

A History of Wilder Research

1917 – 2022

Author: Paul W. Mattessich, Ph.D., Executive Director Emeritus

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Foreword

Created in the early 20th century by Minnesota philanthropists, community leaders, and business leaders, Wilder Research achieved international stature as one of the largest, freestanding, nonpartisan social research organizations in the United States. From its 1917 study revealing conditions menacing to community health, to its 2022 study analyzing the state of Minnesota's response to civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd, Wilder Research has influenced the shaping of social policies and human service programs locally, nationally, and internationally.

Wilder Research stands as a unique entity – a large social research organization, with formal ties to operating programs which deliver human services. Most of its growth occurred during the past 40 years, when it significantly extended the reach of its research into new topic areas and expanded its activities into new geographic areas.

Nonetheless, the roots of the success of Wilder Research stretch back more than a century. This history describes the evolution of Wilder Research. It identifies what has enabled Wilder Research to creatively support the efforts of community organizations, human service agencies, government agencies, philanthropic foundations, and other organizations and groups.

Wilder Research formally began in 1917 with a health and housing study conducted by Carol Aronovici. An immigrant who earned a Ph.D. in sociology, Aronovici encountered and overcame bias typically expressed toward immigrants at the time. He faced political resistance to the use of scientific evidence, which sadly exists in similar form in the present day. Nevertheless, as a result of his achievements as a social scientist, he was one of a group of immigrants honored at the New York World's Fair of 1939-40 for contributions to the United States.

In the description of the evolution of Wilder Research that you will read here, including a chronology of key historical events, you will see how Wilder Research has progressed through several stages. You will take note that it needed to reinvent itself in major ways at least twice, after becoming mostly dormant at two points in time. At each stage of its history, Wilder Research sought to identify the most appropriate niche for its activities.

In its earliest years, Wilder Research focused primarily on uncovering social issues – bringing to the forefront thorough descriptions of the living conditions and needs of people residing in Saint Paul. During the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, the handful of researchers on the staff continued to describe community needs for Saint Paul and larger areas. They also began to assess the effectiveness of policies and programs intended to contribute to a high quality of life for all. They undertook ground-breaking work to understand: What human service programs really work well and produce their desired outcomes? How can those programs improve their efficiency and effectiveness?

From the mid-1970s onward, Wilder Research significantly increased its expertise and solidified its structure, with a staff growing to 80 or more people, dedicated to the mission to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities through research. Research professionals joined their skills with the skills of technical specialists in data collection, data processing, data analysis, administrative support, and communications to work on 200 or more projects each year. This large group continued to follow the two, primary paths established in the previous decades: research to improve the effectiveness of human service programs and policies and research to portray communities' quality of life.

Throughout all the stages of its history, Wilder Research adopted new social science methods and learned to work with dynamically changing populations. Frequently, Wilder Research staff collaborated with partners in government, philanthropy, community organizations, health and human service organizations, and other types of groups. Sometimes, they needed to overcome opposition from groups whose vested interests in the status quo ran counter to social scientific findings.

If you read this because you want to know more about Wilder Research and the larger Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, then I hope that the historical details you encounter will suit your purpose. If you read this because you happen to have an interest in doing social research yourself, or perhaps you seek to develop a research institute, then I hope that you will benefit from the lessons of history.

Based on the history of Wilder Research, several factors appear to have led to its success. Wilder Research took advantage of external circumstances that created a demand for its products and services and that offered support to sustain its work. These include longstanding community interest in understanding health and social needs and a desire on the part of community leaders to improve the coordination and quality of human services. Philanthropic resources, not just financial but also in the form of advice and technical assistance, consistently bolstered productivity.

The success of Wilder Research also resulted from internal factors. Research leaders, with solid training, focused high quality methods on social issues and human service challenges considered relevant by community leaders. Many of those researchers earned national, even international, reputations for their expertise – which serves as independent testament to the quality of their achievements. Staff worked in dedication to a mission to promote community well-being. They adapted their efforts and innovated products and services, depending on the needs of research consumers. They used the most appropriate and up-to-date methods and technology for ensuring reliable, valid information.

Of utmost importance, the staff at Wilder Research maintained a brand of independence and multi-partisanship. They had the autonomy to design studies, collect information, and analyze and interpret that information in the ways that comported with their professional training and preferences – not out of allegiance to a political ideology, a cultural belief, or an institutional bias.

I have had the privilege to work at Wilder Research for 44 years – 38 of them as the Executive Director. The writing of its history offered me a lot of fun and considerable education. Researching the past provided the opportunity to learn more than just about Wilder Research itself. I also developed greater understanding of the social, political, and cultural factors that influenced decisions about how best to care for people in need in our communities. More than ever before, the leaders who make those decisions, whether at the treetops or the grassroots, need reliable research to support their efforts.

Thanks to those who made this history possible...

Amanda Eggers collaborated as a valuable colleague to support the writing of this history. As a skilled librarian and historian, she had previously organized archived materials for ready reference in the Wilder Research Library, and she retrieved additional, relevant materials from elsewhere. Her direct and thorough critiques of early drafts improved the quality of the final manuscript.

Several current and former members of the Wilder Research staff read and reviewed early drafts: Heather Britt; Richard Chase; Phil Cooper; Edith Gozali-Lee; Craig Helmstetter; Nicole MartinRogers; Dan Mueller; and Greg Owen. Their comments greatly enriched the content that readers can now enjoy. Marilyn Conrad and Ann Somers provided technical support. Anna Alba applied her creative hand to formatting.

At the point where this history concludes, Heather Britt takes the leadership reins previously passed, as you will see, from Aronovici, to Stone, to Hoffman, to Berger, to Mattessich. I have appreciated her encouragement to move this history out the door and into the hands of readers who can benefit from it.

Lastly, a thank you to the board of directors and other leaders of the Wilder Foundation, who since 1917 have nurtured the development of a research organization.

And significantly, a profound acknowledgement of the expertise, dedication to mission, and substantial accomplishments of the staff members who made Wilder Research what it has become. For more than a century, individuals brought different backgrounds to Wilder Research, along with varied sets of skills necessary for designing research studies, collecting data, analyzing data, and communicating research results. They subscribed to a common purpose to improve the quality of life for human beings, especially those most vulnerable or most in need. It is indeed an honor to write their history.

Paul W. Mattessich
Executive Director Emeritus, Wilder Research
August 2023

Introduction



Wilder Administration Building on Washington Street in downtown Saint Paul

Research became a focus early in the life of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. The first members of the Wilder board of directors recognized its importance, and they felt that various types of research could enable the “Wilder Charity,” as well as other community-serving organizations, to address human needs in the most efficient, effective manner.

Through more than a century, the Wilder board's ongoing affinity for research stimulated the evolution of what has become an internationally recognized, nonprofit, nonpartisan social research organization. The activities of Wilder Research have included thousands of projects over the years, intended to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities. The work of the staff of Wilder Research has earned recognition as scientifically sound research directly relevant to important social issues and with value for increasing the effectiveness of community, government, and nonprofit organizations.

This history describes the journey of Wilder Research from the early 1900s to the early 2000s. It relies on published reports, newspaper articles, internal documents of the Wilder Foundation, and firsthand accounts from Wilder Research staff.

Formation of the Wilder Foundation

The will of Amherst H. Wilder established a trust and specified that the funds which he left should “relieve, aid and assist the poor, sick, and needy people of the city of Saint Paul.” Therefore, the Amherst H. Wilder Charity commenced philanthropic efforts in 1906 with the provision of direct cash payments to individuals in need (most commonly widows with children). This payment program took shape prior to the development of Social Security and public assistance programs, as we know them today.

After the deaths of Fanny Spencer Wilder and Cornelia Day Wilder Appleby, their wills led to the establishment of a combined trust to support the Amherst H. Wilder Charity, now known as the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.¹ Thus, the Wilder family wills planted the seeds for organizational action to occur on behalf of communities in innovative ways.

¹ For ease of discussion, this history will consistently use the current name of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, with the exception of instances where the name Amherst H. Wilder Charity appears in specific quotations or citations. The last word in the name of the organization changed from “Charity” to “Foundation” in 1953.

The Wilder board of directors sought to increase the positive impacts that the Wilder family’s legacy endowment could bring to the Saint Paul area, and they wanted to plan thoughtfully the next steps that the new organization would take. Therefore, they accomplished a form of research in 1910: they consulted nationally with experts in philanthropy and social work, seeking guidance on how to structure and operate activities supported by the unique endowment that the Wilder family had created. The advice from their advisors condensed into a few common themes: “Go slowly, adhere to no set plan, make a survey of conditions in St. Paul, concentrate aid on mothers and children.”²

The board followed this advice, and during the Foundation’s first decade, in addition to maintaining the program of cash payments to needy individuals, Wilder initiated a visiting nurse service, established day nurseries for children (considered a unique innovation at the time), and created the Wilder Baths which provided bathing facilities for many Saint Paul residents whose homes did not include bathrooms, and which also had a swimming pool for recreation and swim lessons.

Seeking input from, and about, the community

The Wilder board completed additional research on its own in 1911. The wills of Cornelia and Fanny Wilder stipulated the construction of an administration building. To design a building that would optimally meet the needs of both the Wilder Foundation and other community organizations, the board sought direct input from leaders of Saint Paul’s charitable organizations. They invited these organizational leaders for their opinions and advice – conducting what nowadays social scientists refer to as a key informant survey.³ After gathering information, they invited the leaders to collaborate in a review of the survey findings and to plan how best to use the trust established by the Wilder family in the construction of a building to benefit the community.

Five questions from 1911 survey by the board

1. Are you in sympathy with the idea of a United Charities building?
2. Does your organization wish to occupy rooms in the United Charities building?
3. How many such rooms and what amount of floor space would you require?
4. Have you any suggestions to make in regard to the space on the top floor, which is intended to be for general use?
5. What other suggestions have you to offer?

Based on this input, the Wilder board constructed an administration building at 355 Washington Street in Saint Paul, across from Rice Park, on a site currently occupied by the Ordway Theater. The building provided space to both the Wilder Foundation and other community-serving organizations. It eventually housed Wilder Research.

These activities by the first board of directors exemplify two values that remain within the culture of research at the Wilder Foundation to the present day. These values are data-informed decision-making (basing decisions on the best possible information) and involvement of stakeholders (collaboration with others in planning and decision-making).

² Merrill E. Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy to Saint Paul* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1981), 224. The board sent letters of inquiry to request advice from “more than two dozen experts and theorists in the fields of social work and philanthropy.” These included: Graham Taylor, who founded the Chicago Commons and the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy; Francis G. Peabody, a Harvard Divinity School professor who studied “methods of social amelioration”; and John M. Glenn, the first chief operating officer of the Russell Sage Foundation.

³ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 231. The 1911 survey included five questions.

During the next few years, the nascent Wilder board followed the advice which they had received from national experts to understand “conditions in St. Paul,” and they took two steps which began to professionalize Wilder’s approach to conducting social research. First, the board financed the creation of a directory of Saint Paul’s charitable, benevolent, and religious organizations. “Published in 1913, this 600-page work had as its stated purpose ‘to place within the reach of every social worker in the city a ready reference book and guide for action.’”⁴

Second, in 1915, at the request of community organizations, Wilder assumed responsibility for operating a Central Registration Bureau. The Bureau had the purpose to “record information regarding families and individuals who had been the recipients of some form of social service in St. Paul and make the resulting data available to case workers and other concerned agencies and individuals.”⁵

These two endeavors served as precursors to formal research activities carried out by the Wilder Foundation. Moreover, the underlying motivation for both of these, namely the desire to create databases of available services and of recipients of services in order to make human services delivery more efficient and effective, has remained strong within the Wilder Foundation throughout its existence.

The observed benefits of the directory of services and of the Central Registration Bureau (which Wilder funded and operated until 1939) generated increased appreciation of the value of research and led directly to the birth of Wilder Research⁶ as we know it today. Those initiatives fueled the development of Wilder Research and subsequently the 1916 arrival of Dr. Carol Aronovici in Saint Paul, initially for a series of lectures, created the spark which ignited the flames.

⁴ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 243. The reference book was: Hiram Slack, *Directory of Charitable and Benevolent Organizations* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Charity, 1913).

⁵ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 244. An earlier form of the Bureau had existed, beginning in 1892 when representatives of 22 agencies formed an organization with the objectives “to promote cooperation between the charitable agencies, to inform the public with regard to the general work of the charitable agencies, to exchange information with similar groups throughout the country, and to promote the general welfare of those in need.” That organization developed a system to maintain records of families receiving assistance. See: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, *Central Registration Bureau Study*, 1957.

⁶ Wilder Research has had different names over the years, including: Department of Research and Statistics; Office of Research and Statistics; Planning and Development Office; Wilder Research Center; and Wilder Research. Throughout this document, for readability, we use the present-day appellation, Wilder Research.

Beginning to apply a research lens to social issues

In 1917, the Wilder board hired Carol Aronovici as the first research leader of the organization. Romanian-born Aronovici had earned his Ph.D. in sociology at Brown University, under the supervision of Professor Lester Frank Ward, the first president of the American Sociological Association. Interestingly, as a mentor, Professor Ward stressed that science should work for the benefit of humanity – an axiom underlying the mission of Wilder Research as of 2022: To improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities through research and evaluation.

Aronovici drew the attention of Wilder’s governing body when he delivered a series of lectures in Saint Paul during one week in 1916. He had developed a national reputation for innovative thinking about housing, and beginning in about 1912, he had published a series of reports on housing conditions in three east coast cities (Fall River, Massachusetts; New Haven, Connecticut; Springfield, Massachusetts).



Carol Aronovici, Ramsey County Historical Society

Aronovici recommended that communities in the United States should build more government-subsidized housing, as European communities at the time had more commonly constructed. The Saint Paul Institute (precursor to the Science Museum of Minnesota) and United Charities (a group of Saint Paul charitable organizations) had earlier expressed serious concerns about housing conditions in Saint Paul. To hear in greater depth how Aronovici’s ideas might benefit Saint Paul, the Institute sponsored the lecture series, with support and assistance from United Charities.⁷

Much of the work of Wilder Research during the few years after its inception involved surveys and statistical analyses that documented the characteristics and living conditions of Saint Paul’s residents. Some of the work also involved inventories of services, which built on the earlier efforts to catalogue the services provided by public and private organizations to people in need.

The world at that time⁸

As context, during the formative stage of Wilder Research, World War I took place from 1914 to 1918. An influenza pandemic struck worldwide in 1918-19. The city of Saint Paul had approximately 215,000 residents in 1910; the city’s population rose to approximately 235,000 in 1920.

Woodrow Wilson served as president of the United States from 1913 to 1921. He promoted progressive values on issues related to employment conditions, child labor, pensions, public health, health care, and the elimination of poverty – all of which related in one way or another to the work of the Wilder Foundation. Wilson’s major contender,

⁷ Gary Phelps, “Aronovici’s Campaign to Clean Up St. Paul,” *Ramsey County History* 15, no. 1 (1956): 12.

⁸ For each stage in the history of Wilder Research, a brief overview provides a summary understanding of the social and political environments in which Wilder Research developed. The overview mentions key events at the local, national, and sometimes international levels which had relevance for social policies, human services, and community issues relevant for the attention of Wilder Research. It occasionally mentions notable technological innovations (e.g., computers, communication technology) which influenced the means by which Wilder Research did its work.

Teddy Roosevelt, a Republican who ran as the nominee of the Bull Moose Party in 1912, also espoused progressive values. His platform included a proposal to implement national health insurance – something that would have transformed the dynamics of health care and human services in the United States.

The 19th Amendment to the U.S. constitution achieved ratification in 1920, making it illegal to deny anyone the right to vote based on their gender. Also that year, public media communication advanced significantly, with commercial radio station broadcasting by KDKA Pittsburgh.

The first two decades of the 20th century constituted a period of intense fermentation for the shaping of modern charitable organizations and for the evolution of values regarding philanthropy and public responsibility for care of persons in need. Notions about the nature of public charity, who should receive it, and how they should receive it, underwent significant consideration during that time. One historian identified two principles that emerged in the debate that occurred in Minnesota – each of which motivated a different group of people who hoped to influence the direction of charitable work:

On the one hand, charity was to be scientific and businesslike. A city's charitable resources could accomplish more if allocated with the same hard-headed, systematic approach that characterized successful industrialists. ... At the same time, the COS movement stressed the benefits of 'friendly visiting'. Volunteers, most of them women, were assigned to visit poor families and to develop a friendly, sympathetic relationship, the benefits of which... would outweigh any financial or material assistance.⁹

The “COS movement,” noted above, refers to the Charity Organization Society movement which began to spread across the United States during the late 19th century. That movement had a variety of objectives. These included promoting cooperation among charitable agencies in an area, establishing understanding of who needed help and who could provide it, and creating bureaus of information for the benefit of both agencies and individuals.¹⁰ These objectives closely resembled the objectives of the first Wilder board of directors in their support of a central registration bureau, a directory of Saint Paul's charitable, benevolent, and religious organizations in Saint Paul, a visiting nurse program, and a research department.

At the Amherst H. Wilder Charity Building on Washington Street in Saint Paul, one morning in 1914, Louis Hill Sr., later the founder of the Northwest Area Foundation, voiced his disdain for “friendly visiting” programs such as those advocated by the Charity Organization Society. Probably expressing the views of similar White businessmen who preferred “businesslike” charity, he called “friendly visiting” a “farce,” and the account of his interaction that day indicates his blunt opinion:

Middle- and upper-class women 'wearing tight-fitting skirts [and] going into the homes of the poor, posing as their friends' did not, in his estimation, constitute charity.¹¹

Amidst this backdrop, where a need clearly existed for insight to guide efforts intended to help individuals experiencing hardship and to improve the overall quality of community life, Wilder Research embarked upon its efforts to apply a research lens to social issues.

⁹ David J. Klaassen, “‘The Deserving Poor’: Beginnings of Organized Charity in Minneapolis,” *Hennepin History* 47, no. 2 (Spring 1988): 19.

¹⁰ Klaassen, “The Deserving Poor,” 19.

¹¹ Randall T. Getchell, “The ‘Historic Fight’, the Struggle to Control St. Paul Charity,” *Minnesota History*, (Winter 2003-2004): 394.

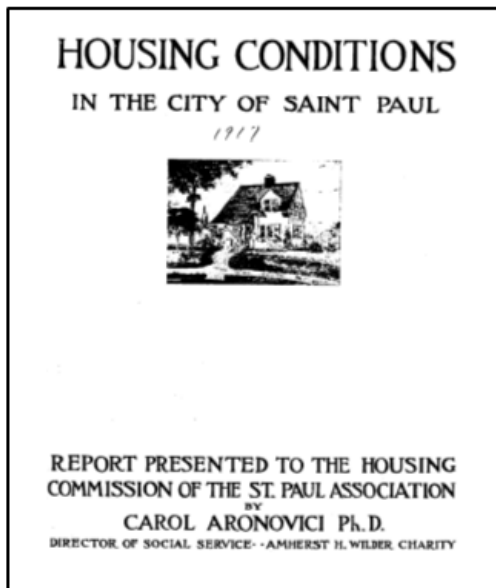
The first study by Wilder Research

In 1917, Aronovici initiated a survey of housing and health conditions, which Wilder Research considers its first study. He expressed a strong desire for the study to lead to action. The *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* reported:

Dr. Carol Aronovici, housing expert, told the committee on housing and town planning and the housing commission of the St. Paul Association, at a meeting at noon in the club rooms, that he desires assurance from the association and affiliated agencies that the findings of the proposed housing survey will result in broad and far reaching action.

If I am to advise the board of directors of the Wilder Charities to undertake such a survey, which if carefully carried out will involve an expenditure of several thousand dollars, it is important to receive such assurances...

It is my conviction that a housing survey which is merely intended to give the community a bad reputation and does not result in immediate, practical, and far-reaching action, is detrimental rather than beneficial to the community.¹²



Cover of the 1917 report on housing conditions in Saint Paul

Based on Aronovici’s survey, which included visiting the homes of more than 22,000 people, Wilder Research issued its first research publication: *Housing Conditions in the City of Saint Paul*.¹³ With statistical tables, graphs, maps, and pictures, the report provided a framework for significant recommendations intended to improve the lives of Saint Paul’s residents, including: development of housing ordinances; formation of a Housing Bureau; and initiation of comprehensive inspections of hotels and lodging houses to ensure that the conditions in which people lived met basic standards of sanitation.

The report by Aronovici exhibited wisdom more characteristic of the 21st century than of the 20th. He understood the importance of managing the social and physical environments of an urban area in order to create equitable, healthy living spaces for all people, especially people of low income. He had observed city life across the United States and in other countries and had witnessed how housing design could enhance human life.

Some of his observations seem very prescient, given what we now know about the importance of green space, the mixed impacts of the advent of automobile travel, and the advantages and disadvantages of urban growth. He urged, for example, “comprehensive community planning of constructive character” that would produce “the maximum amount of light and air” and “the economical use of land without hindrance to requirements of safety, sanitation, convenience, or permanency of investment.”

¹² *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 5, 1917, as quoted in Phelps, “Aronovici’s Campaign to Clean Up St. Paul,” 12.

¹³ Carol Aronovici, *Housing Conditions in the City of Saint Paul*, (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Charity, 1917).



Flat building, one toilet and water in basement used by six families. Illustration from *Housing Conditions in the City of Saint Paul* (p. 35)

Observing inequities that produced challenges for poor people and immigrants, as well as power dynamics that favored unscrupulous landlords over tenants, Aronovici proposed bold conclusions and recommendations. He acknowledged the importance of promoting health for all of Saint Paul's residents, but noted the special importance of attending to the needs of lower income people:

The entire city needs a constructive plan, but the elimination of the slums and the redistricting of the city to meet the housing and industrial needs of the wage earners and poorer elements of the population, should take precedence over the construction of costly public buildings, the development of improving thoroughfares, the building of boulevards designed for the automobile tourist, the opening up of park areas in districts undeveloped and inaccessible sections of the City. These things, while desirable, should not take precedence over the immediate needs for the improvement of the living conditions of the people.¹⁴

Based on the study he conducted in Saint Paul, he felt that the city had failed to do as much as it could and should have done for its residents. He specifically faulted Saint Paul's public officials for failure to enforce existing building codes, enact new health and housing codes, provide adequate water and sewer lines, and maintain an effective system of garbage collection.

¹⁴ Aronovici, *Housing Conditions*, 11.



Toilets on Phalen Creek. Illustration from *Housing Conditions in the City of Saint Paul* (p. 29)

The report asserts that landlord misbehavior, which public officials chose to ignore, constituted a far bigger problem in Saint Paul than misbehavior by a small proportion of low-income tenants. In that vein, he identified tropes which stigmatized poor people and immigrants, and which public officials referenced in order to justify inaction by the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government with respect to addressing public health issues.

For the legislative branch, the report suggested that stereotypes of the “foreigner” served as excuses which elected officials used to delay passing laws that would protect the health of immigrant and poor populations. Regarding the executive branch, the report strongly criticized the Health Department for inadequate attention to public health issues, citing a lack of personnel and lack of efficiency, but also citing the unwillingness of the Health Department to bring issues forward for attention, due to dominant prejudices against the poor. The report advised that anyone in the Health Department or in any other department of the City government who had failed to protect public health should receive “public condemnation” and be removed from office.

