A STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

THE UNIVERSITY’S “FRONT DOOR & MORE”

2016 - 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Office of University Economic Development (UED) was launched approximately two years ago. The new office assumed the bold responsibility of serving as the public face for economic development at the University, helping external partners connect with resources, services and expertise at the University and its system campuses, and promoting internal collaboration across the breadth of economic development activities.

The first two years have brought initial collaboration successes and a more informed view of ongoing needs and opportunities. We recently completed a series of listening sessions around the state meeting with more than 250 people from 16 communities. It is crucial now to act on the input we have received and to define our priorities and direction for the next three years.

This plan’s aim is to create a blueprint for more and deeper relationships between the University and the Minnesotans who are making a difference in economic development in our state. Our vision is that Minnesota’s economy will grow, diversify and yield benefit to the state’s citizens— with the University of Minnesota pursuing innovative strategies to stimulate and contribute to shared economic success. To achieve this vision, UED will focus its efforts on promoting public-private partnerships that connect the University’s talent and innovation resources with the needs of businesses and communities. We will link this plan to government, industry, community, campus, collegiate and other unit level plans and initiatives. We will remain open to ongoing input and discussion.

1 Effective dates for the document: January 2016-December 2018.
FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

Definition of Economic Development

In the context of the University of Minnesota, economic development means proactive engagement and utilization of the University's expertise and innovation resources to help create the conditions for economic prosperity, sustainable economic growth and the accompanying realization of potential for individuals, businesses and communities in Minnesota and around the world.

Guiding Principles

- We are committed to the University's Land Grant Mission to serve the public good.
- We do our job with a culture of urgency, professional engagement and responsiveness.
- We make a difference through measurement, continuous improvement, leadership and innovation.
- We develop and grow relationships.
- We are team players who care that the state benefits from successful economic development.

OUR VISION

Minnesota’s economy will grow, diversify and yield benefit to the state’s citizens—with the University of Minnesota pursuing innovative strategies to stimulate and contribute to shared economic success.

We will:

- Focus University resources to contribute to Minnesota’s economic development.
- Expertly navigate the University system to make efficient connections between needs and opportunities, both within the University system and with external partners.
- Promote access to the University within the broader Minnesota economic development narrative.

2 It should be acknowledged that there are many definitions of economic development. The one included in this document is particularly relevant for the work of UED.
STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES

Beyond the current “Front Door” positioning, our partners want us to be more. They want a two-way portal or gateway for mutual benefit. The “Front Door & More” will go beyond transactions; we’re about relationships. We will represent the University as a responsive, interested and dedicated partner. We will be sensitive to the fact that we are not the only doorway into the University, respecting the welcoming approach of others in the University system. We will become a stronger, “go-to” source of information and data analysis for our partners inside and outside the University. We will act as host and connector for business opportunities, including international opportunities.

Built around the “Front Door & More” over-arching positioning, the following strategic imperatives, which are intertwined and integrated with one another, are UED’s highest priorities for the next three years.

Figure 1: Front Door and More Strategic Imperatives CY2016-19
1. **Expedite Access**

   In order to efficiently connect the University’s resources with Minnesota’s economic development drivers – businesses, associations, governments and communities – UED will implement best in class tools and systems.

   **A. Create a more informative, functional and user-friendly online presence to:**
   - Help businesses and other economic development organizations make connections into the University.
   - Highlight faculty, technologies and centers of excellence, with points of contact.
   - Create links to other, related U of M websites.
   - Link with existing databases for specific colleges, faculty and specialty areas (Experts@Minnesota, etc).
   - Track online usage patterns and results and prepare to adapt the online presence as usage patterns inform what is working and most valued by partners.

   **B. Explore a “menu” approach to help businesses, entrepreneurs and others engage with the University that includes:**
   - A series of self-selected choices for interacting with the University.
   - Options for scheduling visits to campus (with tips about traffic, parking and navigating).
   - Details about ways to connect at upcoming events, trade shows, site visits, etc.
   - Suggestions for finding resources, services and expertise within the University.
   - Examples of successful University-business engagement.

   **C. Utilize a portfolio management approach for developing, maintaining and evaluating University-industry engagement.**
   - With the U of M Foundation, drive success of the Corporate Engagement Workgroup.
   - Implement data systems and tools to monitor and evaluate progress against key indicators and goals.
   - Identify optimal information and leverage points for improving the value of the University’s relationships with its partners and collaborators.

