Mapping Engagement For Your Institution

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Overview

Public maps offer a visually compelling way to present the scope and types of an institution's outreach and engagement activities. With advances in Geographic Information System (GIS) software, it has become increasingly practicable to develop online map applications. The development of a map for the public is marked by a substantial number of decision points along the way that impact the design, definitions, and political implications of the map.

Why Are Maps Useful?

Maps can be used to share the institution's engagement activity with the public and/or to facilitate internal connections. Depending on how they are designed, they can:

- Present scope and types of engagement work in a digestible, often interactive format
- Illustrate real-world activities and impact that facilitate public support
- Demonstrate to legislators and funders the areas and types of work being undertaken that support their priorities
- Clarify institutional reach to campus leaders and identify places that may represent opportunities for encouraging new activity
- Facilitate partnerships and resource sharing among faculty, staff, and units as well as with community organizations

Who Should Be Included in Map Design?

Map development requires input from a broad range of stakeholders. Depending on what you want to build into the map, these might include:

- Public engagement office
- Government relations office
- University communications and marketing office
- Mapping/GIS units
- Extension or other major community-engaged units
- Community-engaged learning office
- Faculty affairs or faculty representatives
- Health sciences representatives
- Web designers/graphic artists
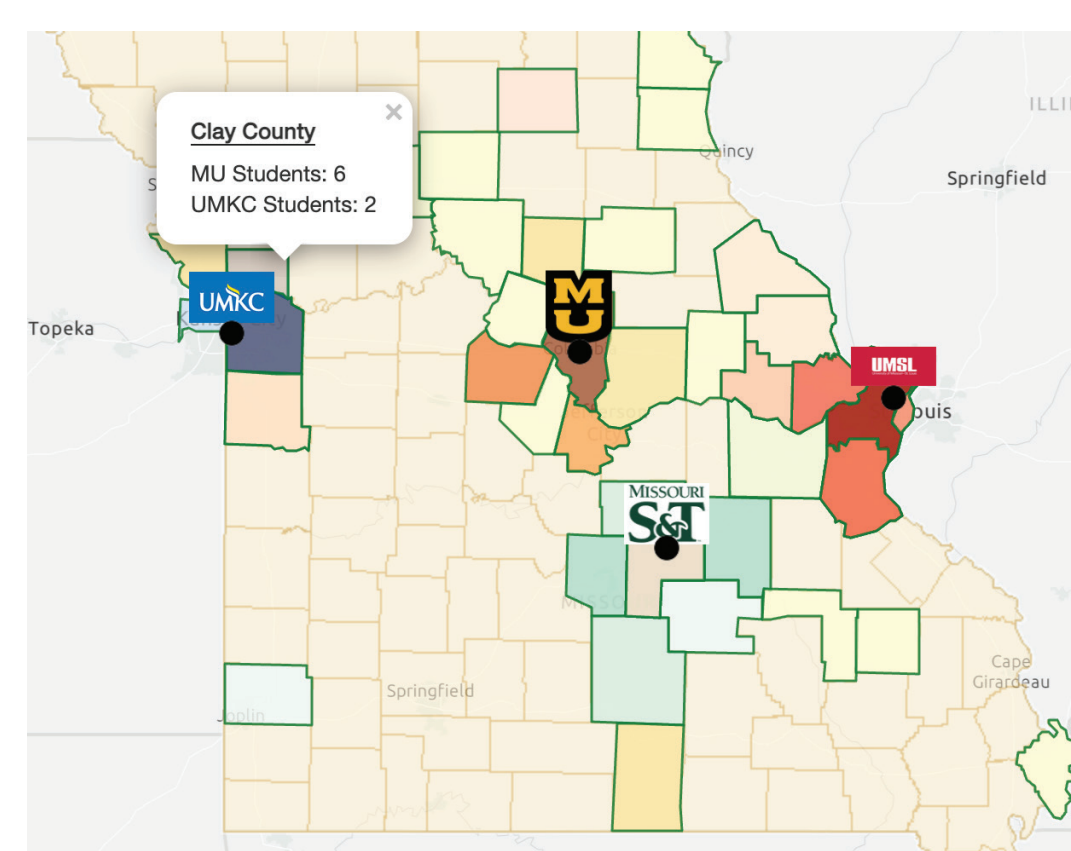- IT and staff responsible for SSO (single sign-on)

What Are Major Decision Points?