The judicial branch received disapprobation through statements in the report that reflected Aronovici’s values of equity and fairness, such as:

...the courts are frequently unwilling or unable to realize the importance of using their judicial power in the protection of the health of the people with the same sense of justice that guides them in the protection of mere property...Property can be reproduced, health cannot...¹⁵

¹⁵ Aronovici, *Housing Conditions*, 25.

Many people praised the report, and it did lead to changes in health and housing policies. Within four months of the report's publication, the Saint Paul City Council enacted a housing ordinance which Aronovici had authored. The ordinance stipulated that any new building constructed for housing could occupy no more than 70% of the lot on which it is situated. The ordinance also mandated connections to the water supply for all new dwellings constructed on streets provided with water mains.¹⁶

Not surprisingly, however, the report received a negative reaction from Saint Paul's health officer, Dr. B.F. Simon. He undoubtedly suffered embarrassment from the revelations in the report about negative living conditions in some areas of Saint Paul. He also undoubtedly resented the blame the report placed on his department for lack of will and lack of action to improve health and housing. Simon indicated that his department had quite a bit of work to do because of the influenza epidemic, and he expressed anti-immigrant sentiments:

I wish to go on record from the first that I have not given a great deal of time or attention to said Dr. Aronovici since taking public office because I absolutely refuse to give much of the public's time to recommendations made by any man who is not a full-fledged American citizen.¹⁷

Other early research

In 1919, Esther Flint (who received a B.A. from Radcliffe College in 1917 and then attended graduate school at the University of Minnesota in "Social and Civic Work") authored *Health Conditions and Health Service in Saint Paul*, assisted by Aronovici.¹⁸ This report drew information from census reports, surveys conducted by Wilder Research, and records produced by agencies that provided health services.

The Flint report acknowledged the assistance of "Miss Gertrude Armstrong" – identified as a "field investigator and handler of statistical data." This provides the earliest known reference to a specific member of what Wilder Research now calls its Survey Center and Data Analysis staff. As of 1919, three individuals seem to have worked full or part time for Wilder Research: Aronovici; Flint; and Armstrong.

Others surely existed to carry out the surveys for the 1917 and 1919 reports. Helen McManigal had taken a position in 1915 to initiate and maintain the operations of the Central Registration Bureau, and she likely collaborated in some way with the staff of Wilder Research.



Cover of the 1919 report on health conditions and services in Saint Paul (1919)

¹⁶ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 253.

¹⁷ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 257.

¹⁸ Esther Flint, *Health Conditions and Health Service in Saint Paul*, (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Charity, 1919).

The Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries requested research on women in industry – the first of many requests that would arrive at Wilder Research, all the way to the present day, from government agencies inviting studies. Aronovici completed a report in 1920 and noted:

While we cannot draw any positive conclusions as to the rate of increase in wages that had taken place during the war, it is clear that a disproportionate number of women were receiving a wage below the minimum of subsistence and that these low wages were frequently needed to assist in the support of the family of the wage earner.

The native women are employed at comparatively higher wages than the foreign women and the foreign married women enter gainful occupations more frequently when they have children than do the native women, showing perhaps, that economic necessity is the cause of employment in a large number of cases.¹⁹

In 1920, the Central Registration Bureau had reached five years of operation under the auspices of the Wilder Foundation. Its function bears a remarkable similarity to the stated purposes of modern approaches to serving families and building the capacity of families to care for themselves. As described in the Wilder Foundation’s annual report, the Bureau provided an “opportunity for co-operation of social effort.”

Social workers must compare their plans when working on the same family or they may easily be working at cross purposes, as a family needing material relief is very likely to be sick also and need the attention of a medical agency, or it may need court attention and, if such is the case, several agencies must be called in, hence the necessity of co-operation.²⁰

The departure of the first Wilder Research director

Sadly, despite the body of high quality research that developed during his tenure as the leader of Wilder Research, and despite the programmatic achievements attributed to his inspiration, Aronovici felt that Wilder’s leadership did not sufficiently take action in response to research. He formally resigned as director in December 1918. In light of community interest in the reasons for his departure, he wrote to the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* that his resignation:

...was tendered as a result of an agreement between the Wilder Charity and myself that unless the somewhat elaborate program which I prepared was to be carried through at an early date, my services could be dispensed with by the Wilder Charity. ...The board of directors of the Wilder Charity is not responsible for my action in any way whatever, while the relations between the board and myself during the last two years have been and remain most cordial.²¹

¹⁹ Carol Aronovici, *Women in Industry in Minnesota*, report submitted to the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industries Bureau of Women and Children (1920), 35. “Native” refers to women born in the United States. Strong gender norms, along with expectations for who should earn wages and notions about why women would enter the formal workforce, permeate this interpretation of the data. But that’s a topic for a different historical analysis. By and large, Aronovici held strong egalitarian values.

²⁰ *Report of the Amherst H. Wilder Charity for Year Ending June 30, 1920*, 48.

²¹ Phelps, “Aronovici’s Campaign,” 17.

Nonetheless, Aronovici remained in town briefly and continued to work independently on significant research and planning projects. He collaborated with Flint on her study, published in 1919. He chaired the Minnesota State Committee on Americanization; he taught at the University of Minnesota; and he published a book in 1920, *Housing and the Housing Problem*.²² He proposed to the directors of a “food training camp” at the 1917 Minnesota State Fair that Minnesota should establish a cooperative canning plant which would offer low-income women both a place of employment and a source of low cost fruits and vegetables.²³

Aronovici died in 1957. His obituary in *The New York Times* indicated that, at the University of Pennsylvania, he had taught “the first course in city planning offered in this country.”²⁴ After leaving Saint Paul, he became the State Commissioner of Housing and Immigration for California. The obituary also noted: “At the New York World’s Fair of 1939-40 he was one of a group of naturalized citizens honored for contributions to ‘the welfare and progress of the United States.’” A profile of Aronovici in the *Star Tribune* in 2017 characterized him as “years ahead of his time.”²⁵

²² Carol Aronovici, *Housing and the Housing Problem*. (Chicago: McClurg & Co., 1920).

²³ Minnesota Morning Tribune, “Co-operative Plant for Canning May Be Established Here,” July 22, 1917.

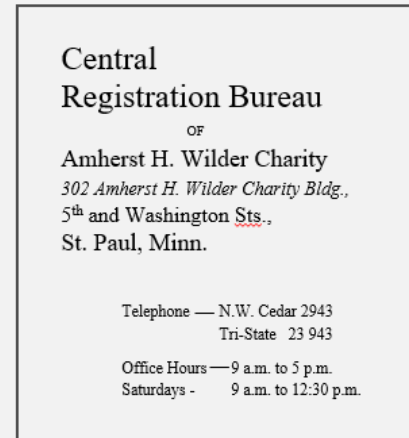
²⁴ *The New York Times*, August 1, 1957, 25.

²⁵ Curt Brown, “Lifting the Lid on St. Paul’s Poverty,” *Star Tribune*, November 19, 2017, B4.

Research recedes

Wilder Research appears to have pursued limited activities during this 18-year stage in its history – with work devoted primarily to monitoring of human service usage in Saint Paul, through the Central Registration Bureau.

The Central Registration Bureau continued productive operations, until Ramsey County took over complete management of the Bureau in 1939. “Miss Louise J. Wittman” appears to have led the Bureau during part of this time. She, and perhaps other Wilder staff, compiled information on Wilder’s clients and on the services provided to those clients. Similarly, they maintained the data submitted by other charitable organizations regarding their service recipients. In 1921, 55 organizations submitted data to the bureau, with 11,000 new registrations at that time. In 1932, the bureau needed to increase its staff to cope with the large number of records – 31,500 new registrations in 1932-33.²⁶



Cover of a pamphlet advertising the Central Registration Bureau (undated)

Wilder Research staff reported on trends in the numbers of people seeking assistance from the charitable organizations that participated in the Central Registration Bureau. They offered recommendations for planning of services. The personnel who operated the Central Registration Bureau might have carried out limited research activities which made use of the data from the Bureau. The Social Service Division of the Children’s Bureau, a federal agency, carried out an experiment in Saint Paul from 1937 to 1943 “to study ways of discovering and getting treatment to children who were showing behavior difficulties.” Their report makes reference to a “survey of financial relief, both public and private, in St. Paul for the year 1936,” conducted by Janet Nolan of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.²⁷

It required a year, from late 1938 to late 1939, to transfer the Central Registration Bureau from the Wilder Foundation to Ramsey County. As part of that transfer, a plan was developed that suggested that “the Amherst H. Wilder Charity devote the money which they had formerly spent on the Central Registration Bureau to the establishment of a Department of Research and Statistics.”²⁸

Addressing racism and other biases inherent in intelligence tests

Meanwhile during this time period, Grace Arthur, who began her employment at the Wilder Foundation’s Child Guidance Clinic as its first psychologist in 1924, pursued a nationally recognized line of work on the development of intelligence measurement scales. Arthur had received her Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. An abbreviated version of her doctoral thesis appeared in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* in 1926, offering improved measures

²⁶ Minutes of the Wilder Board of Directors, July 11, 1921, March 24, 1932, July 10, 1933.

²⁷ Sybil Stone, Elsa Castendyck, and Harold B. Hanson, *Children in the Community: The St. Paul Experiment in Child Welfare* (Washington, DC: Federal Security Agency, Social Security Administration, Children’s Bureau, Publication 317, 1946), III and 5.

²⁸ Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, *Central Registration Bureau Study* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Foundation, 1957), 2.

of intelligence to psychologists, especially those who wanted to develop effective treatment plans for children at a child guidance clinic. She actively continued research and instrument testing, resulting in two volumes to guide the use of intelligence tests, published by The Commonwealth Fund.²⁹

Arthur's "point scale of performance tests" had a particularly noteworthy aspect, in many respects far ahead of its time. In contrast to other psychological scales and intelligence assessments of the era, it emphasized nonverbal testing intended to provide an objective measurement for all young people regardless of cultural background, English-language proficiency, and auditory ability. She had a particular interest in accurate portrayal of the competencies of Native American children. Her obituary in *The Saint Paul Pioneer Press* carried the title: "Even Death Cannot Reduce Her to a Statistic."³⁰ A biographical sketch characterized Arthur's life as "centered on making the world a better place for children." It further indicated:

She took a special interest in the education of Native American children, who for decades confronted a racist public education system. ...

[S]he exposed the racism inherent in IQ tests commonly used at the time. 'Until that time,' said a fellow worker, 'it was generally accepted that Indians were not the mental equals of other people. Arthur changed all that.' 'Her work,' said another associate, 'made a great deal of difference in the government's attitude' toward the education of Native American children.

Grace Arthur's life was filled with facts, figures, data—and children. While her untimely death may have made her a highway statistic, for the children whose lives she impacted, death could never reduce her to a statistic.

*Arthur said of her many accolades, 'Isn't it nice that we're helping children?'*³¹

The world at that time

The Great Depression, which began after the stock market crash of 1929 and reached an end in 1939, consumed much of this stage in the history of Wilder Research. Also in 1939, the German invasion of Poland initiated World War II.

The city of Saint Paul had approximately 288,000 residents; the state of Minnesota had approximately 2,800,000 residents in 1940.

"Lawlessness and the corruption of officials and police — the unintended consequences of Prohibition — infected many American cities, including St. Paul," according to the Minnesota Historical Society.³² The city became a haven for the operations of gangsters. Gangsters kidnapped William Hamm, Jr. in 1933 and Edward Bremer in 1934. Both of these prominent Saint Paul business leaders contributed to endowments that established foundations which supported and collaborated with programs and research of the Wilder Foundation over many decades.

²⁹ Grace Arthur, "A Group Point Scale for the Measurement of Intelligence," *Journal of Applied Psychology* X, no. 2 (June 1926). Grace Arthur, *A Point Scale of Performance Tests. Vol. I: Clinical Manual* (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1930). Grace Arthur, *A Point Scale of Performance Tests. Vol. II: The Process of Standardization* (New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1933).

³⁰ *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, "Even Death Cannot Reduce Her to a Statistic," May 29, 1967.

³¹ "Mary Grace Arthur: Expanding the Measures of Intelligence," Hamline History Blog, <http://kristinbloomberg.com/hamline-history/mary-grace-arthur/>

³² "Gangsters in St. Paul: Overview," Minnesota Historical Society Library, last modified September 6, 2022, <https://libguides.mnhs.org/gangsters/ov>

Franklin Roosevelt served as president of the United States from 1933 to 1945. Relevant to the aims of the Wilder Foundation, he brought to Congress the New Deal – a set of programs that would counteract the Great Depression by addressing poor economic conditions and unemployment. He promoted the passage of the first Social Security Act in 1935. This social insurance entitlement program changed the landscape for organizations addressing health, social, and economic needs in communities. As one historian concluded, this act “reversed historic assumptions about the nature of social responsibility, and it established the proposition that the individual has clear-cut social rights.”³³

³³ William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 132-133.

Research to inform the management of human services

In 1941, the Wilder board of directors revived the activities of a formal research division. Wilder and other community organizations had intensified their interest in coherent community planning for persons in need in Saint Paul. The revived research division had the purpose to “supply a means whereby information on health and welfare programs can be assembled, interpreted, and used as a guide in over-all social planning for the community.”³⁴ The board hired Allan Stone as the new leader. Born and raised on Minneapolis’ North Side, Stone graduated from the University of Minnesota with a bachelor’s degree in mathematics. Before joining Wilder Research, he did research and maintained welfare program statistics for the Minnesota Department of Public Welfare.

Within about a year, Wilder Research published the *Census Tract Street Index for St. Paul, Minnesota*. This, the first known publication from the decade of the 1940s, might sound like a practical, but not very important, reference item. However, Wilder Research saw it as an empowerment tool for improving the quality of life of residents of Saint Paul. Wilder Research staff wanted to put the index in a place of usefulness and assist agencies, groups, and individuals in compiling and analyzing data relating to Saint Paul.”³⁵

Historian Merrill Jarchow, who wrote a history of the Wilder family and Wilder Foundation in 1981, provides these comments on the 1940s:

Early in 1942, he [Stone] was involved in cooperation with the Employment Stabilization Research Institute at the state university, with the County Welfare Board, and with the division of social welfare of the Minnesota Department of Social Security in a study of employment and unemployment in Saint Paul. Thereafter, Stone engaged in numbers of other valuable projects – investigations to help Selective Service boards in the screening of draftees, assisting the local probation office, being a party to the organization of the Civilian Defense Volunteer Bureau. ...

[I]n August, 1946, the Charity’s board took formal action... By unanimous vote, it decided to make the facilities of the research department available to a central planning and research committee which should represent all social agencies in St. Paul and hence be “in a position to initiate, coordinate, and supervise community-wide research projects.”³⁶

The annual report of the Wilder Foundation in 1947 indicates that agencies had begun to receive assistance from Wilder Research for the development of reliable, objective reporting systems for their programs. The report also noted that the Greater Saint Paul Community Chest and Council had recently reorganized and that Wilder Research had become their “research and statistical arm.” The report asserts:

The sum total of the impact of these research projects has demonstrated to the social agencies of St. Paul the fact that a prerequisite to sound administration is the greater knowledge of social problems and planning gained through social research.³⁷

³⁴ Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, *1947 Annual Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Research Department), 52.

³⁵ Department of Research and Statistics, *Census Tract Street Index for St. Paul, Minnesota*, (Department of Research and Statistics, 1942), 2. The Sociology Department at the University of Minnesota prepared the first issue of the guide which the Saint Paul Community Chest published in 1936. Wilder Research appears to have updated the street index every few years, until 1969 when it published the sixth edition.

³⁶ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring Legacy*, 305. See also: Allan Stone, “Screening of Selective Service Registrants,” *The Compass* (1943): 13-15.

³⁷ Wilder Foundation, *1947 Annual Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Research Department), 53.

The world at that time

Participation in World War II (1939-1945) caused vast changes in virtually every aspect of American life. Among a U.S. population who overall had optimism about the future, affluence became more prevalent. Public policies provided money for veterans to attend college, to purchase homes, and to buy farms. However, the fruits of economic progress did not spread evenly to historically marginalized groups, such as African Americans; nor did those fruits spread to women as directly as to men.³⁸

Harry S. Truman became president in 1945. He continued to promote New Deal social reforms. He also addressed civil rights, as evidenced by being the first U.S. president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and by his 1948 executive order to desegregate the armed forces.

The baby boom generation began in 1946, with its last members born in 1964. The sheer size of that generation created a “pig in a python” demographic wave which significantly influenced culture, economic life, and other aspects of societies worldwide into the 21st century. Across the United States, families of larger size migrated from cities to suburbs, expanding housing, retail, and employment into areas previously sparsely inhabited. School systems in both cities and suburbs felt the impacts of a rapid increase in students. Eventually, when the baby boomers reached adulthood, those systems experienced an enrollment decline.

Ground breaking research in social work

Wilder Research collaborated with Family Service of Saint Paul on a project intended to have a major influence on social work research and practice. This project “set up workable methods of gathering data on the types of social problems confronting the agency’s clients, social and economic data about the clients themselves, and the effectiveness of the agency in assisting them.”³⁹

A journal which published a portion of the findings from this research described the study as “a courageous attempt at more precise measurement of casework effectiveness.”⁴⁰ Based on an analysis of 1,032 long-term cases for which Family Service did casework, the researchers identified the most frequent problems and analyzed the interrelationships among those problems. Quantification of the co-occurrence of problems provided new and unique insight into the situations of families who request help from social service agencies. The researchers noted:

*Of greatest significance to casework practice, to agency policy, and to community planning, is the fact that in only 17.6 percent of the 1,032 cases was one of the 98 specific problems identified alone.*⁴¹

³⁸ “The Post War United States, 1945 to 1968,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/post-war-united-states-1945-1968/overview/>

³⁹ Wilder Foundation, *1947 Annual Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Research Department), 52.

⁴⁰ Aldred Heckman and Allan Stone, “Forging New Tools,” *Survey Midmonthly* (1947): 267-270.

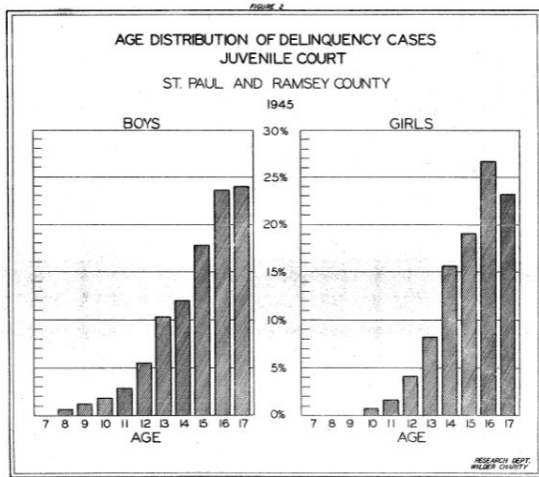
⁴¹ Heckman and Stone, “Forging New Tools,” 268.

In addition, Wilder Research staff developed a procedure for determining whether improvement occurred in the problems brought to Family Service. The results showed that at least some improvement did occur for 70% of the cases. The researchers delved into reasons why casework was partly successful or unsuccessful and suggested possible strategies to increase success. The research stands as an innovative effort to develop and use an evidence base for systematic improvement of the effectiveness of social work services. The article encouraged other agencies to use systematically collected data (which many of them possessed) for ongoing improvement:

Data such as those assembled in this study have long been available in casework agencies. This project represents an effort to develop working procedures for putting such data to practical use in improving the quality and effectiveness of casework practice.⁴²

The publication of findings from this research in a professional journal illustrates the interest of Wilder Research, continuing to the present day, in developing tools to assist organizations to provide effective human services.

Research on juvenile justice and other social issues



Age breakdown of children appearing in juvenile court, from the 1945 report on juvenile justice in Saint Paul and Ramsey County

Concern about crimes committed by young people deepened during the early and middle portions of the decade, due largely to the perception that the pressures of the war years had the effect of driving some young people to dysfunctional behaviors. Wilder Research issued a series of annual reports on this topic, with historical plotting of trends in “delinquency cases” beginning in 1930, and with in-depth analysis of the cases for each single year that a report was issued.

The language of the report for 1945 suggests that some members of the community had voiced questions about differences in the rates of crimes committed by young people from different racial groups and with different immigration statuses. Undoubtedly, stereotypes existed about the immigrant and Black populations at the time.

Regarding race, the 1945 report noted the “excellent record” of Black young people and the small extent to which they had shown up as juvenile offenders in the series of reports produced over a fifteen-year period by Wilder Research.⁴³

Perhaps to counter perceptions about immigrants, the report stated:

As we have consistently pointed out in the past, the problem of juvenile delinquency does not stem, in this community, from the child of foreign-born parents.⁴⁴

Other reports issued during the 1940s included one on chronically ill people in Saint Paul and another on Saint Paul boarding homes.

⁴² Heckman and Stone, “Forging New Tools,” 270.

⁴³ Allan Stone, Viola V. Battey, and Eugene H. Burns, *Juvenile Delinquency in St. Paul and Ramsey County 1945*, (Saint Paul, MN: Department of Research and Statistics, Amherst H. Wilder Charity, 1946), 5.

⁴⁴ Stone, Battey, and Burns, *Juvenile Delinquency...1945*, 7.

Leadership transition

In 1947, Stone left to become executive director of the Minnesota division of the American Cancer Society. A dedicated community activist, he later edited a magazine about the nursing home industry. He served on the board of the Alzheimer's Association, among others, and was vice president of the National Board of the American Heart Association.⁴⁵

In 1948, Isaac Hoffman, described as “a onetime graduate assistant in sociology at the University of Minnesota,” became the new leader of Wilder Research. Hoffman had taught at the business school of the University of Minnesota before his employment at Wilder.⁴⁶

The world at that time

The decades of the 1950s and 1960s contained many notable events that shaped the social and political environments in which Wilder Research evolved. Significant health and human services legislation, the creation of new federal departments to oversee federal programs, suburbanization, increased attention to civil rights, social protests (for racial equality, gender equality, and against war efforts) – these and other events transformed the experience of living in the United States.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, a former general who commanded troops to victory in Europe during World War II, succeeded Truman and served as president from 1953 to 1961. As a Republican, he maintained most of the programs from the Democrat administrations of Roosevelt and Truman. He created the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, which later evolved into the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The civil rights movement took shape during the mid-1950s. In 1954, a unanimous decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled school segregation unconstitutional. In 1956, the court declared unconstitutional the segregation of public city buses. To advance civil rights, Eisenhower reaffirmed Truman’s desegregation of the armed services. In 1957, he sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce high school desegregation. In August of 1963, as part of the March on Washington, attended by more than 250,000 people, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech.

The Vietnam War took place from 1954 to 1975, causing great controversy and generating major anti-war protests across the United States. As a result of several prominent incidents, the actions of the police toward peace protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago became labeled a “police riot.”⁴⁷

No major innovations occurred in social welfare policies during the 1950s, although the Housing Act of 1956 included provisions to give preference to the elderly in public housing and to support people displaced by urban renewal. Legislative proposals to provide hospital insurance to older people, as part of Social Security, were introduced to every Congress during the 1950s, but not until the mid-1960s would such programming take shape, as Medicare.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Terry Collins, “Allan Stone Dies: Was Health Care Advocate,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 29, 2000, 7B.

⁴⁶ Jarchow, *Amherst H. Wilder and His Enduring*, 305-306.

⁴⁷ Daniel Walker, “Rights in Conflict,” a report submitted by Daniel Walker, director of the Chicago Study Team, to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, December 1, 1968.

