



## *Convergence Colloquia: Gauging Impact*

The Convergence Colloquia are multi-disciplinary gatherings that advance cutting-edge research to develop innovative solutions and build long term partnerships that improve the world. The idea behind the gatherings is to bring together University of Minnesota researchers with private, public, and nonprofit stakeholders to identify strategic collaboration opportunities that can lead to significant impact at the local, state, national, and global scales.

The colloquia grew out of recommendations from the U's research strategic plan, [Five Years Forward](#), to promote a culture of serendipity that advances scientific discovery through collaborative thinking and action. Embedded in a strategic vision and action plan, the colloquia are grounded in a results-oriented approach that includes ongoing evaluation and reflection to ensure accountability and results.

### **Coming together**

Under the leadership of Prof. Carissa Schively Slotterback, seven highly successful Convergence Colloquia were held between February 2015 and May 2016 on the topics of smart cities and infrastructure, aging, health equity, renewable energy, sustainable food systems, water supply, and citizen science.

More than 600 people, with roughly half from the University and half from outside, participated in these action-oriented "think tanks." Internal participants came from all five University campuses and at least 15 UMTC colleges, and external participants represented the nonprofit sector (41%), the public sector (39%) and the private sector (25.8%).

Surveys of participants indicated a high level of satisfaction with the colloquia, with more than half reporting that they met more than five new people at their event and 95 percent or more of respondents saying they had productive opportunities for interaction and the chance to meet people outside their discipline.

### **Serendipity grants**

The colloquia are followed on by the opportunity to build new collaborative research teams that engage diverse disciplinary perspectives and integrate U of M experts with those from the public, private and nonprofit organizations in Minnesota with funding from dedicated Serendipity Grants.

For the first seven Convergence Colloquia, 25 serendipity grants (out of 59 proposals) were awarded for a total of \$522,374, including \$130,123 in grants from the McKnight Foundation.

Serendipity Grants included projects to map the age of infrastructure across Minnesota's towns and cities in order to help inform policymakers' decisions, to benchmark the growing sector of urban agriculture for environmental sustainability and production efficiency, and to examine the opportunities and barriers to the use of renewable energies by municipal and cooperative utilities in Greater Minnesota.

More grant details are available under each colloquium's topic at: [research.umn.edu/convergence](https://research.umn.edu/convergence).