

Engaging Rural Communities through Research Pilot Summary Report - 2022 & 2023

BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

With the support of the D2D Research Facility at the MN State Fair, University researchers have enrolled over 146,000 individuals in innovative research projects since 2014. However, 75% of these participants are from the metro area. Research that supports the health, economic, educational, social, and service needs of rural Minnesotans is of paramount importance in fulfilling the University's land grant mission and demonstrating our value beyond the metro area.

For two summers, D2D conducted a pilot that tested whether the traditional D2D research infrastructure model would be effective in engaging rural county community members.

GOALS

1. Assess effectiveness of the D2D model in the rural county fair context (eg, # enrolled participants).
2. Assess UMN researcher satisfaction with operating their studies at county fairs.
3. Assess rural county fair board satisfaction with D2D research at their fairs.

PROJECT TIMELINE & ACTIVITIES

- Winter: D2D attended Minnesota County Fair Convention to solicit rural fair interest; communications with fair boards; internal pilot funding provided by 10 different University units; strategic planning.
- Spring: Selection of 5 rural fair locations based on geographic diversity, fair board invitation, schedule, and quality of available facilities; rural research RFA disseminated to research community; review of research proposals; IRB approvals for all studies; site visits and operational planning.
- Summer: Conducted research operations at 5 county fairs. Included logistics for team travel, lodging, rural fair & news outlet communications, WiFi, signage, building setup/take-down.
- Fall: Evaluation of pilot study; completion of final report; planning for next year; consideration of future funding.
- Repeat cycle in 2023 with budget allowing for participation in 3 county fairs.

SCHOOL/COLLEGE PI's	2022	2023
Allied Health Sciences	1	0
CEHD	1	2
CLA	3	5
CSE	1	1
Dentistry	1	0
Medical School	7	5
Nursing	1	3
Public Health	3	3
Crookston – Science & Math	1	1
Duluth – Med & Pharm	1	1
Morris - Social Science, Humanities	2	1
TOTAL	22	22

2022		2023	
22 studies		20 studies	
14 HS	64%	11 HS	55%
8 Non-HS	36%	9 Non-HS	45%

- 13 (65%): PI's participating in 2022 & 2023



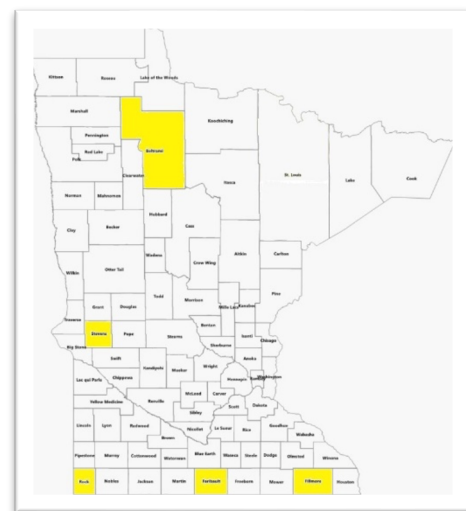
County Fair	Town, MN Region	County Pop.	Hours of Operation	Type of Research Space	# of Studies		Total Enrolled	
					2022	2023	2022	2023
Fillmore	Preston, South east	21,031	1 day – 5 hrs	Outdoor Tent	5	NA	73	NA
Faribault	Blue Earth, South central	13,727	3 days – 24 hrs	4H Bldg	8	NA	337	NA
Rock	Luverne, South west	9,386	4 days – 23 hrs	Commercial Bldg	5	11	400	289
Beltrami	Bemidji, North west	46,784	4 days – 25 hrs	Designated Bldg	9	13	435	535
Stevens	Morris, West central	9,770	5 days – 27.5 hrs	Ice Arena / Comm Space	10	12	532	740
'22 & '23 combined: 180 total hrs of data collection, 3341 total enrollees							1777	1564

Note: 4-5 studies were scheduled each day, projects rotated in/out providing variety to fairgoers. Studies may have attended more than one fair.

