

CREATING WHOLE COMMUNITIES

UMSL | Economic and
Community Development
University of Missouri–St. Louis

UMSL | Social Work
University of Missouri–St. Louis

U Extension
University of Missouri



**2024
END
OF
YEAR
REPORT**

**CREATING WHOLE
COMMUNITIES
(CWC) IS A
COLLABORATION
BETWEEN THE
UNIVERSITY OF
MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS,
UNIVERSITY
OF MISSOURI
EXTENSION
AND MISSOURI
NEIGHBORHOODS
TO BUILD CIVIC
CAPACITY, THE
COLLECTIVE
STRENGTH OF
PEOPLE IN A PLACE
TO RESPOND TO
CHALLENGES
AND PURSUE
THRIVING, WHOLE
COMMUNITIES.**

RESEARCH

Supporting place-based research on community building practice and policy issues, and sharing research for practical application with community leaders.

CIVIC DIALOGUE

Creating space and opportunity for community conversations, exploring what works in creating whole communities.

LEADERSHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Providing training opportunities and technical assistance to support leadership development and community building.

The Creating Whole Communities Faculty Fellowship program introduced a new two-phase submission structure to enhance the grant application process. The first phase involves an abstract submission to assess alignment with grant criteria and provide the opportunity to receive feedback to refine projects followed by a full proposal submission. This phased approach helped applicants determine whether to invest time in a full proposal while also deepening their understanding of key grant requirements, such as following a place-based community development framework.

**IN 2024, CWC
AWARDED FIVE NEW
RESEARCH AND
IMPLEMENTATION
GRANTS (\$8,000
EACH) THAT WILL
SUPPORT UMSL
FACULTY AND
THEIR COMMUNITY
PARTNER IN USING A
COMMUNITY-BASED
PARTICIPATORY
RESEARCH
FRAMEWORK TO
ADDRESS ISSUES
CRITICAL TO LOCAL
NEIGHBORHOODS
AND MUNICIPALITIES.**

**PICTURE THIS:
VISUALIZING
NEIGHBORHOOD
RESOURCES
THAT MITIGATE
INJUSTICES
AND MOBILIZE
THE PUBLIC**

Adriano Udani, UMSL Department of Public Policy, and Migrantes Unidos completed their Research and Implementation project, *Picture This: Visualizing Neighborhood Resources that Mitigate Injustices and Mobilize the Public*.

2024 RESEARCH AND IMPLEMENTATION

COMMEMORATING ST. LOUIS IN THE LONG CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Lauren Obermark and Lara Kelland, UMSL Departments of English and History, are partnering with Gateway GIS on the *Commemorating St. Louis in the Long Civil Rights Movement* project.

MOTHERHOOD EMPOWERMENT COLLABORATIVE

Christina Castellano, UMSL Department of Nursing, partnered with SSM MOMS Line on the *Motherhood Empowerment Collaborative* project.

COMMUNITY-LED INTERPRETIVE PROGRAMS DEEPEN PLACE CONNECTIONS IN THE VILLE

Theresa Coble, UMSL College of Education, is partnering with 4theVille on the *Community-led Interpretive Programs Deepen Place Connections in The Ville* project.

DOWNTOWN STREET EXHIBITION ABOUT CHINESE AMERICANS IN ST. LOUIS

Susan Brownell, UMSL Department of History, is partnering with the Greater St. Louis, Inc., Missouri Historical Society and the Downtown Neighborhood Association, on the *Downtown Street Exhibition about Chinese Americans in St. Louis* project.

