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The deadline for feedback is the end of day on March 15, 2021.

### Addressing Redlining through Community Engagement: A plan for Omaha

When we reflect on the roots of our communities, it is impossible to avoid the reality of colonization, racism and white supremacy; redlining is an example of how communities of color have experienced intentional disinvestment and segregation (Strand, 2017). Omaha is all too familiar with the historical impacts of disinvestment in the community, a result of redlining.

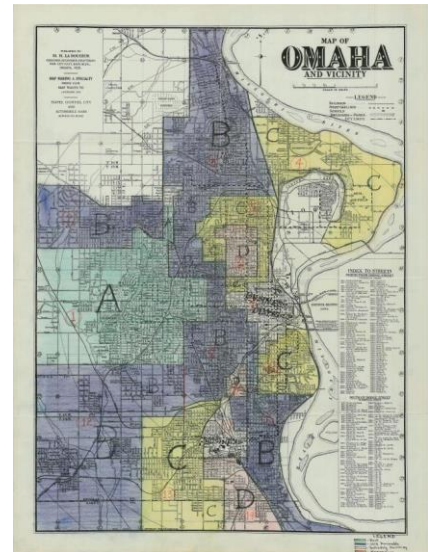
This project is built upon careful research and listening to community partners about their lived experience. Data collected in Omaha shows the redlined areas of our city remain the highest poverty areas where the highest concentrations of minority populations live. Research gathered also indicated how these practices and infrastructure “development” limited access for communities of color in our city. The results of this research led the Service Learning Academy to engage diverse collaborators representing P-12, higher education, and community partners to better understand the historical and contemporary implications of redlining policies. While the initial foundation has been established, there is still much work to be done together.

We recognize the opportunity this initiative will afford us in developing new methods for engaging with the community where historically there has been tremendous inequity of power and resources. This can help inform future initiatives between the University and community, especially when working within communities that have historically been excluded and disinvested. This work has allowed us to work collaboratively with communities and educate the next generation of leaders to avoid historical mistakes and change policy as directed by the community.

This pilot project is intended to bring four major groups together:

1. UNO faculty members
2. P-12 teachers
3. Community partners (representing nonprofit organizations, business, residents, community organizers, and governmental agencies)
4. North Omaha residents living in previously redlined zone D as “Hazardous”

The foundation of this proposal has been developing the past several years. Education about how redlining influenced Omaha’s history tells a more accurate story of the history of disinvestment. As a community, we are growing more aware of how white supremacy and racist policies shaped the current, real, and perceived experience of all residents of Omaha. The Union for Contemporary Art has hosted an exhibit titled *Undesign the Redline* for the past 18 months, even giving online tours to maintain access during the pandemic. The UNO Service Learning Academy used the service learning lens to identify interdisciplinary and intergenerational solutions to redlining through service learning. Philanthropic foundations in Omaha have offered two-day trainings about the roots of white supremacy from the Racial Equity Institute for approximately 900 people in the Omaha area, which is growing. Residents in Omaha are too aware of the daily microaggressions they experience because of the disinvestment of their space. P-12 schools look for deep, meaningful ways to educate and apply learning. Collectively, these partners would come together to organize a proposal that builds on the work they have been doing separately



and provides an answer to the question Maya Angelou gave us years ago, “Now that we know better, what do we do?”

This project proposal centers the community in the project, which is best practice in community engagement efforts. Coupling the assets identified above, we propose to activate a board of community members that will build their own understanding of community development and engagement that will guide investment efforts through service learning and community engagement. The Community Board will undergo training facilitated by ONE Omaha that will provide a foundation about the City of Omaha offices, access points, communication strategies, advocacy efforts, and other topics. The first few months will require strong relationship building and trust with the board, ONE Omaha, university, and other partners. The group will then compile a neighborhood health check list that will communicate opportunities for investment in the redlined spaces to share with the educators and community partners. Then, by connecting their course objectives and community partner assets, faculty members will develop service learning and community engagement project ideas with community partners and pitch those to the community board. Specifically, they will outline the course learning goals, community development goal, link to the health check list, assessment strategies, and budget. The board will green light the projects for implementation and allocate resources to fund the projects. Members of the 10-person Community Board serve 3-year terms; we anticipate approximately 10 service learning/community engagement projects to occur each year from years 2-5.

Training would also occur for the UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers. Each would be required to complete an online tour of the *Undesign the Redline* exhibit at the Union for Contemporary art and a subsequent hour-long training connecting redlining to Omaha data. They also need to complete (or have completed within the last 3 years) the Service Learning Seminar training. This includes training about implicit bias, best practices in service learning course development, and best practices in community partner development. These trainings would be held on campus in the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center and in the community.

The project would not only strengthen UNO’s community engagement mission and center community organizations in identifying projects, but it would also strengthen the opportunities for OPS teachers to connect to UNO. As an incentive, teachers who complete the necessary training and implement a service learning course through this project would have access to tuition remission for up to 3 graduate credits. This will build the pipeline of teachers that are uniquely trained in best practices in service learning and community engagement, our Omaha history, and implementing a service learning project. Similarly, UNO faculty members would have access to \$500 course development stipends for course development and training requirements necessary for this project. Once trained, these faculty members not only understand service learning and community engagement best practices, the history of redlining in Omaha, and the resident-identified opportunities for investment. This project has the opportunity to engage hundreds of students through this model over the next three years; the trained faculty members can continue to use what they learn and impact student learning exponentially over the years.

We have connected with the following potential partners for this project: Omaha Public Schools, ONE Omaha, Union for Contemporary Art, UNO Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center, Great Plains Black History Museum, Sherwood Foundation, Omaha Circle, Spark, UNO Black Studies, UNO Urban Studies, City of Omaha Planning Department, City of Omaha Mayor’s Office, North Omaha Neighborhood Alliance, and UNO Service Learning Academy.

**Year 1:** Recruit community board; Train and build trust with community board and partners; Train UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers about redlining; Train UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers about best practices in service learning and community engagement course and partnership development; Identify Community Fellow; Hire graduate assistant and student interns; Conduct neighborhood health check list. *Metrics:* Board developed and trained; Number of faculty and P-12 teachers trained; Completed neighborhood check list; Staffing hired and trained.

**Year 2:** Train UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers about best practices in service learning and community engagement course and partnership development; Continue community board training and convening; Develop and submit service learning and community engagement projects to board; Implement projects as identified; Revisit neighborhood health check list. *Metrics:* Number of faculty and P-12 teachers trained; Number of UNO students engaged in service learning/community engagement projects; Impact of service learning/community engagement projects (as identified by the community); Pre and post assessment for student learning.

**Year 3:** Train UNO faculty members and P-12 teachers about best practices in service learning and community engagement course and partnership development; Continue community board training and convening; Develop and submit service learning and community engagement projects to board; Implement projects as identified; Revisit neighborhood health check list. *Metrics:* Number of faculty and P-12 teachers trained; Number of UNO students engaged in service learning/community engagement projects; Impact of service learning/community engagement projects (as identified by the community); Pre and post assessment for student learning.

Opportunities for additional funding:

- Kresge Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Omaha Community Foundation
- Diversity Grants
- Others depending on community-identified priority areas
- Nebraska Arts Council
- Nebraska Humanities Council
- Local Foundations

Strand, P. (2017). "Mirror, mirror on the wall...": Reflections on fairness and housing in the Omaha Council-Bluffs region. *Creighton Law Review*, 50(2), 183-247.