-use patterns of the larger Hiawatha-Lake area. This pattern stands in sharp contrast, however, to the dense, urban, transit-oriented land-use pattern that is coming to the project area. A coordinated solution to parking is paramount to the success of the Corcoran neighborhood, and the successful realization of CNO’s land-use plan. Sasha Bergman, an urban and regional planning graduate student in the Humphrey School, defined and articulated the demand for parking in the project area and researched various solutions. The results are being used to guide and inform the community process around new development in the project area. **Program:** Neighborhood Partnerships for Community Research (NPCR)

David Forrest Awarded CURA Dissertation Research Grant

CURA is pleased to announce David Forrest, a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science, as the first recipient of the CURA Dissertation Research Grant. The grant provides one year of support to a Ph.D. candidate in good academic standing at the University of Minnesota for the purpose of completing dissertation research on a significant issue or topic related to urban areas in the upper Midwest region.

Joe Soss, Cowles Professor for the Study of Public Service at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, praised Forrest in his letter of support as “one of the most impressive graduate students I have worked with.” He noted that Forrest’s dissertation research “has

the potential to make significant contributions to the scholarly literatures on policy advocacy, political representation, and the positioning of marginalized populations in U.S. politics,” as well as to “yield some important lessons and warnings for people who work on poverty and housing advocacy.”

Against the backdrop of the recent housing crisis and recession, Forrest’s research explores the role that political activists play as representatives of marginalized groups of urban poor people, focusing specifically on anti-poverty activists in Minneapolis and their efforts regarding housing and the foreclosure crisis, public education, and welfare rights. Using field research and drawing on contemporary democratic

theory, Forrest investigates how political activists’ efforts serve to construct the “urban poor” as a political group with a shared identity, and position them as stakeholders in relation to institutions such as school boards and banks. Ultimately, Forrest is interested in understanding how these constructions impact both the voice of the urban poor in the policy-making process and the larger structural causes of poverty in the United States.

An article summarizing Forrest’s dissertation research will appear in a future issue of the *CURA Reporter*. For more information about the CURA Dissertation Research Grant program, visit www.cura.umn.edu/Dissertation.php.