STRENGTHENING SYMBOLIC OWNERSHIP THROUGH COMMUNITY- ENGAGED RESEARCH

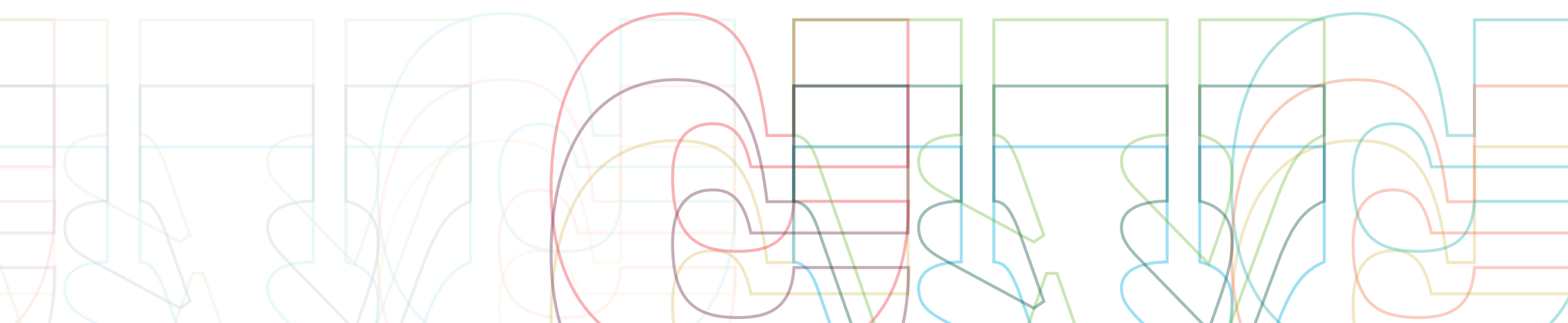
Ifeanyichukwu Ukpabi, UMSL Department of Research, Economic and Community Development, is partnering with Beyond Housing (24:1 Normandy Collaborative Community) on the *Strengthening Symbolic Ownership through Community-Engaged Research* project.

CWC ALSO AWARDED ONE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING GRANT (\$1,000), WHICH WILL SERVE TO SUPPORT UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN EXPLORING INTERESTS, DEVELOPING MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS AND IDENTIFYING RESEARCH GOALS.

2024 RELATIONSHIP- BUILDING AWARDEE

AGING GRACEFULLY COMMUNITY GROUP COUNSELING

Mary Abernathy and Emily Oliveira, UMSL Department of Educational Sciences and Professional Programs, is partnering with A Caring Plus on the *The Aging Gracefully Community Group Counseling* project.



EXTENSION FACULTY INNOVATION FUND (EFIF)

The Extension Faculty Innovation Fund offers \$5,000 grants to enable MU Extension Community Development and Regional Economic Development faculty in innovating and strengthening their work through small dollar capacity-building grants and facilitated partnerships with UM System academic resources. EFIF seeks to support new research-based pilot projects, evidence-based improvements on existing programs, engaging partners, stakeholders, researchers for community development field-building, or other innovative community development-focused initiatives.

Three projects received funding in 2023 and were advanced or completed in 2024:

The Publications Challenge, created by Darla Campbell, is a statewide initiative to develop new Community and Economic Development guide sheets. In 2024, there were 15 proposed guide sheets submitted to the Education Director for feedback. The emphasis on publications through this project resulted in a record number of publications being incorporated into the 2025 Action Plans. In 2024 and 2025, the MU Extension

Business and Communities group has been working to clarify the types of publications and the technical process.

The Public Boards Curriculum Revamp, led by Darla Campbell, Jackie Spainhower and Tracie Moore, aims to strategically formalize and brand the Extension Public Boards curriculum to empower colleagues to learn and teach the curriculum with confidence. In 2024, the team completed their first draft revisions and submitted them to the Education Director and state specialist for peer review. MU Extension Integrated Marketing Communications has been contracted for formatting, review, and branding. The pilot run of the revised curriculum is scheduled for March 21, 2025.

Show Me Neighborhood Art Week, led by David Burton, Lisa Overholser, Elena Stephenson, Deana Dothage and Ashley Allen Brown, is a statewide community development public art initiative designed to foster a sense of place and belonging in Missouri neighborhoods through creative expression and resident-made public art. The initiative launched in 2024, running from June 1-15, during which individuals from

neighborhood communities across the state created and displayed their own yard art, receiving awards for their work through neighbor votes.

The event saw widespread participation, with three registered sites, 1,182 online votes, 293 sign-ups for the Engaged Neighbor Newsletter, 600 names entered for a gift card drawing, and \$3,000 awarded in artist prizes. Among participants, 75% reported that taking part in Show Me Neighborhood Art Week enhanced their sense of belonging and love for community.