⁴⁸ M.G. Gluck and V. Reno, (eds.), *Reflections on Implementing Medicare* (Washington, DC: National Academy of Social Insurance, January 2001).

John F. Kennedy became president of the United States in January of 1961. He supported the civil rights movement and promoted civil rights legislation. He founded the Peace Corps, with the intention to promote a spirit of social responsibility among all residents of the country. His inaugural address included an admonition that inspired many baby boomers to perform community service locally, nationally, and internationally: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

Following Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, Lyndon Johnson became president and encouraged Congress to move forward with civil rights legislation, championing the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act which prohibited discrimination in public places. Johnson signed into law a major voting rights act, and he signed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. That Act eliminated barriers that had kept people from countries other than European countries from settling in the United States.

In 1964, Johnson declared “an unconditional war on poverty.” The “war” involved a variety of “Great Society” programs intended to improve education, economic security, housing, and health among United States residents. Johnson supported, and often played major leadership roles in, the development of: The Food Stamp Act (1964); Head Start (1964); The Job Corps (1964); Medicare and Medicaid (1965); Community Health Centers (1965); and other social welfare programs. The Russell Sage Foundation declared the War on Poverty a “success for the elderly by almost any measure.”⁴⁹ It also reported positive, long-term impacts of the War on Poverty with respect to children’s health, access to higher education, and reduction of poverty.⁵⁰

Programs developed by the federal government during the 1960s had profound implications for planning and decision-making regarding the delivery of human services by the Wilder Foundation and other organizations. The social, demographic, cultural, and legislative changes of the 1950s and 1960s, mentioned above, plus others, established a new environment for the social scientific research and program evaluation studies that Wilder Research would undertake during these two decades and beyond.

Continuing groundbreaking research in social work

During the 1950s, Wilder Research directed its efforts toward a variety of social issues and problems, maintaining its mission to do useful social scientific work that would provide a resource to communities and community-serving organizations for increasing the effectiveness of their activities undertaken to improve community well-being.

Although most research and publications from this decade focused on local issues, some took a broader perspective. The research staff at that time aspired to influence the field of social work in general, if such an opportunity presented itself. *Toward a Logic for Social Work Research* offered principles, definitions, and other insights that contributed on a national level to the development of social work theory, practice, and research.⁵¹ Isaac Hoffman received credit

⁴⁹ Kathleen McGarry, *The Safety Net for the Elderly* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, September 2013).

⁵⁰ Barbara Wolfe, *Improving Access to Medical Care & Health for Children & Adults* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, September 2013). Jane Waldfogel, *The Safety Net for Families with Children* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, September 2013). Bridget Terry Long, *The War on Poverty & Higher Education* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, September 2013). Katherine Swartz, *The War on Poverty’s Effects on Health Care Use of the Elderly* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, September 2013).

⁵¹ Isaac Hoffman, *Toward a Logic for Social Work Research*, (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1952). Used and/or cited, for example, in: Werner W. Boehm, “Terminology in Social Casework: An Attempt at Theoretical Clarification,” Werner Boehm Papers. Box 1. University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, Social Welfare History Archives, 1954. Earnest Greenwood, “Social Science and Social Work: A Theory of Their Relationship,” *Social Service Review* 29, no. 1 (1955).

for introducing the term “multi-problem family” to the social work field, based on his empirical examination of the use of health and human services in Saint Paul.⁵² Over the years, this term has evolved in the social work field to reflect the understanding that the problems families experience are not solely attributable to the families themselves but derive from multiple sources, often from social conditions and environmental stressors outside of families’ control.

In the late 1940s, staff at Wilder Research had joined with staff from New York-based Community Research Associates, the Greater St. Paul Community Chest and Council, and the Welfare Board of Ramsey County to embark on a major study. Funded by the Grant Foundation, the study had the goal to provide insight for agencies to better plan for treatment of families who “despite the best efforts of both voluntary and public social agencies over a period of years” still could not overcome their challenges. The study involved obtaining the cooperation of more than 100 public and private agencies who combined data on 43,000 families receiving services in November 1948. Analysis of the combined data revealed that some families received a disproportionate amount of the services provided by the agencies. The analysis also indicated that these families appeared to suffer more than other families from poor physical and mental health.⁵³

Based on the study, Bradley Buell from Community Research Associates exhorted Saint Paul’s leaders to make a radical shift in their thinking. He suggested that community agencies throughout the United States had largely avoided tackling the issues of families with chronic, severe problems, using the alibi of “no money” or “you can’t do anything with these people.” Further, he asserted that too many communities engaged in “picking up the pieces,” rather than addressing the source of issues through prevention or rehabilitation. He urged Saint Paul’s leadership to innovate.⁵⁴

Innovation emerged in 1952 in the form of the Family-Centered Project. After two years of planning, five agencies, including the Wilder Foundation’s Child Guidance Clinic, received funding from the Hill Family Foundation to begin collaboration in the delivery of services that would address the needs of families encountering long-term challenges. Collaboration in the delivery of services continued to 1959, but the project continued until 1967 to train care providers in family-centered techniques and to collect data on families receiving services. It provided a database for studies conducted by researchers locally and nationally.⁵⁵

⁵² Helge Kjems, “Coordinated Practical Family Therapy among Multi-Problem Families,” *Acta Socio-Medica Scandinavica* 1, no. 2 (1969).

⁵³ See: Charles J. Birt, “Family-Centered Project of St. Paul,” *Social Work* 1, (October 1956). Leonard Rutman, “The Demonstration Project as a Research & Change Strategy,” *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare* 2, no. 2 (1974). The description of the small proportion of families receiving a large proportion of services received much attention. However, Frank Rarig, the chief executive of the Wilder Foundation at the time, noted that a figure circulating in both professional publications and the media could create the wrong impression about the consumption of services by families with chronic problems. That figure – calculated by dividing the number of families with chronic problems by the total number of families in Saint Paul – led to the conclusion that “six percent of families” consumed 50% of the services provided by the agencies. Rarig encouraged a denominator equal to the total number of families receiving services (not the total number of families in Saint Paul). From that calculation he drew the conclusion that “32 percent absorbed up to 50 percent of the volume of services in the study month - admittedly a slightly less dramatic statement.” (Rutman, “The Demonstration Project,” 265.)

⁵⁴ Carl T. Rowan, “Is There Hope for ‘Hopeless’ Families?,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 5, 1958.

⁵⁵ For example: Bradley Buell, *Community Planning for Human Services* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). L. L. Geismar and Beverly Ayres, *Families in Trouble*, (Saint Paul, MN: Family Centered Project, Greater St. Paul Community Chest and Councils, 1958). Carol H. Meyer, “Individualizing the Multiproblem Family,” *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services* 44, no. 5 (May 1963).

Harrison’s study of potentially chronic cases: a transition point

Research by Ethel Harrison, completed in 1955, aimed to both assist local human service agencies and add to the social work research literature. The study reflects how Wilder Research continued to evolve with up-to-date social scientific methods, flexible staffing, community partnerships, and a strong commitment to dissemination of information to inform the human services field and improve communities. Harrison, a Wilder Research staff member, conducted a research project that served Wilder’s interests and that provided the basis for her dissertation for a Ph.D. in social work at the University of Minnesota.

Harrison’s study, identified as a cooperative venture between the Welfare Board of Ramsey County and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, focused on whether the intake process for social services could produce information useful for identifying “potentially chronic cases” – that is, people who would potentially require assistance from government or charitable organizations for the long term.⁵⁶

Study reports appeared in two forms: one, fitting the template of a doctoral dissertation for the University of Minnesota; the other, crafted as a report by Wilder Research, to bring research results to non-academic audiences.

In the foreword to the report, Isaac Hoffman wrote:

This report is being reproduced and made available to the profession because of the conviction of the Research Department of the Foundation that it is a fundamental obligation of all who are engaged in social work research to share not only with their technical compatriots but also with all segments of the profession the results of current research undertakings.⁵⁷

Harrison’s study stands, in some respects, as a watershed study – a transition point that introduced a combination of features that remained prominent among subsequent studies at Wilder Research. These include:

- Representative sampling, in this case a “time cohort approach.” This provided a solid and accurate understanding of people who received services.
- A report format which provided easy-to-read results, with technical details placed in an appendix. This format satisfied the needs of readers who just wanted results and the needs of other readers who wanted to understand (and sometimes critique) a study’s methodology to assess the validity of the information for themselves.⁵⁸
- Reliable measurement and scale construction.
- Statistical measures of association and testing of differences. Harrison sought to determine whether she could conclusively distinguish the chronic case from the non-chronic case with statistical precision.

⁵⁶ Ethel G. Harrison, *Identifying the Potentially Chronic Case at Intake*, (Saint Paul, MN: Department of Research and Statistics, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1955).

⁵⁷ Harrison, *Identifying the Potentially Chronic*, vii.

⁵⁸ If you read this report, you will not find it “easy to read” by today’s standards. Typed with a manual typewriter, single spaced, with none of the sophisticated graphics possible in the 21st century, the pages can seem cumbersome even to look at, let alone read. However, Harrison recognized the importance of segmenting her audiences and therefore wrote a version intended for an educated, non-scientist audience, which sifted out statistical and methodological jargon while maintaining the key messages and presenting recommendations. A non-scientist audience continues as the primary audience for Wilder Research to the present day; although Wilder Research staff do some publishing for social scientific audiences as well.

Foundation focus and community focus of Wilder Research's work in the 1960s

During the 1960s, the work of Wilder Research⁵⁹ fell into two categories, according to Norrine Bohman, who served as a staff member during that time: a Wilder Foundation focus and a community focus.⁶⁰

For the Wilder Foundation itself, Wilder Research tabulated data on the Foundation's clients and the services that the clients received. Wilder Research also gathered other information, on request, to assist with program planning and decision making.

For example, the Child Guidance Clinic used an interdisciplinary team approach to serve young people and their families. At one point, clinic management noted that, despite the fact that they had increased the number of staff, the clinic overall did not increase the number of children it served. They suspected that issues of management, coordination, and structure created obstacles to efficiency and productivity. So, Wilder Research undertook a study of time, case assignment, and communication – with the intent both to support decision-making within the Foundation and to inform the social work field broadly, because the researchers felt that many clinics might experience problems similar to Wilder's issues.⁶¹

In addition, research staff provided resources and assistance to Wilder's administration, which fell outside of typical social science research activities. Their support to Wilder's Executive Office and administrative services included:

- “Serving as a Foundation history, library, and information center
- Writing and distributing Foundation informational (nonstatistical) reports and special brochures, invitations, etc... anniversary reports, 25 year reports, special occasion reports, individual program reports
- Conducting public events, e.g., open house for Wilder Residence West in 1966
- Performing administrative analyses and clerical activities to support administration
- Meeting almost all printing needs of the Foundation: reports – brochures – statistical forms – census forms – Wilder Residences weekly activity schedule”⁶²

Beyond the Wilder Foundation, Wilder Research took a community focus, intending to assist state and local government, philanthropic and nonprofit organizations to provide services more effectively and efficiently. When requested, Wilder Research staff advised agencies on community needs and on how to collect and report data on the clients they served and the services they provided. Wilder Research also carried out data processing for a small number of agencies.

⁵⁹ Wilder Research at this time had the name, “Research Department of the Wilder Foundation.”

⁶⁰ Norrine Bohman, “Wilder Research Department 1960-1969,” Typewritten notes (available in Wilder Research Library), December 2000.

⁶¹ Ethel G. Harrison and Isaac Hoffman, *Management of the Team Approach in a Child Guidance Clinic*, (Saint Paul, MN: Department of Research and Statistics, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1960).

⁶² Bohman, “Wilder Research Department.” “Wilder Residence West” existed at that time as a living facility for older residents, located on Humboldt Avenue on the West Side of Saint Paul. With respect to printing, after the research department disbanded in 1969, the Foundation continued to maintain high capacity printing equipment and to employ a printer. That person worked on the fourth floor of the Wilder Administration Building, in space right beside the space taken by Wilder Research when it resumed operation in 1976.

Norrine Bohman reported that data processing and analytic support for community agencies consumed a major amount of time of data processing personnel, a research analyst, and clerical staff. Unfortunately, in her view, some unsatisfactory relationships developed between Wilder Research and the agencies it supported with these services. Wilder Research staff felt that their efforts contributed to the success of those agencies. Yet the agencies seemed to overlook this contribution and did not afford Wilder adequate recognition.⁶³

During this time, Wilder Research served the United Fund and the Community Health and Welfare Planning Council by providing information and advice in support of policy and planning decisions.⁶⁴

Should Wilder Research continue?

The late 1960s through the mid-1970s became a crucible for the redirection of research at the Wilder Foundation. Questions arose regarding the future of Wilder Research. Should it continue on its established course? What needs existed for research and client service monitoring for the Wilder Foundation? For organizations other than Wilder, what needs existed for community research and technical assistance? The world had greatly evolved over the previous three decades. Computers had improved the efficiency and swiftness of data processing. Other organizations had begun to provide research services to community and nonprofit organizations and to government agencies.⁶⁵ A Community Health and Welfare Planning Council had grown as a semi-independent arm of the United Way, with its own board and staff.

In 1969, the Wilder board of directors decided to reduce the research efforts of the Foundation. The board negotiated a formal transfer of the Foundation's research unit to the Saint Paul United Way. Some Wilder Research staff moved into employment with the United Way. The research director retired, and one member⁶⁶ of the research staff remained at the Foundation, working under the auspices of Wilder's administration to compile and report client statistics and to support planning.

In 1970, Wilder's Child Guidance Clinic listed one of its staff as a research psychologist. This position apparently had some sort of responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the clinic's services. However, the position does not appear to have done much research, and no studies conducted by the incumbent of that position have surfaced.

Consultants at that time suggested that the Foundation might find value in a formal, independent, and centrally organized set of staff who could assess the quality of the Foundation's services and optimally plan programs that would meet community needs. They recommended consideration of a "forward planning unit" that would define goals and establish measures of goal attainment. In a draft organization chart, this unit appeared under the title,

⁶³ Bohman, "Wilder Research Department."

⁶⁴ Saint Paul United Fund later became the Saint Paul United Way, which eventually merged into the Greater Twin Cities United Way. The Community Health and Welfare Planning Council existed as an arm of the United Fund, which reviewed data on trends, community needs, and service usage; it no longer exists.

⁶⁵ New organizations that focused on research similar to what Wilder Research might do included (with their starting years shown for some): government agencies such as the Metropolitan Council (1967), the Minnesota State Planning Agency (1965); private organizations such as the Community Health and Welfare Planning Council (noted above), and the Community Planning Organization; as well as academic centers such as the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) at the University of Minnesota (1968).

⁶⁶ This staff person, Norrine Bohman, had begun her employment at Wilder in 1963. She eventually became assistant to the president of the Wilder Foundation and remained working with Wilder into the 1990s.

“Planning – Evaluation – Special Projects.” The consultants recommended that the unit would consist of two or three permanent staff, with other staff involved for specific projects or as expert advisors.⁶⁷

The seed planted by the consultants lay dormant for several years, then germinated in 1976.

The world at that time

As context, at this transition point in the history of Wilder Research, the Watergate scandal, which had begun in 1972, led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974. The war in Vietnam ended in 1975. Domestically, the “War on Poverty,” mentioned earlier, continued. The “Great Society” programs of the Lyndon B. Johnson era, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Older Americans Act, had come into existence during the mid to late 1960s. Medicare had a profound effect by enabling retired older adults to obtain health and hospital care. In addition, it initiated the desegregation of hospitals to promote equitable care.⁶⁸

The city of Saint Paul had approximately 310,000 residents, and the state of Minnesota had approximately 3,800,000 residents, at the time of the 1970 census.

Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States in November 1976.

⁶⁷ Stanton Associates, Inc., *Amherst H. Wilder Foundation Organization and Functioning* (Stanton Associates: June 1970).

⁶⁸ Gluck and Reno, *Reflections on Implementing Medicare*

Reorganizing, establishing a new presence, and positioning for increased impact

During the 1970s, interest in research increased among leaders of government and nonprofit organizations, who sought to improve the effectiveness of their services. They wanted formal needs assessments to determine what services would optimally benefit community residents and sought formal evaluation studies of human service programs. Leonard Wilkening, the president of the Wilder Foundation at the time, had a master's degree in sociology from Kent State University, and experience with management of a variety of human service programs. He had a vision to incorporate social research into Wilder's operations. Thus, the Wilder board of directors authorized the revival of Wilder Research.⁶⁹

In 1976, Wilder hired David Berger, Ph.D., to lead Wilder Research,⁷⁰ with the mandate to develop a computerized client record system for Wilder Programs and to develop a system for evaluation of those programs. Berger held a Ph.D. in psychology, with experience as both a clinician and a research scientist. He had previously set up the department of evaluation for Temple University Hospital, and he had served as head of research for the state of Oregon.

During his first two years, Berger hired information technology and administrative support staff, established contracts with consultants, and resurrected Wilder Research from its seven year hiatus.⁷¹

The Wilder Foundation at a peak, in size and scope

The activities of the Wilder Foundation in the mid-1970s had great breadth. The Foundation had four major operating divisions:

- Services to Children – including the Child Guidance Clinic (one of the oldest programs of the Foundation, established in 1924), residential programs for young people who needed placement along with treatment outside of their homes, a community care unit (initially a program to train pastors to provide clinical care, but transitioning in the mid-1970s to an operating network of mutual support groups), a school program for children with special learning needs,⁷² the Thomas-Dale Community Center, and other programs.

⁶⁹ At the time of the mid-1970s revival of Wilder Research, the earliest charitable efforts of the Wilder Foundation continued: The Foundation provided small cash payments to the very last few of the pensioners who benefited from the relief program developed around the same time that the board had initially established Wilder Research. The Wilder Child Guidance Clinic, initiated in the mid-1920s, actively provided services to a large number of children and their families.

⁷⁰ Named at this time the "Planning and Development Office." Consistent with the recommendations in the 1970 report from Stanton Associates, that name was intended to convey that Wilder's research staff would assist Wilder Programs, and eventually other organizations in the community, to plan, grow, and enhance their services by building an evaluation culture. "Development" did not indicate that the research staff would engage in fundraising (the more common use of the word in today's nonprofit organizations).

⁷¹ Personnel during the first two years included: Hugh Stapp, Systems Analyst; Vicki McCown (Gee Treft), Administrative Assistant; Mary Lou Tillman, Data Entry Operator; and Dr. Geoffrey Maruyama, consultant. Dr. Maruyama serves to this day as a Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. He has directed the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, and he has served as president of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

⁷² This school program, the Eisenmenger Learning Center, operated as a regular part of the Saint Paul Public Schools. It had several classrooms at 919 Lafond Avenue, a principal (Ed Rubin who served for 30 years as director), teachers, and support staff. Every morning and afternoon, principal Rubin would greet the school buses that drove onto the Lafond Campus and which Wilder Research staff could observe from their windows on the fourth floor of the 919 Lafond building.

- Services to the Elderly – including nursing homes (offering care at varied levels), senior apartments, in-home care programs, a Senior Citizens Center,⁷³ a Senior Sales Shop where seniors could sell items they made on consignment, and other programs.
- Corrections Services – including Bremer House (a transition program for adjudicated adult offenders) and St. Croix Camps (a short term wilderness residential program for juvenile offenders).
- Housing Services – several apartments for which Wilder served as owner and/or housing management company.

In addition, the Foundation operated Camp Wilder in Marine on St. Croix, at that time a relatively primitive facility used primarily as a day camp for neighborhood and youth-serving organizations that operated in Saint Paul and its suburbs.

The leaders of the four major operating divisions consisted of: Marilyn Lee, Services to Children (a 25 year employee who had begun her career in 1951 as a social worker in the Child Guidance Clinic); Mona Schneider, Services to the Elderly (with extensive training and experience in geriatrics); Jack Young (former warden at the Minnesota State Prison in Stillwater, who after leaving the Foundation became the Minnesota Commissioner of Corrections); and John Briscoe (a housing developer). Wilder Research staff began to collaborate with these leaders and their staff on new approaches to using information to improve effectiveness.

Expansion of the Foundation’s efforts occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Enhancement of Camp Wilder transformed it into a multi-building conference, retreat, and camping center, renamed Wilder Forest.

The Foundation planned and implemented extensive urban development activities, such as Energy Park, a joint effort of Wilder, the city of Saint Paul, and the Saint Paul Port Authority. The Foundation created the AHW Corporation in 1980 to convert a train maintenance building into Bandana Square, a retail center, which the AHW Corporation then managed. The AHW Corporation also constructed and managed housing at Energy Park.

The Child Guidance Clinic established several branches in locations around the East Metro area. Consultation and technical assistance services for nonprofit and government agencies became available through a new program, Management Support Services. The Foundation became one of the largest employers in the Twin Cities. At the height of summer operations during those years, with a full complement of staff in place at Wilder Forest, the Foundation’s personnel numbered more than 1,200.

The Wilder Foundation’s president, Leonard Wilkening, oversaw the growth of the Wilder Foundation during this time. Wilkening also stood as a major presence among health, welfare, and community-serving organizations in the Saint Paul area, as well as among Saint Paul’s philanthropic foundations. He served on the boards of the Minnesota Foundation, the United Hospital Foundation, and other organizations. He formed the Human Services Council (described later in this history). The eponymous Leonard Wilkening Children’s Gallery at the Como Zoo offers a tribute to his fundraising endeavors on behalf of the zoo. Some of his bold efforts which led to failure also remained remembered long after he transitioned from his leadership position at the Wilder Foundation.⁷⁴

⁷³ Located directly beside the Wilder Administration Building, on the current site of the Ordway Theater.

⁷⁴ See, for example: Roger Bergerson, “Bandana Square’s Saga as a Retail Mall,” *Park Bugle*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.parkbugle.org/bandana-squares-saga-as-a-retail-mall/> The article notes: “[J]ust six years in to the deal, Wilder had lost \$9 million on the retail mall. Foundation President Leonard Wilkening said the drain on the nonprofit’s resources was threatening its ability to fund the health and social-service programs that were its core mission.”

Computerized record systems for client tracking and program evaluation

As a consequence of the breadth of services delivered by the Foundation, record systems for people served by the Foundation required great scope. The Foundation's Executive Office requested that Wilder Research acquire suitable hardware and develop suitable software to support service delivery to persons served by the Foundation's many programs. First and foremost, Wilder Research staff designed and implemented a computerized client record system – similar in function to modern electronic health record systems. The client record system had a variety of goals. It had the goal to automate paper records. It had the goal to enable comprehensive examination of how Wilder served clients. (Service delivery staff could obtain reports showing all the services a client received and showing the staff who provided these services from any program in the Foundation.) It also had the goal to provide a database for research, evaluation, and demonstration studies to determine the outcomes of services, how well services worked with different types of people, and how services could evolve to best meet clients' needs.

In the client record system, each client received a unique identification number. In some cases, collaterals such as parents and guardians also received identification numbers. Staff entered demographic information about each client into the system. The system recorded admission into every program that served a client, and it tracked the type and amount of services received. Service delivery personnel documented diagnoses, presenting problems, and other information about a client's physical and mental status and functioning. Highly centralized and all-encompassing, the client record system addressed many of the information needs of both service providers and researchers.

Some of the Wilder Foundation's services had unique characteristics that precluded the use of the client record system. Wilder Research developed several specialized record systems for those programs. The Senior Citizens Center and the Thomas-Dale Community Center made use of a member record system. Housing programs used a resident record system. Mutual support groups, which wanted to preserve the anonymity of their members, used a support group record system that enabled participants at each group meeting to check in without using their names. Volunteer activities across all of Wilder's programs were recorded in a volunteer record system.