To design the map, major decision points occur around definitional, logistical, and political issues.
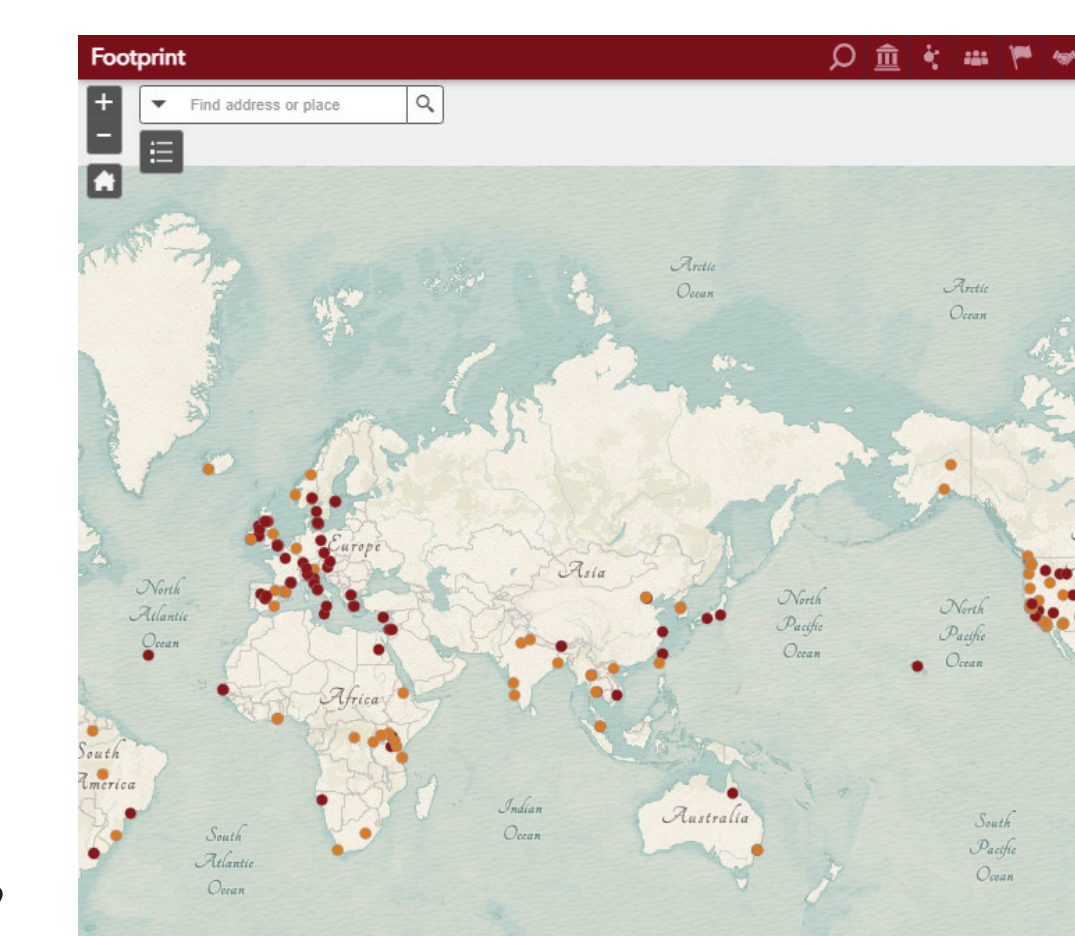
Definitional Decisions

These decisions determine what is included on the map. You will be guided by the intended purpose of the map: Are you looking to display as much activity as possible, or are you seeking a more focused approach?

- What qualifies as an engagement activity? Is the map focused on engaged scholarship – engaged research and community-engaged learning – or is it broader?
- Are any public events initiated by the institution eligible? Alumni club activity, athletics events?
- Is it engagement to participate on a community board or committee? How about professional societies?
- Are one-time events included or should activities have a minimum length of time?

- Does the map include student placements (clinical placements, internship sites)?

University of Missouri: Counties where student teachers and those in field experiences work in schools.