1,182

SHOW ME
NEIGHBORHOOD
ART WEEK
ONLINE VOTES

293

NEWSLETTER SIGN-UPS

600

PRIZE DRAWING ENTRIES

75%

OF PARTICIPANTS
REPORTED AN ENHANCED
SENSE OF COMMUNITY
BELONGING

(L to R)

Best in Show Award:

Mural by Donna Huellinghoff and Eileen Wade on the Chamber of Commerce building in Union, MO

People's Choice Award:

Hand-crafted flowers in Springfield, MO

Central Region Award:

Versailles City Park (playground murals) by Morgan County R-II School District students

EFIF 2024 AWARDEE

Building Entrepreneurship in Missouri's Creative Economy, led by Lisa Overholser, Jackie Spainhower, Luke Dietterle, Amy Patillo and Lisa Robinson, aims to explore the growth of entrepreneurship in Missouri's Creative Economy. The project focuses on businesses with creative focus in Hamilton, Missouri that surrounded the growth of Missouri Star Quilt company. The project goals are to better understand what the "Creative Economy" looks like in Missouri, learn about best practices and effective strategies from successful entrepreneurs in Missouri's creative industries and to better articulate the comprehensive impact (economic, social and cultural) of creative businesses.

Chamber
presentation
(TOP)

Hamilton
tailgate event
(BOTTOM)



In 2024, CWC focused efforts on building civic muscle among neighborhood leadership alumni and community members by offering spaces for engagement on current topics, knowledge sharing, and collaborative idea formation in order to respond to local challenges.

CIVIC DIALOGUE

UMSL FORUM FOR COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

MARCH + DECEMBER 2024

CWC, in collaboration with UMSL's Offices of Community Engagement and Outreach, Strategic Initiatives, Research and Economic and Community Development, and MU Extension, offered the **UMSL Forum for Community Dialogue** series, bringing members of UMSL and the greater Saint Louis community together to enhance the capacity of groups and individuals to consider different viewpoints about issues that impact the region and move towards a common ground in which the community can plan for its future. Two events were held this year.

The *Economic Justice: What's Possible in the 314?* event invited attendees to share thoughts on the meaning and impact of economic justice in the region. The discussion aimed to uncover both challenges and opportunities in creating a more just economy. There were 39 attendees.

The *Representation Matters: Of the People, For the People* event provided a platform to discuss community member's thoughts on how they are represented in government institutions and the impact of various voices in decision-making spaces. UMSL Political Science professors, Dr. Anita Manion and Dr. David Kimball, set the context for the conversation with findings from their Boards and Commissions research. There were 22 attendees.



39
ATTENDEES

*ECONOMIC JUSTICE:
WHAT'S POSSIBLE IN THE 314?*

22
ATTENDEES

*REPRESENTATION MATTERS:
OF THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE*

COMMUNITY ENGAGED RESEARCH LISTENING SESSION LUNCHEON

APRIL 2024

To enhance faculty-community partnership funding and training, CWC hosted a two-hour facilitated conversation to gather insights from faculty and community members on past programs and inform future planning. The discussion included faculty from UMSL Nursing, Public Policy, and Education, along with alumni from neighborhood leadership programs and community partners involved in prior Faculty Fellows Research and Implementation grants. A total of 24 participants engaged in the conversation, sharing valuable perspectives to shape future initiatives.

24
PARTICIPANTS

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP FELLOWS THINK TANK BOOK CLUB

MAY, SEPTEMBER + DECEMBER 2024

The NLF Book Club hosted another series of dynamic discussions on books focused on key social and community-centered issues. The book club served as a valuable way for neighborhood leaders to connect as well as to encourage, motivate and inspire each other as they enjoin in efforts to address challenges raised in these books. The book club supports a group of changemakers in continuously strengthening themselves through discussions in which they can network, share knowledge and resources, and create ideas. There were 32 attendees over three virtual book club sessions, and CWC sponsored 81 total books for the year, including for alumni who could not attend but still wanted to engage with the book.