Through these systems, each of which began operation sometime between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, Wilder Research assisted the Foundation's staff to deliver, analyze, plan, and evaluate the Foundation's services. During that short time, however, Wilder Research staff carried out only a small number of program evaluation and demonstration research studies.

Community studies and needs assessments

In 1978, the Wilder board encouraged studies of the living conditions and needs of people in Ramsey County. The board had observed overall population growth, an increased number of older people, an increased number of persons of color, and suburbanization during the previous two decades. They felt that accurate information could benefit the planning and delivery of human services. During the next four years, the funding for these studies enabled Wilder Research to hire several staff who remained for 30 or more years and who began to establish a national reputation for Wilder Research as an outstanding applied social research institute.

Paul Mattessich joined Wilder Research in 1978 to direct a study of people 60 years of age and older. In 1980, he advanced to associate director with the principal mandate to grow Wilder's community-focused research and its research consultation with other organizations. The Foundation also asked that he set in motion some small demonstration studies to make use of the data collected through the newly developed client record systems and other systems.

To complete additional community-focused research, specifically a study of terminally ill patients and their families, Greg Owen joined Wilder Research in 1979, serving in a temporary position. For this study, the research project team sent death certificates to the signing physicians asking them if the deaths that they certified had resulted from a terminal illness. After receiving their responses, staff attempted to interview all next of kin. Owen left Wilder Research after completing his work on this study, and he returned later to a permanent position.



Paul Mattessich and Dan Mueller with Wilder Research's first in-house computer, the Plexus (1983)

Subsequently, Dan Mueller and Phil Cooper joined Wilder Research to work on a study of young adults. Richard Chase joined to work on a study of single parent families. A children's study was the last of these Ramsey County-focused needs assessments.

The research staff who filled positions to lead these studies at Wilder Research in the late 1970s through mid-1980s remained in Wilder's employ for a long time. In addition to Mattessich, Owen, Mueller, Cooper, and Chase, others who have had careers at Wilder Research lasting more than three decades, from the 1980s to the present day, include: Marilyn Conrad (administrative/business manager), June Heineman (research associate), and Karen Ulstad (research associate).

Other than the study of terminally-ill patients and their families, the community-focused research studies conducted in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s involved creating large, representative samples of a population of interest (e.g., young adults). Wilder Research staff drew samples of city blocks, and interviewers canvassed those blocks on foot and then selected households and individual respondents based on sampling criteria established for each study. In-person interviews (usually in respondents' homes) were conducted with older adults, young adults, and single parents in each of those studies.

For the study of children, parents participated in in-person interviews, and teachers completed questionnaires for each child of school age in the study. The children's study included a follow-up survey. Five years after the first survey, parents participated in a second interview, to provide information for a longitudinal documentation of the children's health, school participation, housing situation, and other aspects of their lives.

Trained volunteers conducted most of the interviews for the older adult study. Wilder Research staff, along with some temporary staff, conducted the interviews for the young adult, single parent family, and children's studies. In later years, Wilder Research conducted other community studies of population groups, using a variety of data collection methods (for example, a statewide survey of older adults and surveys of immigrant and refugee groups in the Twin Cities region).

For each community study, the research team created an advisory committee of service providers, researchers, funders, and community representatives, to provide guidance. The committee offered input on research questions that the study should address and on the methods for gathering information. The committee discussed the study's findings and helped the researchers identify implications and craft recommendations based on the findings.

Each study produced a variety of reports, presentations, and seminars, and each study buttressed the efforts of local and state organizations, including government, to plan and deliver effective services. The studies sometimes influenced legislation. During 1986, for example, Minnesota legislators made frequent reference to the single parent family study during hearings related to welfare reform. That same year, the Ramsey County Welfare Reform Task Force issued recommendations based on the study. Both state legislators and Minnesota Department of Human Services staff used the Ramsey County recommendations and the single parent family study as input to statewide welfare reform legislation enacted in 1987.⁷⁵ Studies typically attracted media attention.⁷⁶

Wilder Foundation resources partly supported these community studies. Other major financial contributors included The Saint Paul Foundation, the Saint Paul United Way, and the Northwest Area Foundation. The Hamm Clinic, which at the time did extensive outreach to local colleges, contributed to the study of young adults.

When the Foundation extensively upgraded Camp Wilder, to become Wilder Forest, with several modern buildings for meetings, retreats, and overnight accommodations, Wilder Research became the first organization to use Wilder Forest for a major conference. The title of the conference was *Baby Boomers as Young Adults: A Portrait of a Generation*. Buses transported conference participants approximately 30 miles from the Wilder offices at 919 Lafond Avenue to Wilder Forest for an all-day event which featured presentations of study results in a plenary session, followed by nine topical breakout discussion sessions with panelists, and a wrap-up panel discussion of the findings and their implications. Conference attendees included community leaders as well as human service professionals from a variety of sectors relevant to young adults. Wilder Forest staff built a lectern just for the conference. Leonard Wilkening and Norrine Bohman insisted on personally serving a small glass of wine to each individual at lunch time, to inaugurate use of the new buildings. Similar, but not quite as ambitious, conferences took place after the completion of subsequent community studies.

During this time period, Wilder Research also assisted others by providing technical assistance for surveys. For example, for a study of Frogtown, an area in central Saint Paul, Wilder Research designed a survey form and trained volunteer interviewers.⁷⁷

Executive Director transition and a new vision for moving forward

In November 1982, Paul Mattessich, Ph.D., became the executive director of Wilder Research. Mattessich had earned his Ph.D. in sociology at the University of Minnesota, under the supervision of Professor Reuben Hill, an internationally renowned sociologist. Hill had served as president of the International Sociological Association, and he had taught at several universities and had consulted with and advised both international and local philanthropic and social service organizations.

⁷⁵ As reported in memo from Richard Chase to Norrine Bohman, January 1987.

⁷⁶ For example, the children's study: Jean Hopfensperger, "Dollar's Decline Hits Children Hard," *Star Tribune*, February 5, 1988, 3B; Mary Duncomb, "Parent Involvement Impacts Child's Performance," *The Extension Line*, University of Minnesota Extension Service, March 1988, 6. Reports from these community studies of the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Daniel P. Mueller and Philip W. Cooper, *Today's Children: How Are They Faring?* 1988) are accessible on the Wilder Research website www.wilderresearch.org.

⁷⁷ Ann Ahern, "Most Frogtown Residents Like Area, Poll Shows," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, November 18, 1987, 1.

Mattessich had served as interim director for about three months, after the unexpected departure of David Berger during the summer of 1982. Tensions had developed among Berger, the Foundation CEO, division directors, and others in the Foundation. Berger possessed firm notions, which not all Wilder program managers shared, regarding the optimal process for assessing the effectiveness of the Foundation's programs. Then, notably, a study of Wilder's St. Croix Camps' programs for juvenile delinquents revealed that the program produced relatively poor outcomes. Debate raged over whether and how the findings should appear in public. Berger advocated full transparency, along with program modifications and testing of new approaches (which did eventually occur), to determine if program performance could improve. However, other individuals in the Foundation, county government, and agencies serving youth strongly demurred. Relationships became frayed, both internally within the Foundation, and externally between Foundation staff and staff from other organizations.

CEO Leonard Wilkening considered options after Berger's resignation, including possibly scaling down the research division. He solicited feedback from a variety of stakeholders within the Foundation and in the community. Staff in Wilder Research created and signed a four-page statement recommending a new approach for moving forward with research activities.⁷⁸ Based on the enthusiasm of staff, and in consideration of the feedback given by stakeholders outside of the Foundation, Wilkening decided to continue the operations of Wilder Research. He conducted a small, relatively informal talent search, after which he appointed Mattessich as director.

In an article written for the *Wilder News*, Mattessich indicated that Wilder Research,⁷⁹ "continues the Foundation's commitment to *research* studies which are practical and usable for human service agencies and to the collection of *statistics* on Wilder Programs." The article goes on to describe four roles of Wilder Research.

A first role, to collect "information which enables the Foundation to monitor and evaluate its service programs. A client record system is used in client service programs; a member record system is used at the Senior Center; a participant record system is used in mutual-help groups; and a resident record system will soon be installed in Wilder's housing programs. These record systems provide data on: the number and kinds of people who apply for and receive service from the Foundation; the types of problems which people bring to the Foundation; and the types and quantity of service which Foundation staff deliver. They also provide information used in detailed ... studies which evaluate the effectiveness of Wilder's programs."

A second role, to conduct "demonstration studies in collaboration with staff in the operating divisions. These studies typically involve adding innovations to existing programs to see whether those programs can be improved. Current and recent demonstration studies include: two St. Croix Camp studies; a Thomas-Dale Community Center study; a Bremer House study; a Senior Center Relocation study; a Children's Clinic Missed Appointment study; and an Adult Child Education study at the Health Care Center."⁸⁰

A third role, to conduct "needs assessment studies of selected target groups in the community. These studies assist the Foundation and other agencies to recognize unmet needs and to plan their service programs. The current study of young adults (19-34 year olds) has just begun to release findings. Recently completed studies are: an elderly needs assessment and a study of terminally ill patients and their families."

A fourth role, to offer "technical assistance to non-Wilder agencies related to program evaluation as well as any aspect of data collection, data analysis, computer operations, and reporting of information."⁸¹

⁷⁸ "A Strategic Plan for Change in the Office of Research and Statistics," October 18, 1982.

⁷⁹ When Mattessich transitioned to the leadership position, Leonard Wilkening and Norrine Bohman suggested that a new name and rebranding would have benefits. The Planning and Development Office became the Office of Research and Statistics.

⁸⁰ All of these studies focused on programs operated by the Wilder Foundation. All of those programs, except for the children's clinic, have closed since then.

⁸¹ *Wilder News*, 1982 or 1983, month unknown, 5.

The four roles listed above transformed into “four functions”: evaluation; demonstration; community studies; and consultation. Wilder Research became large enough that the earliest versions of research units and core units began to form – one sub-division of Wilder Research for each of the four functions – with each staff person assigned to one or more of the units. At that juncture in 1983, Wilder Research had 18 staff members who included, in the titles of the time, “project directors, research scientists, computer programmers, other data processing specialists, follow-up interviewers, and clerical staff.” Several volunteers also added to the capacity of personnel.⁸²



Wilder Research staff photo (1983)

⁸² Staff at the time: Phil Cooper; Tara Dahl; Dianne DeRoma; Liz Finn; Lisa Floden; Robin Gebhard; Emily Gurnon; Nancy Hurlbut; Molly Lanpher; Clint Lee; Virginia Manion; Paul Mattessich; Dan Mueller; Janet Nitti; Greg Owen; Frank Popplewell; Mary Lou Tillman; Deb Wodke. As of June 2022, four of these staff remained working full or part time for Wilder Research: Cooper; Mattessich; Mueller; and Owen. Dave Mesick, who had a career with the U.S. Census Bureau until his retirement, worked close to full time as a volunteer from the mid-1970s through the early 1980s.



Wilder Research staff photo (2016)

Key principles to produce community impacts

Paul Mattessich sought to build the capacity of Wilder Research to proactively develop solutions to significant social problems and to improve the systems, policies, and programs intended to help people in need. He fashioned a plan for Wilder Research based on several principles:

- Wilder Research had a mission to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities through applied social research.
- Wilder Research would use high quality research methods. This meant designing studies that would produce representative, reliable, and valid information. As a corollary, Wilder Research emphasized the hiring of highly trained individuals into its positions. Most research staff had graduate level training, and almost exclusively, the people who took positions as research project directors or research scientists had doctorates in a social science field.
- Wilder Research would address relevant and significant issues. These could include major social issues, population trends with implications for community well-being, and issues related to the effectiveness of human service organizations.
- Wilder Research would remain nonpartisan, and in conducting external work, it would stand at “arm’s length” from Wilder’s administration and programs.

The Wilder board formalized that last principle in 1992, at the request of Paul Mattessich and on the recommendation of board member Ken Rothchild. The rationale for affording more authority to the principle arose from the experiences of Wilder Research staff during the preceding 15 years.

In the mid-1970s, when Wilder Research resumed operations after a six-year hiatus, some community leaders and service providers worried that the Wilder Foundation might have a hidden agenda. Fears existed that the Wilder Foundation might use research initiatives to “spy” on other organizations and that Wilder might gather information that it would not share, but would use to control a dominant narrative about community needs. Thus, staff hired by Wilder Research encountered opposition to their attempts to do community-wide studies. Those staff needed to engage in significant efforts to build trust and demonstrate their desire to partner with others in the community and share whatever findings their research studies produced.

In addition, some organizations that considered the Wilder Foundation a competitor for grant revenues or client referrals thought that maintaining a research arm offered the Foundation an unfair advantage. Some grant makers expressed wariness about the possible bias of Wilder Research in whatever representation it might do regarding the work of the Foundation. Some public officials and community leaders opined that, to achieve credibility, Wilder Research needed to stand free of political bias.

Consequently, the board passed a resolution “to adjust the accountabilities of the Director of Research to include a direct reporting relationship to the Board in such matters where the possibility of self-interest or misrepresentation might exist.”⁸³ Occasionally since that time, Wilder Research has shown that resolution to funders, potential clients, public officials, and others, if they raised questions or expressed doubts about the values of Wilder Research related to objectivity and nonpartisanship.

⁸³ Minutes of a meeting of the Wilder Board of Directors, November 19, 1992, 7.

Major initiatives begin, alongside growth of research, products, services

Major initiatives – Propelling Wilder Research toward its second century

From the mid-1980s into the early 2000s, Wilder Research developed significant, new initiatives along with new approaches to carrying out research. Many of these have continued to the present day. As Wilder Research grew in size, it transformed its structure.

Wilder Research expanded its consultation and technical assistance efforts. Notably, two signature initiatives came into existence during these years – each of them growing from small, locally focused projects to statewide efforts: Minnesota Compass and the Minnesota Homeless Study. To support the delivery of human services and the development of social policy – locally, nationally, and internationally – Wilder Research expanded the scope of its publications, developed a website, and increased efforts to share knowledge based on its own research and the research of others.

This section of the history of Wilder Research provides an overview of the major, innovative initiatives that took root during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, and which have continued to evolve to the present day.

The world at that time

The 1980s included social, health, technological, and other events that would have long term consequences. On the international scene, Margaret Thatcher and Mikhail Gorbachev had prominence. (Gorbachev visited Saint Paul in 1990.) Ronald Reagan, also well known internationally, served as president of the United States from 1981 to 1989. Of relevance to the Wilder Foundation, Reagan formulated policies to reduce taxes, reduce government spending, reduce unemployment, and promote more “free market” principles. As a result of these policies, spending declined for social welfare programs, unemployment declined, and inflation moderated. The policies increased the wealth of the already wealthy and intensified disparities between people with and without financial resources.⁸⁴

The Centers for Disease Control, in 1981, issued the first report describing the beginning of the AIDS epidemic.

The Berlin Wall fell in 1989, to begin a decline of the Cold War.

The decade of the 1990s is often described as a peaceful decade. Increasing racial diversification manifested itself with numerical growth of diverse populations in the United States as a whole, and in particular within Minnesota’s Twin Cities. Minnesota (especially the Twin Cities region) became home to new population groups from Southeast Asia and Africa. Diversity became a focal point, sometimes a lightning rod, for change in the spheres of employment, education, housing, health care, the arts, and virtually all aspects of community life.

⁸⁴ See, for example: R.D. Plotnick, “Changes in poverty, income inequality, and the standard of living in the United States during the Reagan years,” *International Journal of Health Services* 23, no. 2 (1993). Claire Bond Potter, “The Shadow of Ronald Reagan Is Costing Us Dearly,” *The New York Times*, November 11, 2021.

George Bush and Bill Clinton served as presidents of the United States during the 1990s. Relevant to the work of the Wilder Foundation, Clinton attempted, but failed, to enact significant health care reform. Clinton intended to “end welfare as we have come to know it.” His efforts led to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and the Temporary Aid to Needy Families program, which included work requirements for benefit recipients. This program did not succeed.⁸⁵

The city of Saint Paul had declined in size to approximately 287,000 residents, and the state of Minnesota had grown to approximately 4,900,000 residents, at the time of the 2000 census.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, along with the subsequent war in Iraq, drew much public attention. The stock market took a steep dive in 2002, producing negative impacts on the endowment of the Wilder Foundation. Hurricane Katrina shocked the nation in 2005. A housing crisis of the mid-2000s affected investors and homeowners at all income levels, including the vulnerable community members that Wilder seeks to serve. The Great Recession of 2007 to 2009 intensified the challenges facing low-income populations and populations of color.

At the time of the 2010 census, the city of Saint Paul had approximately 285,000 residents (slightly fewer than in 2000), and the state of Minnesota had grown to approximately 5,300,000 residents.

Social trends research

Opportunities to report and analyze social trends grew markedly in the 1980s because the U.S. Census Bureau, along with other government agencies at national, state, and local levels, gathered more information than ever before. Meanwhile, computers made that information more accessible and more amenable to data processing. Wilder Research took advantage of these opportunities in order to understand population dynamics important for community well-being.

Social Trends in Ramsey, Anoka, Dakota, and Washington Counties, Minnesota 1970 to 1980 provided materials for use at the 1982 Wilder Board/Staff Conference, to support the Foundation’s strategic planning process.⁸⁶ The report examined trends in: population (total, by age, gender, and race); marriage and family status; housing; health; income; education; employment; and criminal justice. Though originally intended for internal use, it received external distribution and led to a similar report requested by the Blandin Foundation for its geographic focus area, Itasca County.

Most importantly, the report paved the way for a series of efforts by Wilder Research to empower communities and human service organizations by providing information and insight regarding community living conditions and needs. Phil Cooper initially handled the acquisition of census data and other social indicators, and he set in motion growth of the data processing capability that Wilder Research would require for activities which eventually evolved into Minnesota Compass.

⁸⁵ Thomas M. Fraker, Dan M. Levy, Irma Perez-Johnson, Alan M. Hershey, Demetra S. Nightingale, Robert B. Olsen, and Rita A. Stapulonis, *National Evaluation of the Welfare-to-Work Grants Program: Final Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2004).

⁸⁶ Mattessich, Paul W., “Social Trends in Ramsey, Anoka, Dakota, and Washington Counties, Minnesota 1970 to 1980.” (Prepared for Wilder Foundation Board/Staff Conference 1982).

Cooper assembled *The Social Environment 1986*, a publication issued by Wilder Research, with data on the Minneapolis-Saint Paul Metropolitan Area, “as a reference for health and human service providers, educators, government officials, community organizations, and others.”⁸⁷ The report documented important trends in population, health, education, and other topics, as a means to understand community changes that had occurred and to anticipate likely future changes. Wilder Research issued occasional subsequent social environment reports during the next 10 years.

To facilitate access to demographic information, Wilder Research served as an associate to the state of Minnesota as a federally designated Census Data Center, beginning in February 1984.⁸⁸ In this capacity, Wilder Research received data files from the U.S. Census Bureau and, in exchange, agreed to provide data, mostly free of charge, to nonprofit organizations in Saint Paul and nearby communities. This arrangement had advantages for Wilder Research, providing complete and free access to detailed population and housing statistics, for use in whatever research the staff needed to do.

Social Outcomes for Our Community and Trend Watch

Wilder Research staff responded to requests to provide information on social trends, using census data and other sources of statistics on the population. By about 1994, conversations with community leaders, public officials, foundation leaders, and leaders of nonprofit organizations led to the idea that Wilder Research should identify a set of important indicators of community vitality and publish those indicators on a regular basis, to stimulate productive community action.

Greater Saint Paul Tomorrow, a coalition of leaders, offered to sponsor a report. Funding for the initiative came from the McKnight Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation. The 3M Foundation paid to print the report. Paul Mattessich led a team of staff who worked with an advisory committee to select indicators, assembled the necessary information, and issued a first report in 1996, called *Social Outcomes for Our Community: Entering the 21st Century*. Copies of the report were mailed to about 2,500 public officials, business leaders, leaders of community organizations, and other leaders in Ramsey, Washington, and Dakota counties. Public officials, organization leaders, and community residents attended forums in the months following publication of the report, to discuss implications and suggest policy changes. The *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* published a three-day series of special articles based on the report.⁸⁹

Policymakers, community leaders, and foundation executives appreciated the objectivity and impartiality of the report. It clearly revealed needs, along with offering insights regarding strategic interventions to meet those needs. Nonetheless, it promoted no political agenda in its depiction of social conditions. Paul Verret, president of The Saint Paul Foundation, championed the community studies and social indicators research of Wilder Research, from the 1970s onward. He offered his perspective on the cachet of the Social Outcomes report:

*These data are solid and objective. If I get numbers from advocacy groups or political parties, I can't always be sure that I can rely on those numbers. I know that I can trust the numbers from Wilder Research, and I can share them with others who will use them.*⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Philip W. Cooper, *The Social Environment 1986*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research), i.

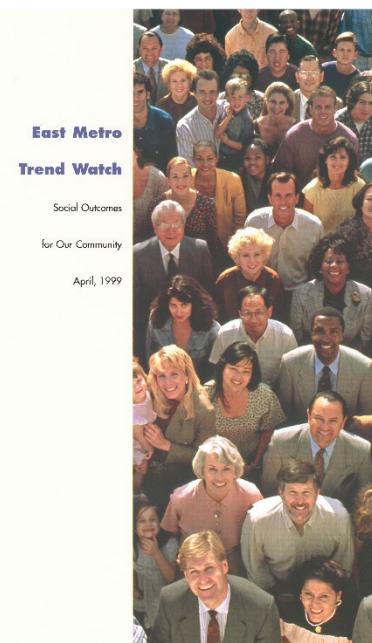
⁸⁸ Letter of appointment as an associate of the State Data Center, from Tom Gillaspay, Minnesota State Demographer, February 21, 1984.

⁸⁹ The series began on Sunday, January 6, 1996, with story text and inserts that took up about 75% of the front page and continued on later pages, along with several other articles and graphs on the later pages. See: Richard Chin, “Room for Improvement,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, January 6, 1996, 1.

⁹⁰ Paul Verret, personal conversation with Paul Mattessich, June 1996.

In 1997, Wilder Research issued a second report, which included both demographic information (from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau) and survey information which Wilder Research had collected through a phone survey of East Metro residents. By 1999, the social outcomes report had become the *East Metro Trend Watch* report⁹¹ – the last report in that series for the 20th century.

Then, with a 2001 report, the scope expanded to the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area. The new Metro Trend Watch incorporated census and other social indicators data, along with information from a survey conducted by Wilder Research, to track community progress in five areas: school readiness and success; decent, affordable housing for people at all income levels; economic opportunities for all residents; public safety and the fear of crime; and a healthy start in life. An editorial in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* assessed Metro Trend Watch positively (“Metro Trend Watch offers useful data, hope for future”) and encouraged its use for “going to work on the challenges” facing the community.⁹²



Cover of *East Metro Trend Watch* (1999)

Funders and sponsors of Metro Trend Watch were: Greater Twin Cities United Way; McKnight Foundation; Minneapolis Foundation; The Saint Paul Foundation; and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. A panel of community consultants advised on the creation of the report. In addition, after the 2001 report, Wilder Research staff worked for a few years on an initiative called Community DataWorks, with a partner, Excensus, to build the capacity to collect, analyze, and report a greater amount of social indicators.