- Will you include online activities?
- Do your partners include organizations whose contribution is limited to providing funding?
- Are higher education institutions considered partners? How about only those in developing countries or where you are providing capacity-building?
- What is the geographic scope? City, state, international?
- Are programs offered on campus for the community, including through university science, arts, or performance venues, included?
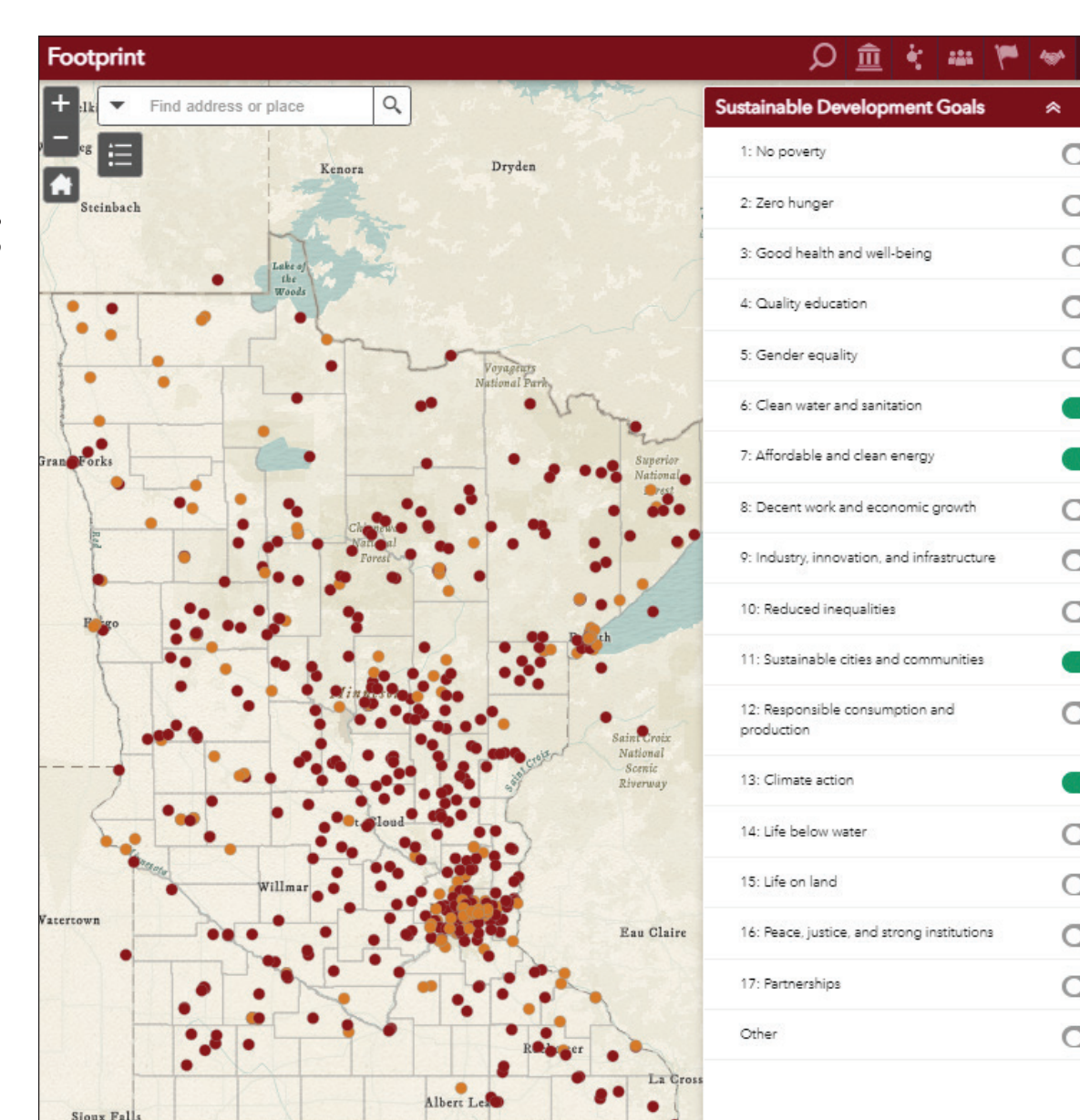

