



The EDACENTER

at the University of Minnesota, Crookston

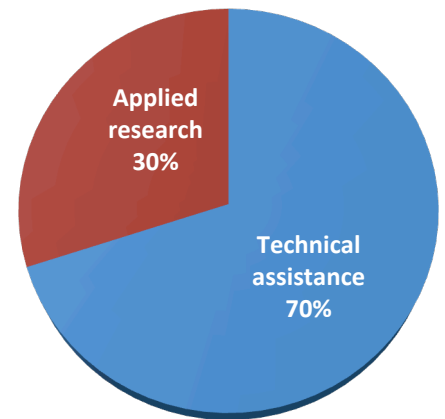
EDA Center at the University of Minnesota, Crookston

The mission of the EDA Center at University of Minnesota (UMN) Crookston is to engage university faculty, staff, and students with local, county, and regional economic development agencies in support of Minnesota's rural economy. The Center focuses on utilizing UMN Crookston's capacity – in partnership with economic development agencies – to support job creation, capital investment, business recruitment, and job retention.

Activities

UMN Crookston's EDA Center focuses primarily on working with local economic development organizations as partners and intermediaries to deliver services. The aim of this approach is to help partners in rural/distressed regions create a culture and environment that is truly supportive of entrepreneurship and innovative cluster development. Minnesota public, tribal-supported, and/or nonprofit economic development agencies supporting rural areas can apply for EDA technical assistance in projects that

advance entrepreneurship and innovation, such as delivering entrepreneurship training, assisting clients with product development services, creating an entrepreneurial mentoring network, and enhancing development of renewable energy cluster in rural regions. The Center works with UMN Crookston Extension and Business programs to deliver workforce development and educational programs, such as online



business/entrepreneur training courses. Digital literacy is a key focus of the Center's workforce programs, and it is a key partner in the "Minnesota Rural Intelligent Communities" project, which provides digital literacy curricula and workshops in rural areas of the state. The EDA Center also conducts

University

University of Minnesota, Crookston

Center Director

Sue Brorson

Center Location

Extension Service

Center since 2008

Center Activities

- Technical assistance
- Applied research
- Workforce development
- Entrepreneurship support

Clients

- Local/rural economic development organizations
- Local governments
- University stakeholders
- Indian tribes

Assessment Techniques

- Client interviews
- Case studies

Contact Information

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applied research on a variety of topics that impact the rural economy, such as digital literacy/utilization in rural businesses, impacts of broadband deployment in rural communities, rural industry cluster studies.

Leveraging

Because the Center's model for delivering technical assistance is by working through local partners, the Center leverages the resources and

*"Superb level of analysis...
timeliness of response... just plain
wonderful folks to work with."*

--Center Client

networks of economic development organizations in rural areas across the state, such as economic development districts. The UMN Extension Service is a key partner and vehicle for

connecting with rural partners and delivering services, as there are 14

regional Extension offices throughout the state. The Center draws upon resources from all five UMN

campuses, including data sources, analytical expertise, student labor, and specialized equipment. Some Center projects, such as rural broadband and digital literacy work, leverage the programs and funding of wider initiatives supported by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, and others.

Success

Collaborative approach to increasing rural digital literacy

Over the past two years, the EDA Center at UMN Crookston has been engaged in the Minnesota Rural Intelligent Communities (MIRC) project, a \$6.3 million NTIA-supported sustainable broadband adoption initiative. This project is focused on making digital tools available to low-income residents, on training residents in digital literacy to enhance the workforce, and on providing technical assistance to rural businesses. The project is focused on eleven rural demonstration areas, but it has statewide impact. Multiple digital literacy curricula have been created by a variety of initiative partners and continue to be delivered. These include short-course workshops for

unemployed individuals seeking employment, training for small business owners wishing to digitally expand their markets and enhance their web presence, and curricula to enhance the digital literacy of the incumbent workforce of existing small rural businesses. Through this project, over 2,000 computers were delivered to low-income families, over 56,000 rural broadband subscriptions were made, over 7,000 rural residents received training, and 2,000 small businesses received training and assistance. The project has had a significant impact on broadband penetration in rural areas – the broadband adoption rate is 29.8% faster in MIRC partner communities when compared to the rest of rural Minnesota. The Minnesota High Tech Association

presented the MIRC project with its 2012 "Innovative Collaboration" award at its annual banquet.

The EDA Center's support for this highly collaborative endeavor is addressing key challenges to workforce/economic development in distressed regions of the state, including lack of digital literacy, broadband adoption, and computer ownership.