The 2004 report from Metro Trend Watch generated attention in the media, especially regarding economic vitality and education in the Twin Cities region.⁹³ This report showed that, during the three years since the previous report, some quality of life measures had improved or remained the same, for example, safety, home ownership, and high school graduation rates. However, the 2004 report pointed to a decrease in the number of well-paying jobs, and it pointed to racial disparities in education. Those disparities became a focus for the media due to the long-term implications which Wilder Research Associate Director Dan Mueller emphasized in an interview for the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*: “Failing to close the achievement gap could mean a shortage of educated workers in the workplace as the baby boomers retire,” he said.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Wilder Research, *East Metro Trend Watch: Social Outcomes for Our Community*, April 1999.

⁹² *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, September 6, 2001, A16.

⁹³ Wilder Research, *Metro Trend Watch 2004: Key trends and perceptions and selected strategies for action* (March 2004). H.J. Cummins, “Livable-wage jobs elusive,” *Star Tribune*, March 24, 2004. Lenora Chu, “Metro area holds steady in survey,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, March 24, 2004. Also cited with respect to educational disparities in a report commissioned by The Itasca Project: Rebecca Sohmer, *Mind the Gap: Reducing Disparities to Improve Regional Competitiveness in the Twin Cities* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 2005).

⁹⁴ Chu, “Metro area holds”, 8B.

Twin Cities Compass and Minnesota Compass

After recognizing the value of Metro Trend Watch and hearing about the experiences of other cities, such as Boston, which had developed initiatives to measure community vitality, community leaders in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area turned to Wilder Research and encouraged an enhancement of the scope and activities of Metro Trend Watch.

On September 27, 2006, a meeting took place in the USB Forum Room of Minnesota Public Radio, culminating in a live *Midmorning* radio broadcast. Approximately 75 regional leaders discussed the prospects for an enhanced social indicators initiative, eventually renamed Twin Cities Compass. They recommended how this work by Wilder Research could focus significant public attention on critical indicators for regional success, how it could elevate the level of decision-making and public policy discussion, and how it could stimulate community action in a nonpartisan, credible manner.

During 2007, in partnership with the Itasca Project, Wilder Research brought together groups of policymakers, community leaders, business leaders, leaders of nonprofit organizations, and others to identify what information would be most useful in order to measure community progress, determine solutions, and move toward productive action. Nine funders had agreed to join a consortium to fund this work: Bush Foundation; Greater Twin Cities United Way; McKnight Foundation; Minneapolis Foundation; The Saint Paul Foundation; 3M Foundation; St. Paul Travelers Foundation; Wells Fargo Foundation; and the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

Irv Weiser, former chairman and CEO of RBC Dain Rauscher, commented on the successful development of the initiative:

*The Itasca group had a task force on determining measurements, which I co-chaired. That led us to Wilder Research. Having one single source of data will be key. We may argue about what the data all means, but never again will we argue about what the data is.*⁹⁵

Twin Cities Compass launched in 2008 as a comprehensive social indicators project that made information accessible and that included proactive outreach and public education.

Within two years of launching Twin Cities Compass, Wilder Research enlarged the initiative to become statewide, renaming it Minnesota Compass. Eventually, Craig Helmstetter assumed the role of director of Minnesota Compass.⁹⁶ Continuing to the present day, Minnesota Compass seeks to contribute to Minnesota's shared well-being by: "(1) Providing credible, easy-to-access data; (2) Tracking trends and measuring progress; (3) Improving understanding to make evidence-informed decisions."⁹⁷

Minnesota Compass staff built a website with the capacity to provide information on social and demographic characteristics of the population in Minnesota and information on the condition of the population with respect to 10 quality-of-life topics. Users of the website can obtain this information for the state as a whole and for smaller geographic areas. In 2014, Compass staff initiated an upgrade of the capacity of the website. The upgrade included the addition of neighborhood profiles – enabling residents of neighborhoods in Minneapolis and Saint Paul to obtain detailed information for their neighborhoods. The upgrade also featured an easy-to-use tool to produce data for geographic areas that Compass users can define and draw by themselves.

⁹⁵ Jennifer Franklin, "Twin Cities Compass," *Wilder Journal* 10, no. 2 (2007): 3.

⁹⁶ Helmstetter fulfilled this role until 2017 when he took the position of managing partner of a new initiative of American Public Media: the APM Research Lab.

⁹⁷ See "About the project," Minnesota Compass, <https://www.mncompass.org>.

Minnesota Compass has benefitted from input from more than 1,000 people who served on committees to select indicators and offer other advice. As Helmstetter stated,

We want the neighborhood profiles to empower communities to address issues that are important to them. To do this we worked with a variety of stakeholders – neighborhood advocates, university researchers, district council members, nonprofits, city planners, and others – to understand what they needed to know to make a difference at the local level.⁹⁸

Annually, hundreds of organizations and communities have made use of the resources of Minnesota Compass. Minnesota Compass has received national recognition in a variety of ways. An article in *Contexts*, a national publication for sociologists, introduced the project to that network of social science professionals.⁹⁹ Staff of Compass published advice for philanthropic foundations and for communities beyond Minnesota, providing insights that organizations worldwide could use to develop similar projects for geographic areas of interest to them. The U.S. Department of Defense requested training at the Pentagon for its leaders who sought to enhance the quality of life of military personnel.¹⁰⁰

Compass staff have made frequent presentations at the annual meeting of The Community Indicators Consortium (communityindicators.net), a national association of organizations dedicated to making social indicators available for communities. That group recognized the achievements of Minnesota Compass with an award at its annual meeting in 2012. The Consortium awarded Paul Mattessich its “Hall of Heroes” award in 2018. Compass Director Craig Helmstetter served on the Consortium’s board from 2013 to 2019, including serving as president in 2018. Compass Director Allison Liuzzi joined the board in 2020 and served as president of the Community Indicators Consortium in 2021. Caitlin Hamrock, a research scientist at Wilder Research, began to contribute to leadership of the Consortium by joining its board in 2022.

Community initiatives and special projects of Minnesota Compass

In addition to covering population trends and quality-of-life topics, Minnesota Compass has engaged in special projects which provide data for designated pages on the website.

In partnership with Boston Scientific, Compass added a STEM section to the site in 2014, to support efforts within the state to strengthen the science, technology, engineering, and math skills of the state’s residents. Caryn Mohr led the development of this section, assisted by Dan Mueller, in collaboration with an advisory group of STEM leaders in Minnesota. A conference, entitled “Compass STEM Gathering: Moving from Research to Action” took place at Wilder Center in September 2014 to introduce this section and to obtain feedback on it from local leaders, educators, and other professionals working in the STEM field.

Under the leadership of Allison Liuzzi, additional special project pages added to the Compass website include: COVID-19; Who leads in Minnesota?; and Early Childhood Risk, Reach, and Resilience. The site also has a Leadership Program Directory and a Racial Equity Resource Directory. The Bush Foundation cooperated in creating these directories and funded both of them.

⁹⁸ Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, *2014 Annual Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Foundation), 8.

⁹⁹ Nicole MartinRogers, Ela Rausch, and Paul Mattessich, “Communities That Don’t Bowl in the Fog,” *Contexts* 8, no. 1 (2009).

¹⁰⁰ For example, Craig Helmstetter, Paul Mattessich, Andi Egbert, Susan Brower, Nancy Hartzler, Jennifer Franklin, and Bryan Lloyd, “Sustaining the Operations of Indicators Projects: The Case of Twin Cities Compass,” in *Community Quality-of-Life Indicators: Best Cases V*, eds. M. Sirgy, R. Phillips, D. Rahtz Community Quality-of-Life Indicators, vol. 3. (Springer, Dordrecht, 2011). Paul Mattessich, “Minnesota Compass Points the Way,” *Giving Forum* 36, no. 2 (2013). Paul Mattessich, “Five Components of Community Well-Being – Service Delivery Strategies,” (Department of Defense Quality of Life Symposium, December 16, 1996).

Minnesota Compass also formed connections with other initiatives to provide backbone information useful for those initiatives. For example, Minnesota Compass partnered with: OneMinneapolis, an initiative intended to address and decrease social and economic disparities among racial groups; and with Generation Next, an initiative to increase educational achievement in the Twin Cities. In partnership with WCCO-TV news in 2020, Compass mapped areas of the Twin Cities at highest risk of severe COVID-19. Minnesota Compass staff have also provided technical assistance and the infrastructure backbone for North Dakota Compass and South Dakota Compass.

A coalition of funders requested that Wilder Research use social indicators information, along with survey data, to measure some of the demographic and economic impacts of the development of light rail transit along the Central Corridor of the Twin Cities, that is, the route primarily along University Avenue between downtown Saint Paul and downtown Minneapolis.¹⁰¹

Research on homelessness

During the 1980s, Saint Paul’s leaders from government, community organizations, nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, and faith communities felt greater urgency to address the problematic social issue of homelessness, as did similar leaders around the United States. However, a lack of information seemed to stymie progress in addressing the issue. In conversations with Wilder Research staff, these leaders suggested that a survey could help to resolve questions about the number and characteristics of people without a permanent residence and about the specific needs they had.

The initial homeless study

To provide a reliable, objective portrait of homelessness, and to contribute to the planning and design of programs and policies to address the issue, Greg Owen established a research strategy for collecting, analyzing, and reporting information on people who experience homelessness in Minnesota. This strategy evolved over several decades, with nurturance from him and his team, and with input from many partners around the state.¹⁰²

Survey interviews occurred for the first time in homeless shelters in Saint Paul in 1984. The homeless survey expanded to include Minneapolis in subsequent years and eventually expanded to a statewide survey in 1991. The survey relies on a large number of volunteers who all work on one designated night to visit shelters, draw samples of shelter residents, and administer interviews in accordance with a prescribed protocol. Volunteers, including individuals and groups from organizations such as businesses, nonprofit organizations, and churches, received training in administering the survey (initially in person, and later through videoconferencing, DVDs, and web-based communication for remote training). Many individuals returned to volunteer over multiple years.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ See, for example, Daniel Mueller and Andi Egbert, *Central Corridor Key Outcomes: Baseline Indicators Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011); Jane Tigan, *Central Corridor Key Outcomes: 2012 Indicators*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012); Brian Pittman, *Business Impacts and Loss Mitigation in the Central Corridor: A Survey of Businesses on the Green Line after Completion of the Light Rail Construction*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015); Peter Mathison and Craig Helmstetter, *Key Outcomes for the Corridor: 2016 Indicators Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

¹⁰² Owen directed the series of homelessness surveys which began in 1984, sharing the status of “co-director” of the 2015 and 2018 surveys with senior research manager Michelle Decker Gerrard.

¹⁰³ Four organizations recruited notably large contingents of volunteer interviewers, from 2009 onward. Employees from Cummins Power Generation formed large groups for each survey. Professors from departments of sociology and social work at Metropolitan State University and Augsburg University successfully encouraged active participation by their students. The University of Minnesota Medical School also sent many volunteers.

Expanding the research statewide

In 1990, Commissioner Jim Solem of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency requested that Wilder Research expand the exclusively metro area study of homelessness to include the entire state of Minnesota. This exponential expansion of the study required the cooperation of many public and private partner agencies and funders. Therefore, Wilder Research collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless, and a wide range of service providers throughout the state serving persons experiencing homelessness, as well as with other nonprofits seeking to expand and preserve affordable housing. A public/private advisory group was formed to design the survey and to advise the research team on the interpretation of findings and the dissemination of those findings. Supplementing the state's funding, the Family Housing Fund of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, the Greater Minnesota Housing Fund, and the Wilder Foundation provided financial support. The Minnesota Satellite Technology Center and the Minnesota Technical College System collaborated in the provision of training sites.

On October 24, 1991, approximately 325 volunteers went to 94 provider locations and numerous street locations to interview over 1,000 homeless individuals throughout Minnesota. In the following months, Owen and his team issued a general report of findings which described the number of adults experiencing homelessness and their children, their characteristics, and their needs. The team conducted a companion study of homeless unaccompanied youth led by Michelle Decker, and issued a companion report as part of the larger study.¹⁰⁴ The statewide survey has occurred every three years since 1991, except for 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a delay. The 2018 study included face-to-face survey interviews with 4,181 adults experiencing homelessness throughout Minnesota.



Homeless Study team. From left: Greg Owen, Scott Parks, Marilyn Conrad, Michelle Decker, Phil Cooper, and June Heineman (1991)

The first statewide study established a pattern for later studies. During the months following each survey, Wilder Research would do extensive data preparation, analysis, and reporting – to provide an overview of homelessness, to delve in depth into certain topics, and frequently to take an intensive look at specific groups within the homeless population.

¹⁰⁴ Greg Owen, June A. Heineman, and Michelle R. Decker, *Homelessness in Minnesota: Homeless Adults and Their Children*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1991). Greg Owen, June A. Heineman, and Michelle R. Decker, *Homelessness in Minnesota: Homeless Youth*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1991).

Every subsequent study included a general report, and the number of companion reports increased. Using data from the most recent study in 2018, Wilder Research staff produced a general report, plus reports on topics such as homelessness on American Indian reservations, homelessness among older adults, homelessness among people who identify as LGBTQ, and veterans experiencing homelessness.¹⁰⁵ With data from this series of statewide studies conducted since 1991, Wilder Research developed the ability to document trends in homelessness over time in Minnesota.¹⁰⁶

The American Indian reservation homeless study has high noteworthiness because it stands as a nationally recognized study and the only one of its kind in the country. Wilder Research agreed to share information from the study publicly only after each contributing Tribe had a chance to review the data and sign off on its publication. Such an agreement was critical to success because so much previous research had simply embarrassed or misrepresented the Tribes without producing any impacts. The Wilder Research study led to progress among Tribes to address their own housing issues and helped Tribal governments do more effective, data-strengthened advocacy, to access resources. After the first reservation study in 2009, Tribal leaders succeeded to leverage more than \$25,000,000 in new housing funding based on the needs identified in the study.

Sharing information and insights in Minnesota and beyond



The Minnesota Homeless Study has generated media attention over the decades throughout Minnesota and elsewhere. Reporters develop stories, sometimes focusing on overall trends and sometimes on specific topics.¹⁰⁷ Early in this series of studies, survey findings debunked the stereotype of a person without shelter as a male adult. Women and children experienced homelessness, and the news media noted this fact.¹⁰⁸ Wilder Research appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* in 2002 in an article that highlighted the homeless studies.¹⁰⁹

News article about findings from the Minnesota Homeless Study (1998)

¹⁰⁵ Brian Pittman, Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Ellen Shelton, *Homelessness in Minnesota: Detailed Findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020). Jackie Aman, Virginia Pendleton, Nicole MartinRogers, Walker Bosch, and Michelle Decker Gerrard, *Homelessness on Minnesota American Indian Reservations: Findings from the 2018 Minnesota Reservation Homeless Study*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020). Michelle Decker Gerrard and Greg Owen, *Older Adults Experiencing Homelessness in Minnesota: Summary of 2018 Statewide Counts and Continuum of Care Regions in the State*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019). Virginia Pendleton, Walker Bosch, Margaret Vohs, Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, and Michelle Decker Gerrard, *Characteristics of People Who Identify as LGBTQ Experiencing Homelessness: Findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020). Michelle Decker Gerrard, June Heineman, and Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, *Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: Findings from the 2018 Minnesota Homeless Study*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

¹⁰⁶ E.g., June Heineman and Michelle Gerrard, *Ramsey County: Characteristics and Trends of Those Experiencing Homelessness in Minnesota*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

¹⁰⁷ For example: Randy Furst, "Nearly 20,000 Homeless on Average in Minnesota," *Star Tribune*, March 26, 2020. Maja Beckstrom, "More Minnesota Homeless Have Jobs, Wilder Survey Says," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, November 16, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ For example, Louis Porter II, "Shelters House More Women and Children," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, September 20, 1989, 1B.

¹⁰⁹ John W. Fountain, "On an Icy Night, Little Room at the Shelter," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2002, 1.

Wilder Research staff have appeared on radio and TV to discuss the study and its implications for policies and programs related to people who experience homelessness. Twin Cities Public Television, TPT, co-produced with Wilder Research a full length documentary on youth homelessness in 2008, with funding from the McKnight Foundation, Target, Minneapolis Foundation, and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. Along with information from the homelessness studies, the documentary combined words, stories, and images from young people with statements from researchers and service providers. It offered an in-depth perspective on causes of, and potential solutions for, youth homelessness.¹¹⁰

Wilder Research staff have written articles about homelessness in professional journals and in newspapers and have delivered presentations at conferences in the United States and Europe. Wilder Research hosted one of the earliest research-focused conferences on homeless youth, *Homeless Youth: What We Know and Where to Go from Here*, in April 1996.¹¹¹ Headlined by Congressman Bruce Vento, co-author of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, the agenda also included presentations by Wilder Research staff and by University of Minnesota professor Dale Blyth.

The U.S. Census Bureau invited Wilder Research staff to two conferences in Washington to discuss the best methods for enumerating and surveying people experiencing homelessness. In this way, the Minnesota Homeless Study has provided practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and others outside of Minnesota with valuable data as well as with insights into how to gather information about people who are experiencing homelessness.

The Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless awarded the Bruce Vento Service Award to Greg Owen in 2013. The award recognized the work that Owen and his team at Wilder Research had done to illuminate the facts about homelessness in Minnesota, together with the research support they had provided to organizations that used data from Wilder Research to support their planning and fundraising efforts.

Homeless Management Information System

During the early 2000s, Wilder Research staff collaborated with the state of Minnesota, the network of Continuum of Care coordinators, and others throughout Minnesota to create the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for Minnesota. This system collects, compiles, and reports data from hundreds of agencies who serve people experiencing homelessness. It enables planners, providers, and funders to understand the characteristics of people served by homeless services agencies, the types of services provided, and the length of time people receive those services. Craig Helmstetter led the development and management of this system with a team of Wilder Research staff, comprised of about 8 members, who devised data forms, entered data, created portals for remote access by participating organizations, and reported information. Colleen O'Brien succeeded Helmstetter and directed the initiative until Wilder Research transferred responsibility for maintaining this system to the Institute of Community Alliances in 2016.

¹¹⁰ "Homeless Youth: Finding Home," TPT, <https://www.tptoriginals.org/homeless-youth-finding-home/>

¹¹¹ Sponsored by the Wilder Foundation, the Otto Bremer Foundation, the Family Housing Fund, and Open Your Hearts to the Hungry and Homeless (a philanthropy organization started by state of Minnesota employees).

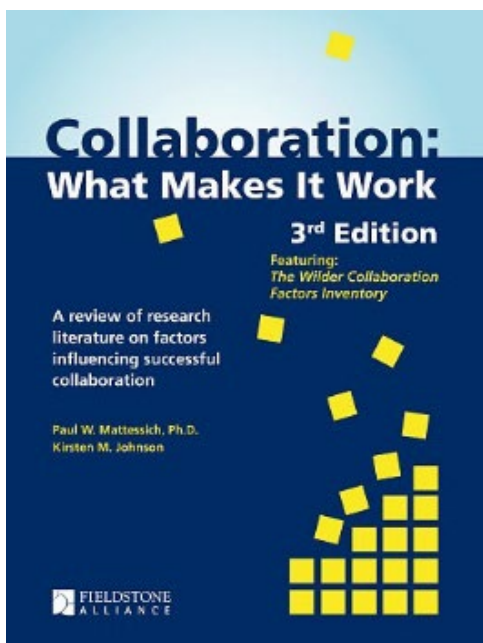
Book publishing

In the late 1980s, Wilder Research recognized another role it could play to strengthen human services organizations, locally, nationally, and internationally: publishing books which offered evidence-based guidance for human services, government policy, and management of nonprofit and government organizations.

Funders' Guide to Prevention Programming

The first book emerged in 1988 in the form of a guide to human service prevention programs, with emphasis on children and adolescents.¹¹² Authored by Dan Mueller and Paul Higgins, this guide presented the results of an analysis of what works and what does not work in preventing child abuse and neglect, children's academic performance, teenage pregnancy, and teenage substance abuse. Although intended initially for an audience of funders of services in these four topic areas, it gained wide circulation among service providers, policymakers, and others in Minnesota and around the United States.

Collaboration: What Makes It Work



Cover of the 3rd edition of *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (2018)

Collaboration: What Makes It Work first appeared in 1992. Based on the premise that effective solutions to complex social issues in modern society require collaboration among organizations, the book had the goal to identify research-based factors that influence the success of collaboration. Paul Mattessich and Barbara Monsey led a team that sifted through hundreds of studies and combined the results of those studies to provide a helpful guide.¹¹³

In 2001, Wilder Research published a second edition of *Collaboration: What Makes It Work*, in order to incorporate new knowledge gained from research on collaboration conducted since publication of the first edition.¹¹⁴ In addition, the 2001 edition introduced a new user-friendly tool: *The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory*. This tool enabled organizations to measure themselves on the factors which research identified as important for the success of collaboration. At first available on paper, the tool eventually appeared in electronic form on the Wilder Research website. Thousands of organizations around the world have used the tool free of charge. The Rand Corporation¹¹⁵ and others have documented its validity and reliability.

¹¹² Daniel P. Mueller and Paul S. Higgins, *Funders' Guide Manual: A Guide to Prevention in Human Services, Focus on Children and Adolescents* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1988).

¹¹³ Paul W. Mattessich and Barbara R. Monsey, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1992). Initially, the Wilder Publishing Center (later becoming independent and renamed Fieldstone Alliance) published books written by Wilder Research authors. Eventually, Turner Publishing Company (www.turnerbookstore.com) acquired Fieldstone Alliance, obtained the rights to the books, and served as the publisher for new editions.

¹¹⁴ Paul W. Mattessich, Marta Murray-Close, and Barbara R. Monsey, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (2nd ed.) (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst. H. Wilder Foundation, 2001).

¹¹⁵ Kathryn Pitkin Derose, Amanda Beatty, and Catherine A. Jackson, *Evaluation of Community Voices Miami: affecting health policy for the uninsured* (Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation, 2004).

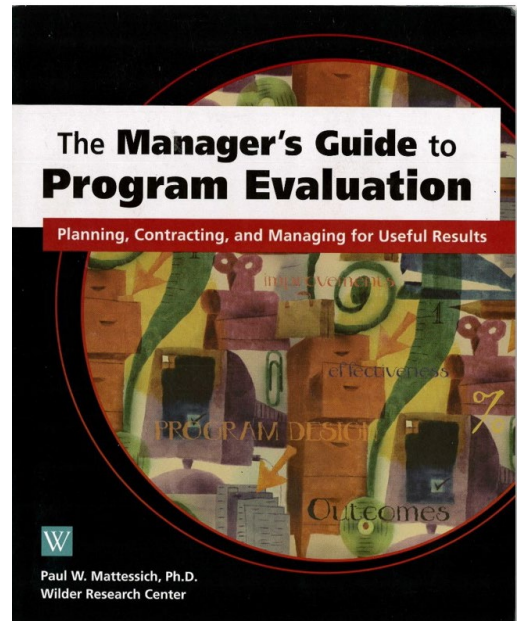
Wilder staff increasingly received invitations to do lectures and training sessions and write articles related to collaboration, and the book is cited in many contexts.¹¹⁶

A third edition of *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* came out in 2018.¹¹⁷ It refined the collaboration success factors, based on research since publication of the second edition. It also added substantial, new material focused on the process of “collaboration across difference” – gender, nationality, race and ethnicity, age, income level, and other features of difference. Use of the collaboration book and of the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory has remained high for three decades.