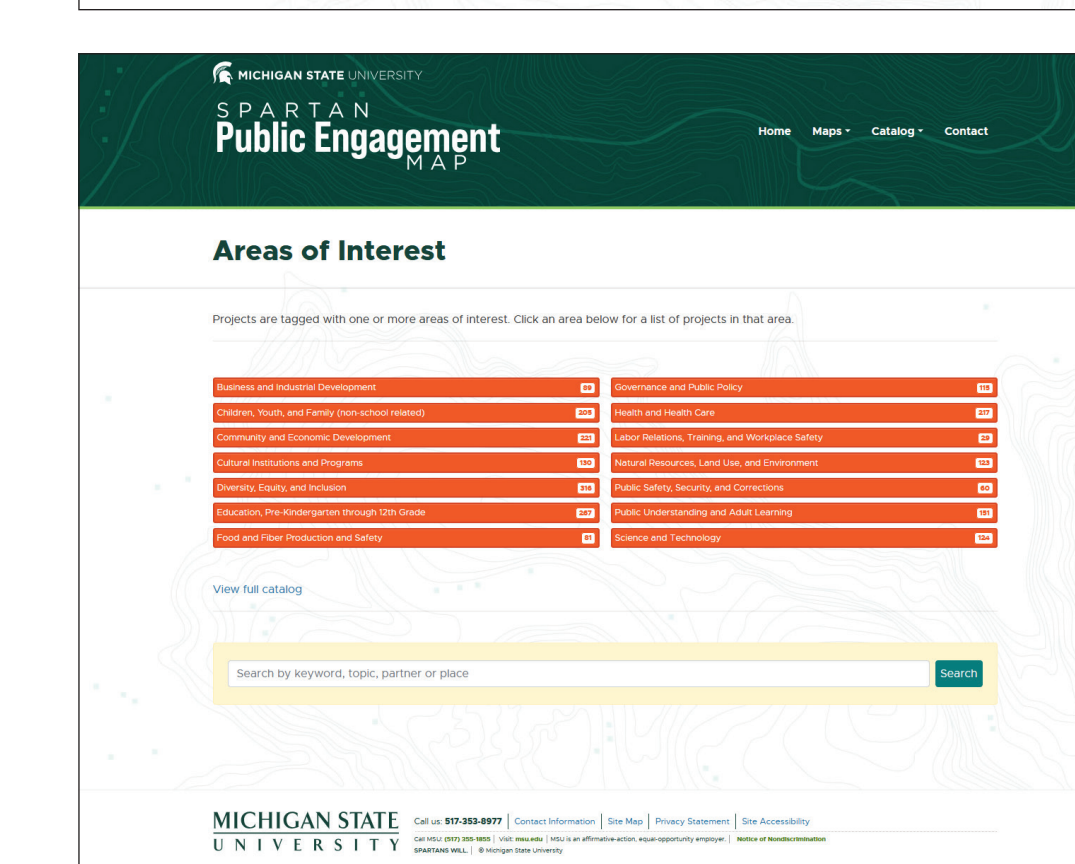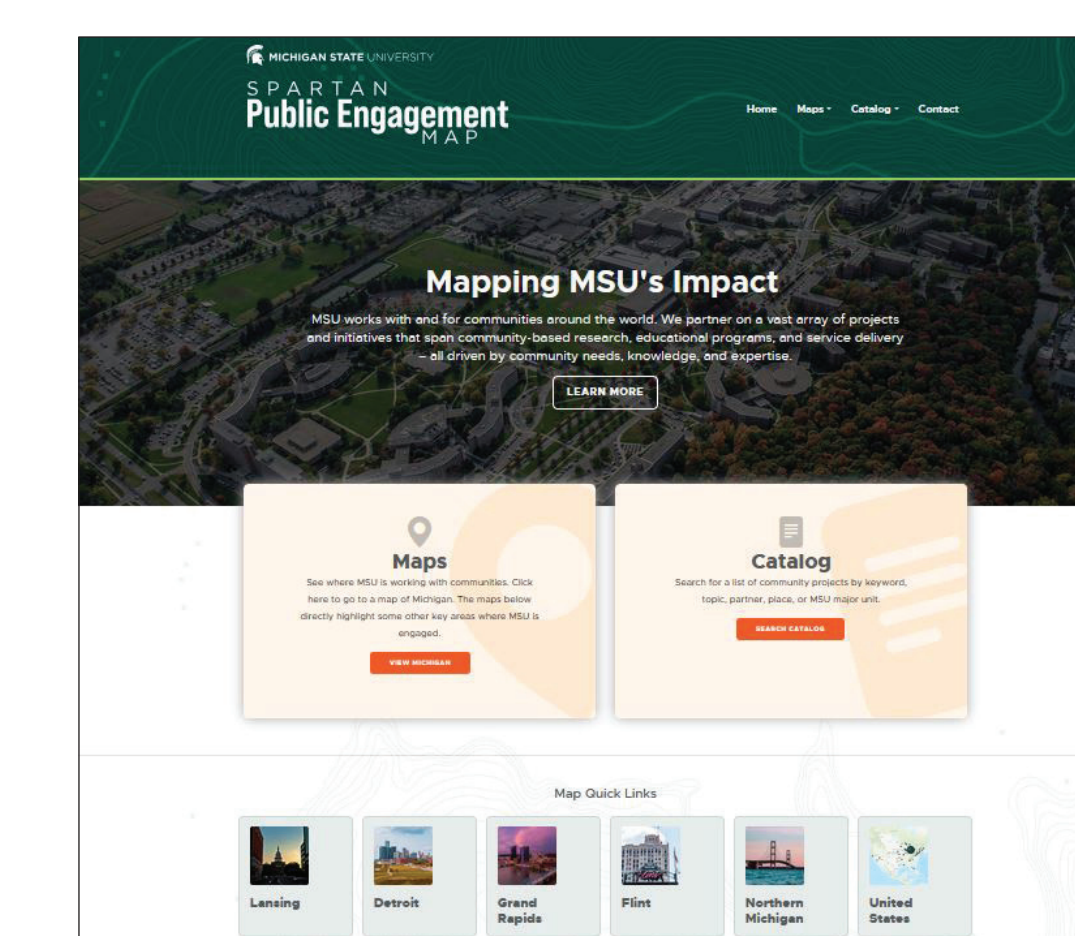University of Minnesota: Public engagement activities across the globe.