32
ATTENDEES

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP FELLOWS SOCIAL EVENT

JULY 2024

NLF alumni joined current participants for a networking session during St. Louis Development Day, fostering new connections and exchanging valuable insights and experiences in community leadership. The event was held at Central Print in Old North, St. Louis—an establishment founded by NLF alum Marie Oberkirsch—chosen to showcase the successful St. Louis development initiatives led by NLF alumni in the region.

Such gatherings play a vital role in strengthening the bonds within the NLF community, providing a space to share updates, celebrate achievements, and create new collaborations. This event brought together 45 current and past NLF participants.

45
PARTICIPANTS

FACING RACE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

NOVEMBER 2024

Tasnim Haq, Dwayne James and Claire Rippel shared Neighborhood Leadership Fellows successes and lessons learned via a 90-minute panel presentation: *Justice Through Resident Leadership: Neighborhood Leadership Fellows Transforming the St. Louis Promise Zone Through Collaboration, Policy and Power.*

Three NLF Alumni panelists (Terry Wilson, Charlin Hughes, Kevin Windham) spoke to measurable outcomes achieved locally and statewide as a result of their collaboration with other alumni and the role of lived experiences in leadership and community voice that led to their individual and collective successes. The session included interactive group discussions focused on increasing resident leadership in audience communities to achieve a more just future. There were 35 attendees for this breakout session. The conference had 4000+ attendees overall.

35
ATTENDEES

LEADER- SHIP AND CAPACITY BUILDING

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2024

In Fall 2024, Neighborhood Leadership Academy hosted two cohorts, one in-person and one virtual, accommodating different learning styles and allowing for a higher volume of participants. With both cohorts combined, there were 54 participants from the counties of Boone, Caldwell, Callaway, Clay, Cooper, Crawford, Dade, Greene, McDonald, St. Charles, St. Louis, St. Louis City and Webster. Additionally, NLA awarded 52 scholarships with a total worth of \$13,325, allowing individuals to participate in NLA at no cost and increasing access to individuals across the state looking to acquire skills and knowledge needed to bring positive change in their communities.

52
SCHOLARSHIPS
AWARDED

\$13,325
SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING



2024 NLA GRADUATES SHARED THE FOLLOWING FEEDBACK:

"The most helpful aspects of the Neighborhood Leadership Academy were the practical skills I gained in community engagement, project planning, and collaboration. Through NLA, I connected with fellow leaders and organizations, which underscored the power of collaboration. I now have a better understanding of how to leverage local resources and expertise to create more impactful, community-driven solutions. These aspects of NLA have provided me with valuable tools and insights that I will continue to apply as I work to revitalize neighborhoods and engage with my community."

"ABCD really shifted my approach by focusing on the strengths and resources within a community rather than starting with its needs or deficits. This perspective opens up new ways to empower community members, helping them to build on what they already have. SMART goals were also transformative because they made it easier to set clear, actionable objectives that can be tracked over time, making progress and accountability much more tangible."

"I really enjoyed my time here and really don't want it to end. Thankful for the wealth of knowledge and can't wait to implement these tools for my community project."

"I really enjoyed this course and feel like you are doing a great thing here - teaching folks how to engage and get projects off of the ground. I liked it much more than I expected. Thank you for the opportunity to participate!"

"So much positivity! I learned there are many people that want to make a positive impact in Missouri. I am optimistic that I will influence greater change in my community because of the support and techniques I have acquired. I loved learning from Extension."

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY - SOUTH AFRICA

MAY 2024, PORT ALFRED, SOUTH AFRICA

Wilson Majee, Claire Rippel and Sarah Hultine Massengale partnered with South African university Stenden South Africa (SSA) to adapt and deliver the Neighborhood Leadership Academy to 17 community leaders in the town of Port Alfred on the Eastern Cape. This proposal emerged as a response to a direct request from SSA following Dr. Majee's invited public lecture on community development at the institute. The primary objective of the proposed work is to enhance collaborative programming, community leader training, and research between MU Extension, UMSL, University of Missouri, University of Western Cape (UWC) and SSA. Four faculty members from Stenden SA plus thirteen community leaders from the Port Alfred region completed the training, which was held May 20-31, 2024. Participants included non-profit organization staff and volunteers, teachers, grassroots project leaders, and former elected officials. The program included an extensive evaluation of the efficacy of this intervention among participants in a South African context.



NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP FELLOWS

JANUARY – SEPTEMBER 2024

Neighborhood Leadership Fellows, an advanced leadership program focused on systems change, hosted 18 sessions over nine months in 2024 and graduated 19 St. Louis Promise Zone resident Fellows. These Fellows learned advocacy skills and strategies needed to gain access to civic leadership tables and halls of power.

NLF program outputs:

- Each Fellow created a 10-year Individualized Personal Leadership Plan.
- Fellows worked in groups to develop a policy-focused project aimed at addressing stronger regional policies for neighborhoods. Groups were tasked with developing or enhancing a policy model/framework based on lived experiences, strengths and networks in addition to performing data research, advocacy and community engagement in order to work towards systematic change that would address a disparity in the Promise Zone.

NLF conducted a final evaluation and participants gave the program an average overall rating of

4.74
OUT OF 5

The groups presented their final projects at the 2024 Graduation Ceremony in September:

NO LIMIT 2 CHANGE:

This policy opportunity aims to support STL Vacancy Collaborative's Registered Neighborhood Organization Project to strengthen community connections and empower neighborhoods to address vacancy issues. By formally recognizing neighborhood groups, the project aims to provide them with important information regarding demolitions and developments and eventually, decision-making power over neighborhood plans.



EDUCATE, DON'T VACATE:

This policy opportunity aims to utilize the Neighborhood Stabilization Division and reduce vacancies in St. Louis communities through education, engagement, and accountability. It raises awareness with welcome packets, instructional videos, and community collaborations, equipping residents with the tools and knowledge to maintain and improve their neighborhoods.



VIOLENCE MUST GO FOR COMMUNITY TO GROW:

This policy opportunity mandates that St. Louis City's Land Reutilization Authority commits to replacing boarded-up structures with doors, windows, and minor outdoor repairs to reduce crime and sustain property values in Promise Zone areas. The initiative also engages community partners, local residents and youth in home repair and beautification efforts. By stabilizing vacant properties for rehabilitation, the opportunity aims to lower vacancy rates, enhance public safety, and promote community revitalization and ultimately reduce the negative impact of vacant buildings associated with crime and violence.

REJUVENATE EMPTY SPACES TO OBTAIN REAL EQUITY (R.E.S.T.O.R.E.):

This policy opportunity proposes that the Land Reutilization Authority develop a policy to attract large employers to invest in and redevelop vacant homes, lots, and blocks in the Promise Zone.

2024 NLF GRADUATES SHARED THE FOLLOWING FEEDBACK:

"The entire experience was transformational. I learned a lot, found support where it was needed, and now have a broader network of amazing people."

"One of the most impactful aspects of NLF was the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with like-minded individuals who are truly dedicated to making a difference. The honesty and openness within the cohort allowed us to connect on a deeper level, creating a supportive environment where everyone felt heard and valued. The chance to work with individuals who are out in the field doing the work was invaluable. Collaborating with experienced professionals provided insights into practical challenges and solutions that aren't always evident in theoretical settings."

"Throughout this fellowship, I gained invaluable knowledge and insights that have truly deepened my understanding of community and service. This great opportunity to collaborate and learn from such dedicated and compassionate people that look like me has been immensely rewarding. Thank you for creating this nurturing environment that encouraged learning, growth and support."

NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERSHIP ACADEMY MINI GRANTS

NOVEMBER 2024

NLA awarded mini-grants to a selection of 2024 NLA participants with a goal of ensuring that project ideas become reality and create positive change at the grassroots, neighborhood level. Participants had an opportunity to apply for a maximum of \$2,500. CWC received 34 applications and funded 10 projects across the state through a grant review committee made up of neighborhood leadership alumni. The total amount awarded was \$23,783.