2. **Catalyze Economic Development**

   UED will proactively identify new and ongoing opportunities to connect the resources of the University with business, government and community leaders working to advance talent, innovation and global trade as drivers of economic development.³

---

³ The Brookings Institution, 2015: “Pillars of Prosperity, Leveraging Regional Assets to Grow Minnesota’s Economy.”
A. Develop a stronger voice in the vital issues surrounding *Minnesota’s workforce*.
   - Provide leadership for the University to define and articulate its role in workforce development in Minnesota (in partnership with the President’s office, the Office of the Vice President of Research and the University at large), including its role in lifelong learning, customized training, experiential learning for students, connections to study abroad and international research opportunities.
   - Examine how UED can promote and/or coordinate internships and guided experiential learning opportunities within the state’s businesses.
   - Reach out to MNSCU as a higher education partner for workforce development.

B. Actively participate in efforts to *promote Minnesota* as a place for business.
   - Maintain regular and direct contact with key business, government and non-profit entities including DEED, GREATER MSP, state and regional chambers, Medical Alley Association, MNSCU, the Minnesota High Tech Association, Enterprise MN, regional economic development organizations, regional Initiative Foundations and others, with a goal of improving marketing efforts and thereby catalyzing economic development efforts throughout the state.
   - Aggressively tell the story of the University’s “Front Door & More” to individual businesses and through the state’s business associations and trade groups, encouraging engagement with the University.
   - Wherever possible, arm University faculty with supporting data on Minnesota’s competitiveness as they advance their areas of expertise around the world as speakers, researchers and recruiters of talented students.

C. Raise the *visibility* of the University as an important economic development collaborator.
   - Facilitate new ways to engage partners in economic development in the state, including online and in-person “Critical Questions” forums to promote discussion and problem-solving.
   - Identify new ways to work with faculty, such as a focused relationship each year with selected faculty members to help expand their relationships with industry and reinforce technology based economic development.
   - Develop regular communication that provides updates on economic development work at the University and explores state-level topics of interest.
   - Consider convening or co-convening an event that brings together economic development thought leaders and provides a forum for recognizing noteworthy accomplishments.
3. Act Statewide
As a system-wide University office, we must have a balanced approach to bring economic development progress into both Greater Minnesota and the greater MSP region. To achieve this balance, UED will build upon our metro-area efforts and accelerate our Greater Minnesota efforts. Selected activities will, wherever possible, take advantage of work in progress and business relationships already established by units across the University.

A. In collaboration with local and regional economic development organizations in Greater Minnesota, evaluate the areas where the University can provide distinct value. Consider lessons learned from initiatives such as the University’s innovation emphasis in Duluth (NRRI) and Austin (Hormel Institute).

B. Prioritize activities that achieve greater interaction and knowledge transfer between the University and economic development and business leaders in Greater Minnesota.
   o Expand the outreach to small and medium sized business. Customize the “menu” approach for working with the University (Strategy #1B) to appeal to smaller businesses, regardless of their location.
   o Bring University resources to Greater Minnesota communities and regions through a series of innovation consortia and gatherings designed to foster cooperation among businesses, communities, organizations and the University.
   o Partner with DEED and the SBDCs to improve connections between Greater Minnesota and UED.
   o Evaluate the opportunity to work with University of Minnesota Extension and others to engage in singular areas of need, such as economic development efforts in Indian Country.

C. Consider how best to establish a staffing presence in Greater Minnesota in order to improve coordination with economic development activities at the system campuses, and with rural economic development efforts in general. Opportunities to be pursued include:
   o Coordinating UED’s activities more closely with the EDA Center at U of M Crookston, one of more than 40 university centers nationwide supported by the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce.
   o Collaborating with UMD’s Center for Economic Development which has strong ties with companies in Northeastern and Northwestern Minnesota.
   o Increasing connection with the economic development activities managed through University of Minnesota Extension.
OPERATIONAL APPROACH

In order to achieve the strategic imperatives documented in this plan, we must define the UED Brand to clearly state who we are and what we stand for, and communicate it. This will include expanding on "Front Door & More" as our more robust brand identity. It will also be important to market the University and our connection capabilities, highlighting UED as a resourceful and creative partner both within the University and externally. As work progresses, packaging and distributing UED success stories will further highlight the role of the group and reinforce the value of engaging with the University.

The plan lays out the areas of highest priority for the next three years of work. UED will remain a small team throughout this period. Therefore, in order for significant progress to be made, it will be important for UED to stay within the described scope and maintain focus. The guidance of the UED Advisory Committee of internal and external experts will be critical as UED’s work brings forward new needs and opportunities for consideration.

A final area to emphasize is the importance of developing the capabilities within UED to collect and analyze a range of data to support decision making and the tracking of progress and impact. This will require the implementation of tools customized for relationship management (i.e. Salesforce), as well as a sophisticated understanding of data that is collected by key collaborators both inside and outside the University.