Logistical Decisions

These decisions drive how the map will be navigated by users.

- What platform will you use? ArcGIS/ESRI is common; GivePulse has a mapping function; and others are also available.
- Will users be able to filter, and by what? Topical area, geographic area, type of engagement activity, academic unit, system campus?

Michigan State University: College and major unit filters.

University of Minnesota: Filters by UN Sustainable Development Goals.

- Will users connect directly to the map, or will there be a landing page that has different information or access points?

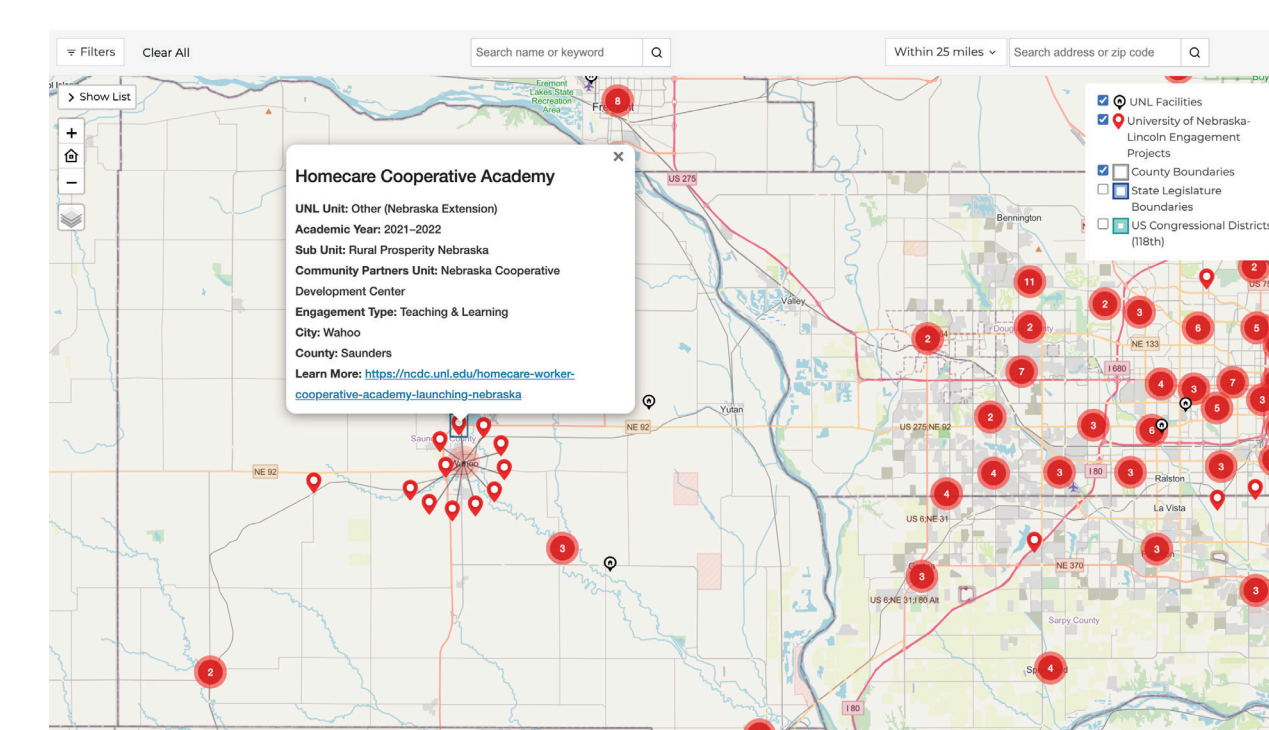- Are you mapping addresses where activity occurs, addresses of partners, or something else?
- Will you present only a map or will there also be a listing or catalog of activities?
- Will the map and/or catalog be exportable or printable?
- Will additional layers be included, such as census data, legislative district, state data?
- What criteria will determine when activities should be removed? When the activity is complete? One year, two years? Never removed, but they are tagged with the year they began? How about publications produced after the project – do these count in the length of the activity?
- How will you update the data? Real time? Annually?

Michigan State University: Landing page (top), and engagement map with project descriptions for view area and map/catalog toggle.

Political Decisions

- Where will the map reside on the institution's website? Government relations site, the President or Provost's site, the engagement office site, the community relations site?
- Will the map be publicly available, or will it require sign-on? Is it for both public and internal use?
- Will users be assigned an access level to access certain data elements?

University of Nebraska – Lincoln (created by University of Missouri): Engagement map with boundary filters and pop-up project description.

- Will activities be located at exact addresses or approximated areas? If both, how will you identify which is which?
- Will you request permission from the activity owners (faculty, staff) to display the activity?
- How will you address the locations of politically controversial work by faculty or partnerships with and serving vulnerable populations?
- What rules will govern the use of data respondents have provided but have asked you not to share on your map?
- How will your map design address possible criticisms about places where your institution has little to report?
- What implications for human subjects' protections might publishing institutional data on a public map raise?

How Will the Map Data Be Collected?

A map is only as useful and the amount and quality of data it plots, so . . .

- Do you have staff time dedicated to getting data and maintaining the map?
- Do you have buy-in from campus and unit leaders for gathering the data?
- Will you collect data from individual faculty and staff members or from aggregating bodies like departments, centers, and institutes? Or from both?
- What strategies will you employ to encourage compliance with data collection requests?
- Will you conduct a survey, have a form that feeds into the map, work with units to get spreadsheets of activities?

University of Minnesota: Form for direct project entry into map.

Summary

A great deal of thought goes into the development of outreach and engagement maps. We recommend partnering with a GIS unit if possible. Convene a team of stakeholders in, and perhaps outside of, the institution to identify the target audiences and intended uses of the map. Finally, work with these partners to make decisions on the definitional, logistical, and political issues inherent in mapping, and enlist them as champions to facilitate buy-in for data collection efforts.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

University of Missouri

Map URLs:
Michigan State University: **In development**
University of Minnesota: **system.umn.edu/your-community**
University of Missouri: **community.umsystem.edu/engagement-mapping/**
University of Nebraska – Lincoln: **allthingsnebraska.unl.edu/engagement-map/**