34

APPLICANTS

10

PROJECTS FUNDED

A sample of the funded projects:

Community Freedged Dade County, MO	The Excelsior Springs Block Party Challenge Clay, MO
Neighborhood Captain Collaborative Greene County, MO	Unity Space St. Louis, MO
Moving Forward Together: Exploring Intergenerational Housing Solutions Greene County, MO	Project Joy - A Community Development Initiative St. Louis, MO
Cut Grass Reduces Trash St. Louis, MO	5500 Clemens Ave Block Party and Community Health Fair St. Louis, MO
Roots of Love & Belonging: Storytelling in Our Park (Frank Williamson) St. Louis, MO	WeConnect St. Louis, MO

\$23,783

TOTAL AWARDED

MISSOURI COMMUNITY LAB (LEARN. ACT. BUILD.)

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2024

Missouri Community LAB pulls together community development trainings onto a single, organized platform that aims to increase participation in the community-building process by educating and supporting all in the quest to build strong, whole communities. There were a total of 125 courses featured on LAB from 49 local and national organizations.

125

COURSES

49

COLLABORATIONS WITH LOCAL / NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

GRANT AND SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE OPPORTUNITIES

Graduates of the neighborhood leadership programs continue to engage with CWC through leadership opportunities. These opportunities include sitting on decision-making committees to allocate funds or select participants.

The following committees all incorporated community resident voice in the leadership, deliberation and decision-making:

NLA Scholarship Committee

68

APPLICATIONS

NLA Alumni Mini-Grant Committee

34

APPLICATIONS

NLF Application Committee

85

APPLICATIONS

NLF Interview Committee

44

INTERVIEWS

Relationship-Building and Research and Implementation Grant Allocation Committee

8

APPLICATIONS

PUBLICATIONS

The impact of CWC's Neighborhood Leadership programming was shared in the following publications in 2024:

Majee W., David I., Hultine-Massengale S., Haq T., Wolff C., James D. and Russell A. (2024) *Creating spaces for dialogue and learning to build collective empowerment: A qualitative study on community leadership development in Midwest America communities*. Community Development, doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2024.2411733

Majee W., Hultine-Massengale S., Rippel C., Reed Adams J. (2024) *Community leadership development*. In B.D. Christens (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of community empowerment*. Cambridge University Press.

CWC Faculty Fellows 2024 recipient Christina Castellano's manuscript, generated from her Creating Whole Communities grant, was accepted for publication:

Castellano, C. (2024). *A Qualitative Exploration: Black Low-Income Mothers' Experiences with a Local Peer Support Group*. [Accepted in Qualitative Health Research Journal]. College of Nursing, University of Missouri–St. Louis.

GRANTS

Our UMSL-MU Extension partnership received a \$1,025,404 grant from the Missouri Foundation for Health to be distributed over two years. This funding supports continuation and expansion of our Neighborhood Leadership programs. These programs are designed to build a pipeline of engaged and effective leaders from historically underserved communities, equipping them to drive local and long term changes that uplift community voices and foster healthier, more resilient communities.

We also received a 3-year, \$928,567 grant from the James S. McDonnell Foundation to launch Civic Collaboration Fellows (CCF), an advanced leadership capacity building program focused on learning with and from resilient communities nationally. Fellows will expand their civic infrastructure and economic mobility knowledge, build critical civic networks, and foster effective collaborative regional leadership by learning from innovative cities that have faced similar challenges.

The CCF Cohort will draw from alumni of the Neighborhood Leadership Fellows (NLF) program as well as key partner representatives from the community economic development field within the footprint of St. Louis City and north St. Louis County.

CREATING WHOLE COMMUNITIES LEADERSHIP ADVISORY TEAM

The CWC Leadership Advisory team strives to be a model for collaborative university-community decision-making.

CWC ADVISORY TEAM MEMBERS

Delesha George
Tonnie Glispie-Smith
Charlin Hughes
Sarah Hultine-Massengale
Janett Lewis
Wilson Majee
Pamela McLucas
Riisa Rawlins
Florian Sichling
Shavanna Spratt
Todd Swanstrom
Adriano Udani
April Walker
Janet Wilding
Patricia Zahn

CWC SUPPORTING STAFF

Jennifer Batres
Tasnim Haq
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Claire Rippel
Catherine Safari
Taylor Storz
Anna Russell Ziegler

CWC ACADEMIC HOME

UMSL School of Social Work

CWC ADMINISTRATIVE HOME

UMSL Economic and Community Development



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