The Manager’s Guide to Program Evaluation

The first edition of *The Manager’s Guide to Program Evaluation* appeared in 2003. This book took a relatively unique approach in the evaluation field because it addressed itself to the people who manage and work in programs, not to researchers, as a primary audience. It offered a user-friendly description of the principles and mechanics of evaluation research. It had the goal to enable service providers in nonprofit, government, and community organizations to collaborate with evaluation researchers and participate in the design and use of evaluation research without needing to know all the technical aspects of such research. National use of the book rose rapidly after it received a review in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.¹¹⁸

In 2021, a second edition of *The Manager’s Guide to Program Evaluation* was published.¹¹⁹ Michael Quinn Patton, one of the most respected experts on evaluation research internationally, gave both the first and second editions glowing appraisals. In addition to wide use by managers in nonprofit and government organizations, it has served as a textbook for students in social work and other human services professions throughout the United States.



Cover of the 2nd edition of *The Manager’s Guide to Program Evaluation* (2021)

*For managers who care about effectiveness, improvement, and learning, no better book on evaluation exists.*¹²⁰

- Dr. Michael Quinn Patton

¹¹⁶ For example: Paul Mattessich, “Can This Collaboration Be Saved?” *SHELTERFORCE The Journal of Affordable Housing and Community Building*, May/June 2003. John McClusky, “Disproving the Hero Myth of Social Entrepreneurship,” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, Winter 2017.

¹¹⁷ Paul W. Mattessich and Kirsten M. Johnson, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (3rd ed.), (Nashville, Tennessee: Fieldstone Alliance, an imprint of Turner Publishing Company, 2018).

¹¹⁸ Book Review, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, December 11, 2003.

¹¹⁹ Paul W. Mattessich, *The Manager’s Guide to Program Evaluation* (2nd ed.) (Nashville, Tennessee: Fieldstone Alliance, an imprint of Turner Publishing Company, 2021).

¹²⁰ Dr. Patton provided his statement for the back cover of the book.

Other books

During the 1990s, Wilder Research published three other books, beyond those mentioned. *What Works in Preventing Rural Violence* offered a resource to human service agencies, law enforcement, victims' advocates, residents' groups, and others who sought to prevent violence in rural communities.¹²¹

In *Community Building: What Makes It Work*,² Wilder Research staff synthesized research on community building to identify factors that influence its success. They showed that characteristics of a community itself, characteristics of the process which community members use to strengthen their ability to function collectively, and characteristics of the organizers of a community-building effort – all have impacts on the ultimate success of attempts to increase the social capacity of community members to achieve their goals. The book added to a body of research literature, which pointed to the importance of “social capital” as a resource for individuals and groups.¹²²

In 2007, *Information Gold Mine: Innovative Uses of Evaluation* illuminated the topic of how nonprofit organizations can use information that they possess on the effectiveness of their programs not only to improve the services that they provide, but also in other, creative ways – for example, to do public relations, raise funds, motivate staff, and recruit volunteers.¹²³

Research consultation and partnering with organizations

Although consultation and partnering comprised key components in many early WR projects, a dedicated effort to increase the capacity and profile of Wilder Research to serve organizations and community groups of all types, in projects focused on their needs, did not materialize until about 1986.

Richard Chase served as a research scientist dedicated to developing fee-for-service research and program evaluation projects with outside organizations (nonprofits, government, and foundations). This work increased over the years, and it constituted a significant driver for the growth of Wilder Research (volume of work, number of projects, number of staff, and revenue). Work with organizations other than the Wilder Foundation's own programs became a major part of the activities of most research staff. Staffing requirements for efforts necessary to carry out the work of consultation projects greatly influenced the formation of research units and core units within Wilder Research.

Later sections of this history provide examples of the work that Wilder Research carried out with and for other organizations.

¹²¹ Barbara R. Monsey, Greg Owen, Carol Zierman, Laura Lambert, and Vince Hyman, *What Works in Preventing Rural Violence* (St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1995).

¹²² Paul W. Mattessich, and Barbara R. Monsey, *Community Building: What Makes It Work* (St. Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1997). Paul Mattessich, “Social Capital and Community Building,” in *An Introduction to Community Development*, eds. Phillips, Rhonda, and Robert H. Pittman (New York: Routledge, 2015), 58-70.

¹²³ Paul W. Mattessich, Shelly Hendricks, and Ross VeLure Roholt, *Information Gold Mine: Innovative Uses of Evaluation* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 2007).

Consultation on client record systems

A heavy demand arose in the 1980s for consultation on client record systems. Many organizations wanted to collect data on the people they served, and they needed technical assistance to do so. Wilder Research met their needs by designing systems, training staff in the use of those systems, collecting the data from each site, combining the data, and then issuing summary and comparative reports.

An editorial in the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* hailed the completion of the YWCA's data system by Wilder Research, asserting that homeless individuals could get “the best, most useful, longest-term help” through the collection of data, analysis of data, and application of the resulting information – an approach that today would be called data-informed decision-making or evidence-based practice.¹²⁴

Wilder Research demonstrated national leadership in showing the value of automating client records. In the mid-1980s, Wilder Programs staff who made use of the systems developed by Wilder Research felt that the systems enhanced their ability to provide effective care. In addition, they reported a great reduction in the amount of time they needed to spend on care planning, case management, scheduling, and report production. Wilder Research contributed to the knowledge base about computerized client records systems through participation in national professional networks.¹²⁵

In the 1990s, at the invitation of Dr. Jim Jordan, a psychiatrist and the executive director of the Hamm Clinic in Saint Paul, Wilder Research staff collaborated with Hamm staff in the development of a system to track patient services, measure the outcomes of those services, and obtain patient satisfaction ratings. The system provided a unique and nationally recognized database for exploring the outcomes of care in a community mental health center.¹²⁶ Paul Mattessich served on the board of directors of the Hamm Clinic from the mid-1990s through the mid-2010s, including holding the position of chair for three years.

Wilder Research also developed records systems intended to assist the Northwest Area Foundation's Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention Programs and Minneapolis Way to Grow, to improve the planning and effectiveness of their work.

Consultation by Wilder Research staff on the development of computerized client records systems continued through the 1990s, but then became less necessary and began to wane as computer technology and software packages became more widely available to all organizations, large and small.

Some organizations sought to combine the data from their own organization with data from partner organizations in order to improve their effectiveness. Wilder Research became involved in a variety of collaborative data systems, some of which continue to the present day, although they are no longer associated with Wilder Research. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wilder Research collaborated in the creation of an information system for three providers of emergency and transitional housing (Catholic Charities, Union Gospel Mission, and the Saint Paul YWCA). Wilder Research also worked to refine and improve a data-sharing system among a consortium of five counseling

¹²⁴ “Computers to Spread the Word on Homeless,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, June 13, 1989.

¹²⁵ See, for example: Paul W. Mattessich, J. Frank Popplewell, and Dianne DeRoma, “Automating Client Record Systems within a Large Human Services Agency” (Third Annual National Symposium on Information Technology, Columbia, South Carolina, 1988).

¹²⁶ See, for example: William Bradshaw, David Roseborough, Rohini Pahwa, and James Jordan, “Evaluation of Psychodynamic Psychotherapy in a Community Mental Health Center,” *Journal of The American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry* 37, no. 4 (2009): 665–681. David Roseborough, J. McLeod, and F. Wright, “Attrition in psychotherapy: A survival analysis,” *Research on Social Work Practice* 26, no. 7 (2016): 803 – 815.

agencies that wanted to improve their services (Catholic Charities, Chicanos Latinos Unidos En Servicio, Family Service of Saint Paul, Jewish Family Service of Saint Paul, and Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota).¹²⁷

Later sections of this history describe other collaborative data system initiatives.

Wilder Research structure: “The Donut Model”

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Wilder Research staff structure had consisted of research teams organized primarily around specific studies, such as the large-scale community studies described earlier, or around functions, such as the evaluation of the Wilder Foundation’s programs. In addition, a few staff outside of those teams served in technical and administrative roles. As Wilder Research grew, the managers decided that the staff structure needed to evolve, and they purposefully transformed the structure into a donut-shaped model. This model persisted through 2022.

Research units comprised the outside of the donut. Each unit consisted of a leader (eventually called a research manager) and other staff with responsibilities for developing and managing research projects and doing varied forms of research consultation. Most of the units had Greek letter names. No requirement existed that units should specialize in a specific topic or type of research. Most staff could work as generalists if they wished. However, some units tended to coalesce their research projects around certain topics and to become recognized for their expertise in those topics.¹²⁸

The culture of Wilder Research put value on entrepreneurship. Research staff had the latitude to develop a body of work that fit their interests and skills and which met research needs of organizations and/or communities. The expectation existed that they would do so proactively.

Core specialty units comprised the inside of the donut. Initially, six of these units existed: Survey Center/Data Collection; Data Analysis; Administrative Support; Library; Communications; and Finance.

The Data Analysis Unit served to centralize data processing and statistical analysis and make those services available to all research staff. Prior to this time, project directors did their own analysis or had it done by an assistant in their unit. Phil Cooper became the head of the Data Analysis Unit, with the title of data coordination supervisor. In 1999, this unit took on a hardware and software technical support function for Wilder Research staff, and Cooper’s title changed to information technology manager. Mark Anton, hired by Cooper in 2001, eventually became data analysis manager.

For as long as Wilder Research managed the client record systems of the Wilder Foundation, the Data Analysis Unit bore responsibility for that management. When the Foundation decided to form a new Information Services Department in the 1990s, that department assumed control of the client record systems. Several staff from Wilder Research left to join that new department, along with technical staff who had formerly been part of the Foundation’s accounting department.

¹²⁷ See: *WRC Report 3*, no. 1 (1991).

¹²⁸ Examples of reputations earned by some research units include social trends and demographics (Compass), homelessness and housing (Gamma), children’s mental health (Sigma), economics (Nu), education (Delta), parental incarceration (Omega), among others.

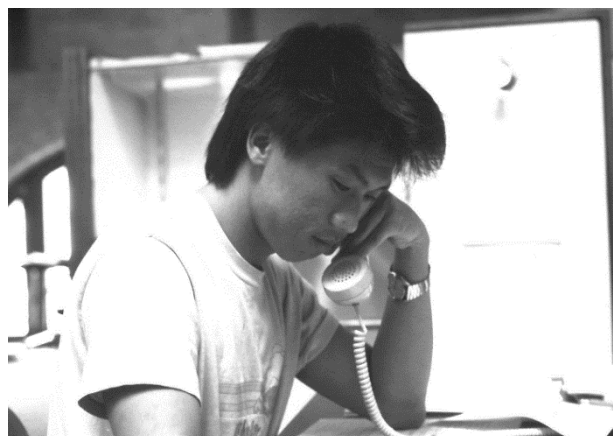
The Admin Support Unit has provided multiple types of office support to Wilder Research. This has included word processing, graphics creation, and report production for hundreds of projects annually. The current manager of the unit, Marilyn Conrad, passed the mark of 36 years of service in February 2022. The Finance Unit has consisted of one finance manager, with occasional part-time assistance from admin support staff. The finance manager oversees all accounting functions for Wilder Research and plays important roles supporting management with financial planning and budgeting and supporting project leaders with project budgeting, billing, and other matters. Dawn Mueller joined the Wilder Research staff – transferring from elsewhere in the Foundation. Currently, Shannon McLevish serves as the Wilder Research finance manager.

The remaining core units – Survey Center, Library, and Communications – have descriptions in later sections.

Wilder Research Associate Director Dan Mueller collaborated extensively over several decades with the leaders of the core units to improve processes for quality control, efficiency, and optimal productivity.

The Survey Center

As noted earlier, Wilder Research had “field investigators” on staff during its first years. Then, off and on, over a 60 year period, Wilder Research hired staff to collect various types of information from individuals and organizations. The large-scale community studies of the 1970s and 1980s relied on paid staff and volunteers who were recruited to work for a temporary period, just for a specific study. For work focused solely on the Wilder Foundation’s programs in the early 1980s, Wilder Research employed “follow-up technicians” who conducted interviews with people who received services from Wilder, to learn about the impacts of the services and about clients’ satisfaction with them.



Phone interviewer, Wilder Research Survey Center (c. 1995)

Gradually, Wilder Research hired additional staff to work on one or more studies, and employment as an interviewer became longer-term in nature. These staff conducted in-person and telephone interviews with a wide variety of people (community residents, human service recipients and providers, teachers, community leaders, and others). Marie Kenny served as the first manager of a unit of staff dedicated to collecting information through interviews, mailed questionnaires, focus groups, and other means. Staff accomplished data collection in multiple languages, whenever needed. Methods of drawing samples of community residents changed with the times – at first including random household sampling and random digit dialing of landline phones, then expanding to drawing samples of cell phone numbers, and eventually sampling through combinations of mailing address, phone number, email, and web-based methods.

The Survey Center expanded greatly under manager Linda Stork, who joined Wilder Research in 1995. New research projects required an increasing number of interviewers. In addition, Stork encouraged other research organizations that did not have interviewers on staff to hire the Survey Center (also known as the Data Collection Unit and sometimes referred to as the call center) for their projects. Several organizations brought high-volume projects to Wilder Research, and the revenue from those projects helped to sustain a large, well-qualified staff of interviewers. Stork had a grander vision for the Survey Center, which did not align at that time with the overall direction of Wilder Research. So, after strengthening the data collection staff and making major contributions to the data collection process at Wilder

Research, Stork left to become telephone survey manager at the National Opinion Research Corporation at the University of Chicago.

Leadership of the Survey Center turned over several times during the next eight years, as the terrain changed for conducting social research and as methods for collecting research information evolved. Two other directors succeeded Stork after her 1999 departure. Eventually, Richard Chase and Phil Cooper managed the Survey Center through a transition and positioned it for the 21st century. Nicole MartinRogers then assumed the duties of survey research manager in 2007. In addition, she managed a special research unit (Rho) dedicated to overseeing large survey projects.

Data collection technology changed significantly from the mid-1980s onward. These changes directly influenced the size and composition of staff in the Survey Center. Computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) had a major impact. CATI made the interviewing process more efficient by eliminating the major step of entering data from paper forms into a computerized database. Software, such as Survey Monkey, became readily available for the design and administration of surveys. The ability to do online questionnaire surveys increased efficiency and lowered costs as long as the population surveyed had access to the internet. Online surveying did not require the mailing of questionnaires or administering questionnaires in person, and it greatly reduced data entry activities. But it required computer programming up-front, prior to administration of a survey.

Meanwhile, the decline in land lines and the high prevalence of mobile phones necessitated changes in sampling designs for general population surveys. As a result of the technological changes noted above and the increased obstacles to completing reliable phone surveys, organizations decreased their requests to Wilder Research for survey work. The decreased demand for surveys led to a reduction in the size of the Survey Center.

The most recent manager of the Survey Center, Dan Swanson, joined Wilder Research in 1998. Since his promotion to manager, he has led the unit through changes and has adapted new technologies to suit the projects in which Wilder Research has most frequently engaged during the past 20 years. Swanson has innovated with new approaches to training interviewers, research assistants, and research associates, and he developed systems for optimally matching these staff to the projects that needed their talents. The Survey Center maintains a low number of regular staff as of 2022, but additional interviewers join the ranks temporarily whenever needed for a large project.

The Research Library

Although an early version of the Wilder Research Library had served as a “history and information center” during at least the 1960s, it ceased operation in 1969.¹²⁹ In the mid-1980s, some space in the Wilder Research suite of offices had the informal designation as a library, and it served as a central location for research journals and publications, but it did not benefit from proactive management. The library blossomed, beginning in 2001, under the leadership of Heather Loch. Loch had taken a research position at Wilder Research in 1993, and subsequently earned a master’s of library and information science degree. She recognized what a strong library could do for Wilder Research, and she had a vision for creating it. Loch and her staff grew the library in size – more books, more social science journals, and more physical resources of other types, as well as more space.

In addition, the library staff assumed an increased number of functions that enhanced the research process. Researchers could rely on these staff for comprehensive bibliographic searches on topics related to active studies. The library staff obtained and collated abstracts of research conducted by others, with relevance to the work of Wilder Research.

¹²⁹ Bohman, “Wilder Research Department.”

They maintained inter-library relationships with university libraries and public libraries, to obtain resources from those places.

After Wilder Research moved to its current location at Wilder Center, the staff expanded their services for other parts of the Wilder Foundation. To this day, the library curates materials relevant to Wilder's service programs; it archives historical documents for the Foundation as a whole; it performs bibliographic searches; and it engages in special projects and task forces on request.

The library staff took on additional roles vital for the success of Wilder Research, yet not typically within the realm of a librarian's duties. They lend their eyes to the quality control process in the final editing stage of research report writing. They serve as the first point of contact for many inquiries from the public and other organizations concerning Wilder Research, its services, and findings from its studies. Loch also created a system to manage the logistics of handling requests for proposals (RFPs) from organizations interested in engaging the services of Wilder Research. The library oversees that system.

Innovations in communication

To enhance its ability to accomplish its mission, Wilder Research sought to improve its capacity to do two types of communication: First, it sought to effectively convey research results in every study's reports (both technical reports and reports for non-technical audiences). Second, it sought to proactively disseminate information to as many audiences as possible, even beyond the initial audiences for each study.

A newsletter, initiated as *Figuratively Speaking* in 1984, offered highlights of the work of Wilder Research and alerted readers to other news about the activities and plans of Wilder Research. Changing its name to *Findings*, and then to *The Random Sampler*, the newsletter came out first in paper form and later via email.

Wilder Research solidified its strategic approach to communications with the hiring of Ginger Hope as the first communications manager in 1999. Hope arrived with broad experience in communications and in freelance writing within government, corporate, nonprofit, and media settings. She improved the design, formatting, clarity, and quality of reports – both through the setting of publication policies and standards and through the enhancement of procedures for copyediting. Hope and two eventual successors, Nancy Hartzler and Wendy Huckaby – supported by a communications associate (Kerry Walsh), library staff, and admin support staff – have helped to deliver research results broadly to a wide variety of audiences through multiple means. Hartzler also made major contributions to the formation of Minnesota Compass (described later in this history).

Communications staff ushered in new forms of communication. In the late 1990s, Wilder Research created its first website, part of the larger Wilder Foundation website. The Wilder Research website enabled staff to describe research results and make reports available and easily accessible. Beyond its primary website, Wilder Research created additional websites for Minnesota Compass and the Minnesota Homeless Study. With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Wilder Research also created the Metrics for Healthy Communities website.

Ginger Hope also developed the template for a blog written by Executive Director Paul Mattessich. Mattessich began to use this blog, The Executive Summary (www.execsum.blogspot.com), in 2005 to offer observations about significant issues, describe important research, and promote discussion among audiences interested in improving community well-being.

Growth of research, products, services

Concurrent with the major initiatives noted previously, from the mid-1980s through early 2000s, Wilder Research engaged in a large number of studies, developed expertise in a variety of topic areas, and increased its number of staff. Its work for the service programs and administration of the Wilder Foundation increased, peaked, and declined during this time. Its work with and for other organizations, local and national, steadily increased.

In 1983, Wilder Research employed 18 persons as full-time or part-time staff. In 2009, it employed 102 persons as full-time or part-time staff. Those staff in 2009 logged a total of just under 150,000 hours, or the equivalent of approximately 72 fulltime employees.



Wilder Research staff photo (2009)

Research activities

Hundreds of research projects occurred from the early 1980s through the 2000s. This history provides descriptions of some of them. The examples illustrate the range of work, partners involved, sources of financial support, and uses of the results of the research. However, the examples do not tell the full story. Readers who want to see all public reports of Wilder Research can do so at www.wilderresearch.org.

Aging

Wilder Research continued studies of aging during this stage in its history – a topic of significance in light of the anticipated growth of the older adult population during the beginning of the 21st century – a phenomenon that would profoundly affect most countries in the world. Also, aging has constituted a major focus of service delivery by the Wilder Foundation’s programs.

Research in the 1980s that related to aging included a statewide survey of 1,500 Minnesota residents age 60 and older, intended to inform planning and service design by the Minnesota Board on Aging, the Metropolitan Council’s Program on Aging, and other groups. Interviewing occurred in waves from 1988 through 1990. The data revealed needs as well as strengths among the older population, and the data provided insights regarding likely trends in the demand for long-term care.

The study produced a general public report which received media attention,¹³⁰ and the study’s staff worked with representatives from regions around the state to produce information focused on each region. In addition, the study drew supplemental samples of older adults of color, to produce reliable data for American Indians, African Americans, Latinos, and Southeast Asians within the older population. A special report appeared with these findings.¹³¹

Based on this study, Wilder Research introduced – via an article in a social science journal – a new conceptual model for thinking about volunteer roles and the management of volunteer activities among the older population.¹³² The study comprised a major focus of the 1989 meeting of the Minnesota Gerontological Society, with more than 200 gerontologists in attendance for presentations by Wilder Research staff members Lucy Rose Fischer, Phil Cooper, Richard Chase, and Dan Mueller.

A telephone survey of older adults living in Ramsey County in 2003 focused on the living conditions and needs of those individuals. It contributed to the development of a framework for describing the quality of life of older adults – encompassing basic needs, plus social engagement and connections, along with aspects of well-being such as spirituality, mental well-being, and life satisfaction.¹³³ Community leaders, led by Ramsey County Commissioner Victoria Reinhardt, Wilder Foundation CEO Tom Kingston, and former mayor of Saint Paul George Latimer, assembled to discuss the findings and generate ideas for improving communities in order to enable older adults to thrive.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Lucy Rose Fischer, *Older Minnesotans: What do they need? How do they contribute?* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1988). One example of a news article is a front page story in the *Star Tribune*: Paul Klauda, “Doing Well and Doing Good,” *Star Tribune*, October 26, 1989, 1. Also, Louis Porter II, “Most Older Minnesotans Found to be Active, in Volunteer Work,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 26, 1989, 1B.

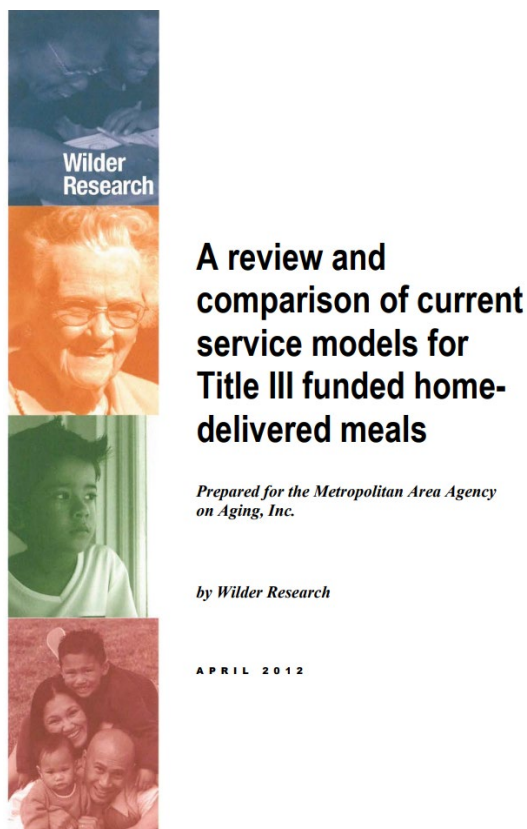
¹³¹ Richard Chase, *Minority Elders in Minnesota* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1990).

¹³² Lucy R. Fischer, Daniel P. Mueller, and Phil Cooper, “Older Volunteers: A Discussion of the Minnesota Senior Study,” *The Gerontologist* 31, no. 2 (1991).