PILOT STUDY RESULTS

Goal 1 - Increase rural participant enrollment. Over the course of the pilot, we learned what worked well for research teams and aided D2D's overall success:

- UMN branding** was positive for recruitment and led to fairgoer curiosity about the 'Research on a Stick' booths. Fair settings themselves are comfortable environs and UMN branding is familiar to people across the state; combined, they encouraged engagement with research teams. Fairs are often places where people go to learn new things and participate in unique activities. The fair setting encourages exploration, education, and spending time participating in new activities. All participants received a branded giveaway item that also created interest around the fair. Many rural fairgoers expressed pride with the U's decision to be present at their fair.
- Active recruitment** was critical to study success. This meant outgoing recruiters and active invitations to all fairgoers who passed by. Presenting fairgoers with an invitation to come talk with us, spending time in conversation about the importance of research participation, explaining the line-up of studies available to take part in that day, these were all strategies that helped gain trust and opened the door to participation.
- Schedules** varied across all fairs, some with strict attendance rules and others where we could set our own hours. Late afternoon/early evening and weekends were the highest attended hours and being present for multiple days allowed for repeat viewing and familiarity with us; certain days were filled with animal showing/judging that limited research participation.
- Studies worked in **variety of venues** including a tent, commercial space, and our own designated building. Each presented their own pros (high foot traffic, personalized space configuration, electricity) and cons (wind, low foot traffic). Based on this pilot we can request certain amenities or make decisions based on previous experience.



Goal 2 - Assess UMN investigator satisfaction with the research they conducted with D2D at rural county fairs. At the conclusion of each fair, investigators were asked to complete a brief feedback survey about their experience; 40 responses were submitted in 2022, 41 in 2023.

“...we were able to reach precisely the types of people we would have the most difficulty targeting through other methods.” – D2D researcher

Overall, the researchers were very happy with their experience as attested by their text responses:

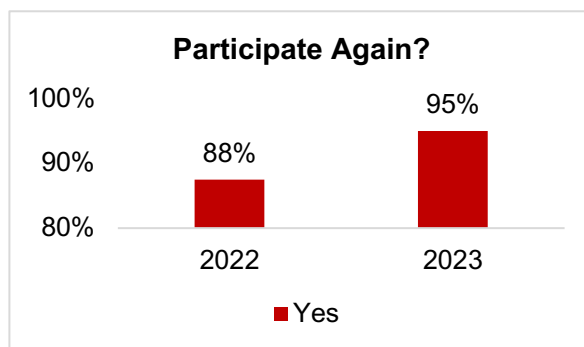
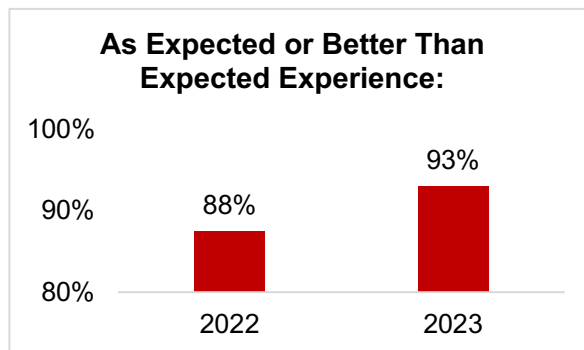
- *“In talking to people, including those who didn't participate, it seemed apparent that people agreed that it is good for the University to get out into rural communities and be a presence at these community events.”*
- *“I think this is an excellent way to demonstrate the relevance of the UMN and our research in outstate MN. The data from rural participants will be invaluable for my research.”*
- *“This was a wonderful setup and really well put together... Well done!”*

For those who indicated the experience was less successful than what was anticipated (n=9), the responses focused on lower than expected foot traffic, distance to fair, and heat.

Interestingly, four respondents who said enrollment was worse than expected also said they would try attending that particular fair again, indicating recognition of the pilot nature of the event and that relationship-building over time could enhance productivity.

Goal 3 - Assess rural county fair board satisfaction with D2D research at their fairs. We surveyed all county fair boards and received the following responses. The tables below show data averaged across both years; 10 responses in 2022, 5 responses in 2023.

In 2022, only two board members responded with ‘neutral’ as to whether D2D added value to the fair, one noting they didn’t have time to interact with us. Board members questioning whether to host D2D again indicated concern that we didn’t have enough participation to make it worth our while; our subsequent participation in 2023 resulted in 100% of fair board respondents indicating value in hosting research at their fairs.



Fair board member comments included:

“It helped area residents make the connection between the Morris campus and the larger University of Minnesota.”

“Fairgoers were very interested in the surveys and pleased that rural Minnesota was considered in their research.”

Interactions with UMN staff & researchers		Do you feel that Research on a Stick added value to your fair?		Would you host Research on a Stick again?	
Excellent/Good	85%	Yes	90%	Yes	90%

“The atmosphere they brought to our fair was amazing. The community is still talking about how great this was to have at our fair as usually SW MN is forgotten about. We hope this will be a strong relationship for years down the road to have at our fair.” – Fair board member

Research on a Stick: University Research at Greater MN Events

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM

2022



2023

