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Office of Sustainability and Center for Small Towns Engage in Summer Outreach Activities

Dedication to community is central to Morris's work and mission as a public land-grant institution.

This summer the University of Minnesota, Morris Office of Sustainability (OOS) and Center for Small Towns (CST) demonstrated their dedication to community outreach. This dedication is central to Morris's work and mission as a public land-grant institution.

OOS activities involve raising awareness about environmental issues, but the office goes a step further by putting into practice programs, technology, and events that promote environmental stewardship. One such project has been [the Morris Model](#). A collaborative effort between the City of Morris and Morris campus, the goal of the Morris Model is to improve local commitment to climate protection and sustainability as participants learn how to make the community a better place.

“The city of Morris has a long history of engaging students in community solution-building,” says Troy Goodnough, director of sustainability. “The Morris Model has confirmed our belief that students can provide a powerful organizing role in community energy and resilience planning work. This is a key component to the replicability of this model in other communities.”

“Working at the Office of Sustainability has expanded my perspectives on energy conservation, community resilience and clean energy initiatives that are being explored and expanded upon not only in Morris, but also across the globe,” says McKenzie Dice ’XX, hometown. “The Morris Model is a diverse and broad project that will shape the future of clean and efficient energy as well as sense of community.”

CST works closely with community-oriented groups like nonprofits, K–12 schools, and local government units to identify, understand, and initiate action on specific needs, pressing issues, and emerging trends that impact rural Minnesota. All CST projects incorporate undergraduate student interns, providing opportunities for Morris students to engage with and contribute to small communities. This summer alone CST staff and students engaged in more than 20 community-based projects.

“The summer months provide a unique opportunity to deepen students' community-based experiences,” says Kerri Barnstuble, CST program coordinator. “Because most CST student interns work 20+ hours per week, they are able to develop strong relationships within our small communities, understand the context and meaning of their work, and provide significant capacity to a range community vitality initiatives.”

Madison Hughes '17, hometown, agrees, adding, “Working at CST brings a sense of purpose and belonging to living in Morris. I get to learn about rural and small-town life, opportunities, and issues that allow me to further root myself into my relatively new prairie home while at the same time hopefully making some sort of difference in the communities I am working with.”

Commitment to community is at the heart of Morris's [mission](#), which includes providing access to resources of the University of Minnesota, serving as a national leader in sustainable energy and green living, and supporting the Morris campus's deep sense of community. For more information on Morris's outreach initiatives, visit morris.umn.edu/outreach.