¹³³ Cara Bailey and Melissa Barker, *Survey of Older Adults in Ramsey County: Quality of Life and Community* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003). Cara Bailey and Kathleen Gilmore, *Highlights of a Survey of Older Adults in Ramsey County*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2004).

¹³⁴ “Building Communities Where Older Adults Thrive,” convened by Ramsey County Community Human Services, Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, Metropolitan Area Agency on Aging, South East Metro SAIL, April 29, 2004.

Atlantic Philanthropies had an interest in understanding civic engagement and volunteer behavior patterns among the baby boomer generation as that cohort moved toward its senior years. The Saint Paul Foundation received funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a study on civic engagement and volunteering among baby boomers in Saint Paul. The study incorporated findings from the 2003 telephone survey, along with additional focus groups and other information. Among its findings, it revealed that faith-based activities constituted the most common type of volunteer work and that persons of color (African American, Hmong, and Latino) reported more involvement in their community, while White respondents more likely reported that they could produce change in their community.¹³⁵



Wilder Research report cover (2012)

Wilder Research made several presentations during this time period to the Minnesota Board on Aging to support learning and decision-making at board meetings and retreats. Wilder Research staff had a direct role in the Board’s consideration of how best to organize and deliver home delivered meals – a policy topic which engendered a great deal of controversy at the time. A comprehensive elder nutrition study by Wilder Research led to the inclusion of frozen, prepared meals as part of the service mix in home delivered meals programs.¹³⁶

Studies of death, dying, and bereavement, including the analysis of services intended to support dying people and their caregiving networks, became an established theme of research. Greg Owen’s 1981 study of terminally ill patients and their families¹³⁷ received local and national attention. Owen became a paladin who continued to partner with others to expand understanding of care for the dying and to improve the quality of resources for dying people and their social support networks. In the 1980s, the Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support identified him among a group of people in Minnesota who stood out as “respected death and dying educators and networkers.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ The Saint Paul Foundation, *The Civic Engagement of Baby Boomers: Preparing for a New Wave of Volunteers, Community Assessment Report* (Saint Paul, MN: 2007).

¹³⁶ Cael Warren, Greg Owen, and Karen Ulstad, *A review and comparison of current service models for Title III funded home-delivered meals* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

¹³⁷ Greg Owen, *Care for the Dying: A Study of the Need for Hospice in Ramsey County, Minnesota* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1981).

¹³⁸ Sharon Dardis, “Minnesota Coalition for Death Education and Support History: 1977-2017,” <https://www.mcdes.org/history-of-mcdes.html> As an example of nationally recognized work on bereavement, see: Greg Owen, Robert Fulton, and Eric Markusen, “Death at a Distance: A Study of Family Survivors,” *OMEGA, Journal of Death and Dying* 13, no. 3 (1983).

Chemical dependency assessment for adolescents

During the early 1980s, chemical dependency professionals who served adolescents became increasingly frustrated due to the lack of effective clinical tools customized for their use. The diagnosis and treatment of chemical dependency problems among adolescents relied heavily on models developed for adults. With grants from the Northwest Area Foundation and The Saint Paul Foundation, Wilder Research sought to respond to the needs expressed by chemical dependency professionals serving adolescents. Wilder Research oversaw a five-year project to develop a standardized assessment instrument that would provide a multidimensional description of problems associated with alcohol and drug use by adolescents, and that would assist in the identification, referral, and treatment of adolescent alcohol and drug abuse.

The project involved a consortium of 16 chemical dependency organizations in Minnesota. Those organizations collaborated with Wilder Research to pilot test and validate an assessment tool. The work led to the creation of a variety of resources, including the Personal Involvement with Chemicals Scale (PICS) which measured the extent of psychological involvement in alcohol and drug use by adolescents. Considered groundbreaking, the scale achieved wide adoption within the field of adolescent chemical dependency treatment.¹³⁹ Some of the researchers on the project team eventually moved to the University of Minnesota where they continued research on adolescent alcohol and drug use.¹⁴⁰

Children and youth

The Wilder Foundation has attended to the well-being of children since its earliest days. The work of Wilder Research built on the interests of the Foundation and other organizations that have shared a commitment to promoting positive youth development, fostering academic success for young people, and enhancing opportunities for young people to thrive as healthy, well-functioning adults. This section and succeeding sections on early childhood, education, and other topics offer highlights of that research.

The Our Children: Our Future initiative epitomized the leadership role that Wilder Research strove to play in using research to broadly improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities. This joint endeavor, involving a diverse group of Minnesota organizations, focused on Minnesota children removed from, or otherwise unable to live in, their families' homes.



Minnesota kids
who don't live
at home
Research Summary
BY WILDER RESEARCH CENTER

Our Children: Our Future report cover (2003)

¹³⁹ See: Ken Winters, and George Henly, "Advances in the Assessment of Adolescent Chemical Dependency: Development of a Chemical Use Problem Severity Scale," *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 1, no. 3 (1987). Ken Winters and George Henly, "Assessing Adolescents Who Abuse Chemicals: The Chemical Dependency Adolescent Assessment Project," in *Adolescent Drug Abuse: Analyses of Treatment Research* (Washington DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration, National Institute on Drug Abuse, 1988).

¹⁴⁰ One member of the research team, Mark Stutrud, forged a new path. He learned the art of beer brewing, and he founded Summit Brewing, one of the first craft beer producers in Minnesota.

To understand the workings and the results of the state government’s approach to providing care for these children, Wilder Research assembled relevant existing information by conducting literature reviews and by compiling service delivery data from systems such as those maintained by the Minnesota departments of Human Services and Corrections. To obtain insights from professionals in the medical, judicial, education, and corrections fields, the study included interviews with such professionals. To gain a broad range of perspectives about the experiences of children placed outside of their homes, the study included 12 community listening sessions in the Twin Cities area, Duluth, and Marshall.

The reports from this initiative statistically portray young people’s problems, needs, and placements. They make observations about the effectiveness of services. They summarize the opinions of professionals regarding the causes of, and potential solutions to, over-representation of African American and American Indian children in the welfare, juvenile justice, and youth homelessness systems. They summarize the opinions, concerns, and suggestions of diverse groups of Minnesotans (based on race, geography, and immigration status). The research team offered conclusions directed toward increasing the success of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, including recommendations for better collaboration among multiple networks of agencies who relate to child welfare and juvenile justice by providing services in fields of housing, education, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, and social skills training.¹⁴¹

An “Action Conference” at the Earle Brown Heritage Center on June 25, 2003, brought together policymakers, funders, and practitioners to learn more about the Our Children: Our Future research and to recommend steps for creating healthy homes for every child in Minnesota. The project team from Wilder Research (Greg Owen, Ellen Shelton, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Nicole MartinRogers) offered a presentation: “30,000 Reasons to Care: Minnesota Kids Who Don’t Live at Home, Why, and What We are Doing about It.” David Sanders, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services delivered a keynote address: “What Are the Elements of Successful Child Welfare Reform?”

Wilder Research staff partnered with the Minneapolis American Indian Center’s Ginew/Golden Eagle Program and Hmong American Partnership’s Project Youth Connect and other youth programs, over several years, to secure millions of dollars in federal funding from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. The funds supported the delivery and evaluation of culture-specific youth development programs. These projects participated in national cross-site evaluations and received international attention in a presentation, “Cultural Ties as a Protective Factor against Risky Behavior,” at the 2002 International Conference on Adolescence in London, England.

Wilder Research staff worked with nonprofits and state agencies to evaluate the effectiveness of home visiting programs which intended to bring services into communities in order to improve the well-being of young people. This work included the 1993-2002 evaluation of targeted home visiting to prevent child abuse for the Minnesota Department of Health, the 1999 evaluation of Minnesota Healthy Beginnings also for the Minnesota Department of Health, and the 2003 evaluation of family home visiting for the Minnesota Visiting Nurse Agency.

Supported by grants and contracts, Wilder Research staff conducted many evaluation studies of programs serving children and youth and their families. These occurred, for example, for youth empowerment and leadership programs, children’s mental health programs, after school programs, and others. Reflecting on this body of research, senior

¹⁴¹ Funded by the Target Foundation and Minneapolis Foundation, with major partners including Family Service, Inc., The Professional Association of Treatment Homes, and the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits. See: Greg Owen, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Nicole MartinRogers, *Our Children, Our Future: A Research Report on Minnesota Children Who Do Not Live at Home* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003). Frank Clancy, *Community Listening Sessions* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003).

research manager Richard Chase identified lessons to enhance the success of programs that seek to both prevent problems and promote development among young people: select outcomes reasonable for a program to achieve; focus on assets; and realize that youth may be more engaged than they seem.¹⁴²

Child welfare

Beginning in the early 1990s, Wilder Research undertook a series of evaluation studies to examine the impact of programs designed to help children involved in the child protection and juvenile justice systems. The first of these studies, Family Options, received funding from the McKnight Foundation and involved collaboration with Hennepin County’s Child Protection Services. The study used an experimental design with random assignment to assess the impact of offering families more choice in services and financial resources in their efforts to improve family functioning. Later, a companion study, the Family Support Project, was funded by the McKnight Foundation in Ramsey County, with similar aims. Both studies showed positive impacts on children that resulted from offering more flexible service and resource options to families. These studies served as precursors to similar studies in other states. The knowledge gained from all of these studies contributed to changes in the state of Minnesota’s strategies for supporting county staff in their child protection work.

A later study, *Delinquents Under 10*, explored the role of intensive supports for children who had committed gross misdemeanor and felony level offenses but who could not be charged with a crime under Minnesota law because of their age. The study found that most children were part of families who had already been served by the child protection system and where parents and older youth had already been adjudicated for a range of offenses. Initial study results seemed promising and encouraged Hennepin County to apply more resources to the needs of these children. Unfortunately, the positive outcomes diminished over time, and the program eventually closed.¹⁴³

Community surveys and needs assessments

When the Minnesota Community Foundation decided to expand its role in Minnesota, its board requested that Wilder Research interview more than 1,000 Minnesotans with the broad goal to find out what mattered to them most. The findings from that survey assisted the Minnesota Community Foundation’s board in establishing priorities for its philanthropic activities throughout the state.¹⁴⁴

The Hugh J. Anderson Foundation sought reliable information about community needs, customized for the St. Croix Valley – a five county area in Minnesota and Wisconsin. They contracted with Wilder Research for resident surveys at the turn of the century. The surveys revealed that most residents of the Valley were content, and few reported major problems. Nevertheless, the survey results pointed to several quality of life issues that the residents considered deserving of attention, for example, support for adults caring for aging parents, housing assistance for low-income households, and expanded availability of child care.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Richard Chase, “The Wisdom of Youth.” American Evaluation Association blog, August 22, 2019, <https://aca365.org/blog/the-wisdom-of-youth-by-richard-chase/>

¹⁴³ Michelle Decker Gerrard and Greg Owen, *Delinquents Under 10: Targeted Early Intervention: Phase 3 Evaluation Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Minnesota Community Foundation, “Foundation Unveils Results of ‘What’s Your Vision?’ Study,” *Perspectives* 1, no. 1 (2002).

¹⁴⁵ Richard Chase and Laura McLain, *St. Croix Valley Survey: Assessment of needs and quality of life in Chisago, Washington, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix Counties* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2001).

Wilder Research partnered with the Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice at the University of Minnesota to conduct a study of racism in three Minnesota counties (Ramsey, Washington, and Dakota). Paul Mattessich co-led the study with former Minneapolis mayor, Sharon Sayles-Belton. The research included a large number of interviews and focus groups, along with analysis of social indicators related to education, housing, and health. Large proportions of residents of color reported their ongoing experiences with racism, often describing obstacles they faced securing housing, employment, and health care. All racial groups reported some level of discomfort around people of other races. Analysis of the social indicators demonstrated substantial disparities between White residents and residents of color with respect to per capita income, home ownership, high school graduation, and college completion. The research probed how victims of racism respond to it. For some, it produced emotional, spiritual, or physical harm. For some, it led to fear, depression, and even self-hatred. Some residents described their strategies of avoidance, nonviolence, and taking a strong stand to counter and prevent racism.¹⁴⁶

Early childhood

Access to child care became a paramount concern for increasing numbers of dual parent and single parent families during the last decades of the 20th century, when labor market participation for women rose significantly. Wilder Research involved itself in research on this topic. During 1999-2000, almost 2,500 Minnesota families participated in a Wilder Research study of child care use and preferences. Considered groundbreaking by early childhood experts, the study revealed in greater depth than any previous research had documented the extensiveness and variety of child care arrangements used by parents. As noted in the study report,

The Department of Children, Families & Learning, together with Wilder Research Center, undertook this research in the belief that it would be of great interest and practical value to those who make policy decisions affecting families; to employers; to providers of care; to schools; to those who work with children and youth; and to all who want to assure that children receive stable, safe, and affordable care.¹⁴⁷

Subsequent surveys and reports enhanced understanding of the volume of care provided not only by the formal child care provider system, but also by families, friends, and neighbors.¹⁴⁸ One study revealed that three-fourths of Minnesota families with children under age 13 regularly used some type of child care arrangement. Many used two. Among households that used child care, about half used family, friend, and neighbor care. These findings furnished insights applied in Minnesota and elsewhere by practitioners, policymakers, funders, and others engaged in improving early care for children.

¹⁴⁶ Wilder Research and Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice at the University of Minnesota, *An Assessment of Racism in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington Counties* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2004).

¹⁴⁷ Richard Chase and Ellen Shelton, *Child Care Use in Minnesota* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2001), 2.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Richard Chase and Shelly Hendricks, *Early Childhood Care and Education in Minnesota: A Status Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003). Richard Chase, Joanne Arnold, Laura Schauben, and Ben Shardlow, *Family, Friend, and Neighbor Caregivers: Results of the 2004 Minnesota Statewide Household Childcare Survey* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2005). Richard Chase, Joanne Arnold, Laura Schauben, and Ben Shardlow, *Child Care Use in Minnesota: 2004 Statewide Household Child Care Survey* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2005). See also: Richard Chase, "State Policies for Supporting Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care," *BUILD Initiative Policy Brief*, October 2008. Richard Chase and Charlie Bruner, "Family, Friend, and Neighbor Care: Achieving Healthy Child Development by Strengthening Families," *BUILD Initiative Policy Brief*, 2012. <https://builddinitiative.org/resource-library/>

Wilder Research staff completed planning analyses, literature reviews, and evaluation studies of early childhood programs at the local and state levels. Evaluation research for these programs produced evidence regarding their outcomes related to early childhood development and adult literacy, which could be used to help improve the programs.¹⁴⁹

For approximately six years during the 1990s, Wilder Research staff carried out a major evaluation of the Head Start Transition Demonstration project at its Minnesota site, the Saint Paul Public Schools. This federal demonstration project, occurring at 31 sites around the United States, had the purpose to improve the transition and school success of Head Start children in the elementary school grades. Previous research had shown that the benefits of Head Start often dissipated for children as they moved into first and later grades. The evaluation included an experimental design with random assignment of schools that participated in the program and schools that served as “controls.” The study team did baseline and annual assessments of cohorts of children from kindergarten through third grade.¹⁵⁰

The evaluation of Project Early Kindergarten constitutes another example of a major evaluation with a quasi-experimental, longitudinal design. It followed three cohorts of children (at higher risk for difficulties in school) in 10 schools over five years from preschool through third grade. The project had the goal to improve alignment of preschool education with K-12 education in order to increase school success among higher risk children. Evaluation results supported the strengthening of the program and its expansion within the Saint Paul schools. Student achievement results were better for the third cohort than for the first, suggesting that the program increased its effectiveness as it matured over three years. The McKnight Foundation funded this evaluation.¹⁵¹

“School readiness” served as a frequent topic for research studies, including studies in both Minnesota and Michigan.¹⁵² Minnesota Compass also highlighted this topic on its website.

Wilder Research evaluated Foundations for Success, a five-year initiative designed to develop and implement a county-wide system for early childhood mental health services in Ramsey County. Reports issued throughout the initiative summarized the results of mental health assessments, parent surveys, and service updates. Overall, the data on outcomes suggested that, among children who participated in this initiative, social-emotional well-being improved.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ For example, Terri Mazurek and Dan Mueller, *Minnesota Family Literacy Initiative Summative Evaluation: A Report on the Even Start Statewide Family Literacy Initiative* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003). Cheryl Holm-Hansen and Deirdre Hinz, *Foundations for Success: Ages & Stages Questionnaire: Social Emotional Results, 2006* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2006).

¹⁵⁰ Daniel P. Mueller and Edith Gozali-Lee, *Final Transition Project Outcomes Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1998).

¹⁵¹ Caryn Mohr, Dan Mueller, and Edith Gozali-Lee, *Project Early Kindergarten Evaluation Update: General Overview of Results through 2007 of a Saint Paul Public Schools Initiative* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2008).

¹⁵² For example: Richard Chase, Paul Anton, José Diaz, Nicole MartinRogers, and Ela Rausch, *Cost Savings Analysis of School Readiness in Michigan* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Wilder Research, *School Readiness Report Card: Prepared for the Early Childhood Advisory Council* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

¹⁵³ Monica Idzelis Rothe, *Foundations for Success: Outcome Assessment Results: Overall Findings* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009).

Education

Formal education provides a mechanism for individuals to develop the skills they need to assume adult roles in society. Wilder Research has placed a significant focus on education from the 1990s to the present. Interest in research on education grew due to general concerns about academic progress for urban children across the United States, and, more specifically, due to concerns about gaps in educational opportunities and progress that existed among children in different racial and social groups.

The Wilder Foundation launched its Achievement Plus initiative in the summer of 1997, and Achievement Plus has continued in modified form to the present day. The initiative integrates activities and resources from schools, communities, families, and public and private organizations, in order to increase student academic achievement. To support the establishment of this initiative, Wilder Research staff supplied research literature reviews on full-service community schools around the United States, which had attempted similar approaches to improve educational achievement for young people. Wilder Research staff also designed and implemented evaluation research studies to examine the impacts of Achievement Plus – overall and its various components – with respect to student behavior, attendance, school climate, and academic achievement.¹⁵⁴ Evaluation results led to further development of the initiative (i.e., instructional reform) and subsequently to improved student outcomes in the early years of this initiative.

Disparities in educational opportunities and progress had not received much attention until the late 1990s. Researchers began at that time to explore the dimensions of differences among students of different racial groups, income levels, and residential areas with respect to their performance at expected academic levels, completion of high school, and other indicators of educational achievement. Research reports from Wilder Research contributed to raising awareness of race-based disparities in students' educational experiences and achievements. The reports also pointed to strategies for eliminating disparities, and identified changes that schools, families, and communities could make in order to improve the formal education of all children.¹⁵⁵

Shining light on educational disparities during the 1990s did not occur without controversy. Paul Mattessich described segments of professional and community audiences who expressed different, even opposing, reactions. Some people praised the research on disparities, saying that it validated what community members and teachers had known but could not describe with precision. Others scorned the presentation of data on disparities, opining that those data would feed negative stereotypes about the ability of children to succeed, based on race. Wilder Research continued to study the reasons for educational disparities and strategies to address them.

Cargill Scholars sought to address achievement issues by raising academic expectations, preventing high-risk behavior, and improving life skills of a group of low-income children who attended school in Minneapolis and some suburbs. The program included tutoring, mentoring, musical instruction, out-of-school activities, and educational enrichment programs. Wilder Research conducted a longitudinal study of the program and issued a series of reports over

¹⁵⁴ For example, Dan Mueller, *Achievement Plus Literature Review: Characteristics of Successful Urban Elementary Schools* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1997). Edith Gozali-Lee, *Family Involvement to Promote Student Achievement: A 'Best Practices' Literature Review* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1999). Dan Mueller, Katie Broton, and Edith Gozali-Lee, *Achievement Plus Evaluation 2009-10* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010).

¹⁵⁵ For example, Dan Mueller, *Tackling the Achievement Gap Head On: What It Takes to Help All Children Succeed in School* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2004). Caryn Mohr, Dan Mueller, and Edith Gozali-Lee, *Tackling the Achievement Gap through Project Early Kindergarten* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2007).

approximately eight years, with the research in general demonstrating mixed academic results among program participants.¹⁵⁶

Wilder Research evaluated the outcomes of several efforts to increase the college enrollment and college success of disadvantaged or marginalized youth (e.g., low income, youth of color, English language learners, foster care youth). Funded primarily by foundations, locally and nationally, these efforts typically included scholarship programs to help pay for college, supplemented by support services.

One example, the Power of YOU initiative, involved Minneapolis Community & Technical College, Saint Paul College, and Metropolitan State University. Evaluation research for this initiative revealed generally positive impacts on the enrollment and retention of historically underrepresented students. It also revealed lack of preparation for college among Power of You students along with slower than average academic progress for those students. A conference at Wilder Center in October 2008 highlighted the study's findings and implications, for community college educators and policymakers, as well as the media.¹⁵⁷

Immigrants and refugees

The number of foreign-born individuals more than doubled in Saint Paul from 1990 to 2000. In 2000, foreign-born individuals comprised approximately 14% of the total population in the cities of both Saint Paul and Minneapolis.¹⁵⁸ Hmong refugees, who began arriving during the mid-1970s, and Somali refugees, who began arriving in the 1990s, constituted notable groups who joined immigrants from many other regions of the world to settle in Minnesota. Consequently, interest grew regarding the experiences of new arrivals, and public and private institutions wanted to understand the implications of the demographic changes at that time.

A study for the Spanish Speaking Affairs Council included a survey of 564 Latino adults (approximately half of them immigrants) in the Twin Cities area and five towns in greater Minnesota. The study offered details on employment, education, and civic participation, documenting the determination of Latinos in Minnesota to improve their livelihood, strengthen their families, and contribute to their communities.¹⁵⁹

Hmong Youth Pride, or 2HTN, was a program for Hmong youth ages 9 to 12 that addressed academic achievement, school commitment, cultural pride, parental effectiveness, and awareness regarding alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. The evaluation employed a quasi-experimental design to learn about the program's impacts. Results showed improvements in academic performance among students participating in 2HTN, along with increased involvement in school activities. The program seemed to reduce concern among parents of program participants about how their children were treated by teachers and other students.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ For example, Cheryl Holm-Hansen and Laura Martell Kelly, *Cargill Scholars: Annual Results Summary* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2002). Laura Martell Kelly, *Cargill Scholars: Evaluation Results* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009).

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer Lee Schultz and Daniel Mueller, *Power of YOU program evaluation: Year 2 report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2008). Doug Belden, "Tuition program produces mixed results," *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, November 1, 2008.

¹⁵⁸ The Brookings Institution, *Minneapolis/St. Paul in Focus: A Profile from Census 2000* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 2003).

¹⁵⁹ Richard Chase, Suzanne Zenger, and Lisa Sass Zaragoza, *Minnesota Latino Needs and Resources Assessment* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1995).

¹⁶⁰ Richard Chase, *Hmong-American Partnership: 2HTN Final Report, Hmong Youth Pride* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2000).

SPEAKING FOR THEMSELVES

A survey of Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali immigrants in Minneapolis-Saint Paul



Wilder Research engaged in a highly innovative study, called *Speaking for Themselves*, which explored the experiences of four cultural groups in the Twin Cities metropolitan area: Hispanic, Hmong, Russian, and Somali immigrants. Wars, lack of safety, and lack of economic opportunity had driven people in these groups to leave their native countries. During late 1999 and early 2000, 1,199 individuals participated in interviews, with questions designed based on input from researchers, newspaper reporters, and representatives from each group. Topics included reasons for leaving their home countries, reasons for coming to the United States and Minnesota, English language ability, views about cultural identity, children and schools, religious identification, types of employment, stress factors, and sources of news and information. Survey respondents identified family connections and employment opportunities as the most significant reasons for selecting the United States when they made the decision to leave their native country.¹⁶¹

Speaking for Themselves report cover (2000)

The *Speaking for Themselves* study stood out internationally at the time of its completion because it uniquely gathered comparable information on four immigrant groups who resided in the same locale. It also demonstrated a workable method for a random-sample, multilingual, large-scale survey of immigrants. For those reasons, for many years the study's report remained one of the most frequently downloaded reports from the Wilder Research website. The *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* provided funds for this study and collaborated in the survey design.

The Minneapolis Foundation had a longstanding interest in serving as a community resource for education and for information about immigration in Minnesota. It also sought to promote constructive dialogue on the issue of immigration. Thus, the Minneapolis Foundation commissioned Wilder Research to undertake a study of the characteristics of Minnesota's immigrant population, and of the economic, social, and cultural effects of immigration in Minnesota.

The reports from this study noted the complexity of the many demographic changes experienced by the state at the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. One consequence of those changes: the state's resident workforce was not replenishing itself. Businesses would likely face worsening shortages of workers. Countering this challenge, the researchers observed that, as immigrants became taxpayers, entrepreneurs, and consumers, they contributed to the economy in ways that would help to sustain the large number of aging Minnesotans who were retiring, drawing on Social Security, and using Medicare. The researchers recommended "additional efforts to improve understanding and create safe spaces for discussion and dialogue," including for example, public education of all Minnesotans regarding the realities of immigration, greater investment in English-language classes for immigrants, and development of partnership programs, toolkits, and other resources for communities experiencing significant increases in immigrant populations.¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Paul Mattessich and Ginger Hope, *Speaking for Themselves* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2000).

¹⁶² Greg Owen, Jessica Meyerson, and Christa Otteson, "A New Age of Immigrants," Wilder Research, 2010.

Public safety and criminal justice

Research related to public safety has a long history at Wilder Research. Studies of youth behavior and involvement with the justice system occurred as early as the 1940s. Evaluation studies of programs in the Wilder Foundation's Corrections Division occurred in the 1970s and 1980s.

In collaboration with 17 agencies that treat youth offenders with the goal to promote positive behaviors and prevent criminal recidivism, Wilder Research engaged in a longitudinal study to attempt to identify what produces successful treatment outcomes. The Minnesota Commissioner of Corrections contracted with Wilder Research to complete this study in order to fulfill a very unique mandate from the Minnesota Legislature to implement “a criterion-related cross validation study designed to measure outcomes of placing juveniles in out-of-home placement programs.” The study compiled “before-during-after” information about young people placed in residential facilities of the 17 agencies. Using statistical techniques such as discriminant function analysis, the research identified how the individual characteristics of the young people, the attributes of their environment, and the features of the programs in which they participated influenced their personal adjustment after discharge and their likelihood of engaging in additional criminal behavior.

The study revealed, for example, that six months after residential treatment, over half of the youth had committed a new offense, and about one-third had reentered an institutional facility. Analysis showed service providers and policymakers that the short-term nature of residential programs, along with the lack of supplemental care services, could not overcome the obstacles faced by young people with inadequate family resources and community supports:

[M]any have been victimized, maltreated, and neglected, during a period in their lives when they are attempting to develop moral reasoning and problem solving skills. They often have not had the opportunity to learn to deal effectively with the multitude of problems they have faced in their short lives. A short stay in a residential facility should be considered one component of the effort to introduce high-risk youth to appropriate problem-solving tools and behaviors. It should not, however, be expected to teach a lifetime of lessons to adolescents who, for one reason or another, have left the path toward healthy adult development.¹⁶³

Wilder Research published *Critical Issues in Domestic Violence* in 2005, to inform policymakers, program developers, and others concerned about domestic violence. The report had the goal to “tell the story of victim services in the state and suggest new directions to forge ahead for the future.”¹⁶⁴ The Deputy Commissioner of Public Safety, Mary Ellison, used the report as an invitation to others to bring forth their ideas and priorities and to move forward in collaboration to serve victims and to prevent domestic violence.

The Center for Reducing Rural Violence asked Wilder Research to evaluate its Working Together Program. This program, funded by the Blandin Foundation and the Annenberg Foundation, had the goal to engage residents and organizations in eight rural locations throughout Minnesota in concerted violence reduction efforts. The program produced changes in policies and operations related to law enforcement, health care, and other community systems. These changes, it was hoped, would reduce violence. However, the study ended before the long-term effects of the program on violence could be assessed.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Paul Mattessich and Kathryn Heffernan, *Understanding and Predicting Successful Outcomes for Adjudicated Delinquents* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1997), 49.

¹⁶⁴ Cheryl Hosley and Lyungai Mbilinyi, *Critical Issues in Domestic Violence* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2005).

¹⁶⁵ Kathryn Heffernan and Paul Mattessich, *Evaluation of the Working Together Program* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 1998).

Return on investment research/cost benefit analysis/economic impacts

Interestingly, the first known attempt by Wilder Research to quantify the economic benefits of a human service program occurred in 1947, with a study conducted in collaboration with Family Service Saint Paul. Wilder Research staff analyzed the amount of services delivered to clients with specific diagnoses and estimated the financial costs averted by successful treatment.¹⁶⁶ Not until the 2000s, however, did a professional economist join the staff.

From roughly 2005 to 2009, economist Paul Anton, and other staff, published almost 50 reports that took a cost benefit or return on investment perspective, spanning topic areas of environment, airport systems, scholarship programs, post-secondary education, youth mentoring, and supportive housing.¹⁶⁷ These staff also completed analyses intended to demonstrate the cost of inadequately addressing certain social issues – as, for example, an analysis commissioned by the Bush Foundation concerning the cost to society when children enter kindergarten unprepared for their experience.¹⁶⁸

A series of studies, initiated in the mid-1990s and eventually spanning more than 20 years, examined how the Neighborhood Development Center, Inc. (NDC) in Saint Paul, Minnesota, helps low-income communities build their capacity, stability, and neighborhood economies by helping new entrepreneurs develop successful businesses. From 1993 through 2002, in partnership with neighborhood organizations and culture-based organizations, NDC assisted almost 2,000 entrepreneurs. Research documented the positive community economic impacts produced by these NDC-assisted businesses, such as neighborhood jobs, payroll taxes, rent, property taxes, local purchase of supplies and materials, and tangible support for neighborhood events and improvements.¹⁶⁹

The plans of Wilder Research in the early 2000s included the aspiration to develop a research unit, similar to other research units, which would conduct stand-alone economic studies as well as contribute economic analysis as a component of program evaluation research and community studies. Such a unit never gained traction, however, due to the difficulty of recruiting and retaining a team of economists dedicated to such activity. Nonetheless, as described later, cost benefit, return on investment, and economic impact studies did continue through the 2010s through the efforts of various staff with appropriate economics expertise in several of the units of Wilder Research.

Welfare reform

Reductions in federal spending on welfare programs occurred during the 1980s, as noted earlier. In state legislatures, elected representatives considered whether and how to change state welfare programs, looking, for example, at eligibility criteria, levels of benefits, and whether to require work and/or community service on the part of benefit recipients.

¹⁶⁶ Heckman and Stone, “Forging new tools”.

¹⁶⁷ For example, Paul Anton and Nicole Behling, *The Economic Impact of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities: Updated Statewide Estimates and Local Estimates for Universities* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2006). Paul Anton and Judy Temple, *Analyzing the Social Return on Investment in Youth Mentoring Programs: A Framework for Minnesota* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2007). Melanie Ferris, Allen Burns, and Paul Anton, *Effective Stimulant Abuse Treatment Strategies: Lessons Learned and Prospective Return on Investment from Two Programs* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Richard Chase, Paul Anton, José Diaz, Nicole MartinRogers, and Ela Rausch, *Cost Savings Analysis of School Readiness in Michigan* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009).

¹⁶⁸ Richard Chase, Brandon Coffee-Borden, Paul Anton, Christopher Moore, and Jennifer Valorose, *The Cost Burden to Minnesota K-12 When Children are Unprepared for Kindergarten* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2008).

¹⁶⁹ Richard Chase, *Helping Neighborhood Businesses Grow* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003).

Welfare reform at the county and state levels became a major focus of attention in 1986 and 1987. The single parent family study, mentioned earlier, helped to ground the local welfare reform discussions with relevant empirical findings and insights. The study increased understanding of the dynamics of welfare programs by comparing single mothers who received Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with those who did not receive such aid.

The study influenced not only legislation, but also programs intended to support families who were required to seek “self-sufficiency.” Using results from the study, the Wilder Foundation was among several organizations that designed supplemental services to enhance required welfare-to-work services available from counties. The Ramsey County welfare-to-work program was initially called PATHS, and as a signal of the supplemental role of the Wilder Foundation program, it had the name PATHS Plus. (The names changed to STRIDE and STRIDE Support Services after some confusion with another program named PATHS.)

In 1988, the McKnight Foundation launched the Aid to Families in Poverty initiative, which funded several welfare-to-work programs, including the Wilder Foundation program. This initiative focused on strengthening effective parenting practices and promoting employment opportunities in order to move families from welfare to family self-sufficiency. Wilder Research conducted a 30-month longitudinal evaluation of the Wilder Foundation program. Wilder Research also evaluated five other McKnight-funded self-sufficiency and welfare reform projects from 1988 to 1992, including Dakota County’s Fast Forward, Merrick Community Centers’ My Turn, and programs for Ramsey Action Programs, Saint Paul Public Housing Authority, and the Face to Face Teen Program.

A study of the McKnight’s Families Forward program revealed positive impacts for participants, including moving from unemployment to employment, increases in earnings, increased eligibility for health care benefits, and more stable personal and family situations.¹⁷⁰

Supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Wilder Research conducted a study of the experiences and perceptions of American Indian, African American, Hmong, and Somali participants in Minnesota’s welfare program in the early 2000s. Results of this study suggested that the greatest opportunity for improving the success of welfare recipients from these groups would arise from strengthening individualized support for their progress toward self-sufficiency, first of all by ensuring adequately skilled job counselors.¹⁷¹

Policymakers, funders, and service delivery agencies in the early 2000s wanted to understand which programs that intended to promote economic self-reliance had the greatest effectiveness and with which types of participants. At that time, Minnesota Community Action Agencies engaged in testing an instrument to measure and describe changes in the lives of the low-income people to whom they provided services. As part of this effort, Wilder Research collaborated with the Minnesota Community Action Partnership, 25 Minnesota Community Action Agencies, and the Office of Economic Opportunity at the Minnesota Department of Human Services to design the Self-Reliance Achievement Scale. Pilot tests of the scale began in 2001. By means of the scale, the agencies documented positive changes in the majority of program participants with respect to job stability, hours of employment, and housing stability. That information enabled the agencies to ask what they could do for participants whose circumstances did not improve, and then they made modifications to increase their programs’ effectiveness.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Ellen Shelton, “Work force training tactics show results”, *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, December 13, 2005. Ellen Shelton, Greg Owen, Thalia Cooper, June Heineman, Nicole Martin, Brian Pittman, and Karen Ulstad, *Training low-income workers for skills and advancement* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2006).

¹⁷¹ Ellen Shelton and Greg Owen, *The issues behind the outcomes for Somali, Hmong, American Indian, and African American welfare participants* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2003).

¹⁷² Karen Ulstad, Greg Owen, and Ron Mortenson, *The Self-Reliance Achievement Scale (SRAS)* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2008).

Wilder Foundation program evaluation

Efforts to understand the impacts of the Wilder Foundation’s services upon the people served by its programs occurred from at least the 1940s onward. From 1940 to 1970, Wilder Research used evaluation methodologies that offered systematic description and counting of the number of people served by the Foundation and of the amount of services they received. Outcomes for the people served were occasionally measured but were more often assumed to be positive, if service delivery took place as expected.

In 1976, the Foundation’s board of directors decided to require evaluation of outcomes in all of the Foundation’s programs. As noted previously, the board resumed the operation of Wilder Research during that same year, and it provided resources for Wilder Research to conduct internal program evaluation, along with other forms of research and consulting.

In the late 1970s, research staff modeled evaluation upon then-current approaches to mental health services evaluation. A computerized client record system recorded client demographics, services received, and one or more “problems” for each client. Evaluation consisted of monitoring diagnosed problems over time to determine if the services resolved clients’ problems. Data collection occurred at least throughout a client’s service episode, from intake into a program until termination of services. Some programs took a longer view, and their evaluation designs involved follow-up of clients after program completion. Months after clients stopped receiving services from the Foundation’s programs, Wilder Research interviewers called clients (or parents of minor clients) to gather information useful for understanding the long-term outcomes of the services that they had received.

Evaluation later evolved to include measurement of a variety of types of outcomes (not solely the resolution of client “problems”) along with measurement of client satisfaction. For some programs, evaluation research also included measures of accessibility, to understand how easily and efficiently clients could obtain services from those programs. Wilder Research staff customized evaluation designs, as much as possible, for specific programs or for clusters of related programs. Sometimes, the researchers measured unique outcomes for a program. However, the use of standardized assessment forms (such as the Achenbach Child Behavior Checklist for children’s programs, and activities of daily living scales for older clients) became favored. Such tools enabled programs to adopt measures of optimal functioning with established validity and reliability, and to compare themselves to baselines and to the performance of other organizations.¹⁷³

The Wilder Foundation reduced staff size and the scope of its services before and after the turn of the century, mostly by closing residential programs or transferring them to other organizations. Nonetheless, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the Foundation had about 600 staff. They served more than 10,000 people a year, from diverse racial groups, who mostly resided in the eastern portion of Minnesota’s Twin Cities region. Funding and expectations for program evaluation began to decline during this decade. Nevertheless, most of the Foundation’s programs continued to gather at least some data on service outcomes and/or client satisfaction through 2010. Wilder Research managed almost all of this data collection. For a number of years, research staff assembled the information into a standard format for staff and board to use in annual reviews of programs and for strategic planning.

¹⁷³ Regarding measurement of activities of daily living during this time period, see: Joshua M. Wiener, Raymond J. Hanley, Robert Clark, and Joan F. Van Nostrand, “Measuring the Activities of Daily Living: Comparisons across National Surveys,” *Journal of Gerontology: SOCIAL SCIENCES* 45 (1990). Regarding the child behavior checklist, the American Psychological Association provides this description: <https://www.apa.org/depression-guideline/child-behavior-checklist.pdf>.

From 2001 through 2005, Wilder Programs served approximately 10,000 to 13,000 people per year. A 2005 performance report summarized five years of survey data gathered by Wilder Research regarding the experiences of those clients. An average of 79% of survey respondents reported favorable outcomes from their service experience. Children’s Residential Services had the least favorable ratings of outcomes, ranging from 57% to 65%. Community Services for the Elderly rated highest, with ratings at or close to 90%. Among the clients surveyed, 85% rated their satisfaction with staff favorably.¹⁷⁴

In its heyday at the Wilder Foundation, the process of program evaluation drew attention nationally as a model for gathering information on service outcomes, client satisfaction, and service accessibility for program improvement. A professional journal for program evaluators invited an article in which Wilder Research staff described the process. In that article, Dan Mueller, the associate director of Wilder Research at the time, described his leadership of the evaluation effort. Along with the managers of Wilder Programs and the research managers within Wilder Research, whose teams implemented the evaluations, he developed an overall evaluation plan for the Foundation’s programs. In collaboration with that group, he revisited and revised the plan periodically, as needed.¹⁷⁵

Programs set objectives, measures, and performance targets for client outcomes, client satisfaction, and accessibility of services. Program evaluation reports included recommended action items for program improvement. After reports were completed, program and research staff often met to discuss the results and their implications, and they would develop an action plan to guide the next steps for improving the work that programs did with their clients. Wilder Research could then track the implementation of those steps for improvement and determine whether they produced changes in program outcomes over time. As that process repeated itself over several years, Wilder Research could contribute to an ongoing cycle of program improvement in collaboration with the Wilder Foundation’s human services delivery staff.

During the first decade of the 2000s, Wilder Research studied how well the Wilder Foundation overall, with its 40+ programs at the time, accomplished its organization-wide strategic plan. Evaluation research provided information on progress in implementing intended actions to increase Wilder’s impacts on individual clients and the local community as a whole. The research measured how well performance targets were met with respect to the volume of services provided, service effectiveness, and satisfaction with the services provided by Wilder’s programs. The Wilder Foundation had overall goals, such as transforming itself into a more effective multicultural organization, and the evaluation offered information to assist the Foundation to pursue these goals.

Wilder Foundation Strategic Plan: Goals and Strategies

Goal 1 Healthy, Resilient Children, Youth and Families	Goal 2 Economic Stability	Goal 3 Successful Aging in the Community	Goal 4 Vital Neighborhoods and Communities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase school success. 2. Improve outcomes for troubled children and their families. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Maximize workforce participation for people with barriers. 4. Improve the quality, quantity and stability of low-income housing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Develop and maintain a broad, flexible and accessible array of community-based support services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Engage youth, strengthen community leadership, and help build effective organizations and coalitions.

Foundation goals, from the *Evaluation Report on Wilder Foundation Strategic Plan: Results Through FY 2004*, p. 1

¹⁷⁴ Wilder Foundation, *FY2005 Annual Performance Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, May 2006).

¹⁷⁵ Paul W. Mattessich, Daniel P. Mueller, and Cheryl Holm-Hansen, “Managing evaluation for program improvement at the Wilder Foundation,” *New Directions for Evaluation* 121 (2009): 27-42.

Other activities

Fellows programs

During this time period, Wilder Research initiated or collaborated in fellowship programs intended to provide opportunities for students and new professionals of color to strengthen their skills for applied social research.

In the late 1990s, Paul Mattessich met several times with the dean of the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs¹⁷⁶ at the University of Minnesota. He also presented at a Humphrey Institute faculty meeting to propose a partnership between Wilder Research and the Institute. The partnership would involve a fellowship program for students of color. Students who were selected would work during the summer in a full-time, paid position as a research associate and continue to work part-time during their second school year. For the initial cohorts, Wilder Research would also cover the cost of their second year tuition.

The program operated from 2000 through 2009, including one to three fellows each year. Edith Gozali-Lee served as supervisor during most of that time, handling both administrative responsibilities as well as mentoring many of the fellows.

Wilder Research management considered this fellowship arrangement successful. For example, Nicole MartinRogers, a member of the first cohort of fellows in 2000-2001, took a full-time position at Wilder Research after graduation, subsequently earning a Ph.D. and becoming a senior research manager. MartinRogers served as the president of the Minnesota Evaluation Association in 2019. Fellow Trista Harris eventually became executive director of the Minnesota Council on Foundations. Fellow Shelly Hendricks co-authored the book, *Information Gold Mine*, published by Wilder Research. Brandon Coffee-Borden, the last of the fellows, pursued a career which led him to a position at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, leading research efforts in support of government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and foundations nationally. Other fellows entered careers in research, human services, and social policy.

Wilder Research served as a placement site for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Evaluation Fellowship Program, an initiative intended to increase participation by diverse groups in the evaluation profession. Jill Jim, Natalie Alizaga, and José Reyes came to Minnesota to participate as fellows. After earning her Ph.D., Jim, a member of the Navajo Nation and a fluent Navajo speaker, became executive director of the Navajo Department of Health. In 2020, she was appointed a member of President Biden's COVID-19 Advisory Board.

In 2012, Wilder Research hosted an International Fellow, Zuliati Rohmah, in affiliation with the Humphrey School of Public Affairs. In another fellowship arrangement, one social justice fellow, Sheila Romero, worked at Wilder Research, and she dedicated time to an initiative funded by the National Network of Grantmakers. The report she wrote identified common experiences among people of color who contributed to the field of philanthropy.¹⁷⁷ For one year, Wilder Research also provided a placement opportunity as part of the American Evaluation Association's Minority Fellows Program.

¹⁷⁶ Renamed, in 2011, the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs.

¹⁷⁷ Romero, Sheila, "The Honest Truth: Lessons Learned from the Stories of People of Color in Philanthropy," 2006. Jointly published by the Wilder Foundation and the National Network of Grantmakers, partners who actively contributed to the initiatives were Ron McKinley from the National Network of Grantmakers, Joy Persall from Native Americans in Philanthropy, and Paul Mattessich and Alexandra Pierce from Wilder Research.

Supporting the Wilder Foundation’s innovation and strategic development

The internal innovation role, played by Wilder Research on and off beginning in 1917, continued during this time.

In 1986, Wilder Research launched Winet (Wilder Information Network). Wilder Research staff developed Winet software to enable authorized administrative and program staff throughout the Wilder Foundation to access client information directly for both residential (e.g., nursing homes) and non-residential (e.g., Child Guidance Clinic) services. Staff could also input client characteristics, clinical information, and other information remotely, without sending those items on paper forms for data entry. Eventually, other software systems replaced Winet, and responsibility for managing electronic client records shifted to other parts of the Wilder Foundation.

Wilder Research contributed significantly to the development and use of standardized behavioral checklists for children served by the Child Guidance Clinic and the residential treatment programs at the Wilder Foundation. At the request of those service programs, Wilder Research staff reviewed existing clinical instruments and developed new instruments for assessing children’s behavior at the point of intake for service and at later times over the course of treatment. Clinical staff felt that these new tools improved their ability to provide optimal treatment. Research staff made use of the tools in their studies of Wilder’s programs.

In 1988, a Foundation task force recommended upgrading the Foundation’s Personnel Department to a broader, enhanced Human Resources Department. Leonard Wilkening requested that Paul Mattessich and a team from Wilder Research develop a plan for a new department. The department would respond to concerns among Wilder management regarding: “high turnover rates in some programs; difficulties in attracting applicants for certain positions; rising costs of insurance and workers’ compensation; and employee requests for improvements in benefits, communications, and other issues, measured in climate surveys.”¹⁷⁸ Based on input provided to Wilder Research from throughout the Foundation, a Human Resources Department Planning Committee recommended a mission, eight areas of accountability, and a new structure for the department. The Wilder Foundation did create a new department. It also made adjustments in pay scales for many positions, which helped with recruitment and with reduction of turnover.

Wilder Research developed survey projects, internal to the Wilder Foundation, in response to requests from the Foundation’s administration. For one project, Wilder Research developed an employee survey which measured the attitudes, feelings, and satisfaction of all of the Foundation’s employees regarding their work. Wilder Research administered that survey several times until the Foundation decided to contract with an external human resources consultant to continue with that effort. Wilder Research implemented a series of surveys in the 1990s regarding employees’ satisfaction with Wilder’s Information Services. To assist Wilder’s Human Resources Department to understand the motivation of employees to leave their positions at the Wilder Foundation, the Survey Center of Wilder Research conducted a phone survey of employees who left their employment with Wilder in 2008.

In late 2006, Wilder’s Executive Office asked Wilder Research staff to organize an effort in which members of Wilder’s Leadership Team would interview leaders in the Latino community in order to identify key issues seen by those leaders and to identify possible ways in which the Wilder Foundation could partner with and/or better serve Latinos. Suggestions for how the Foundation could serve the Latino community emerged with respect to education, health care, housing, and other topics.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Paul Mattessich, *Human Resources Department Planning Committee Final Report and Recommendations* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, April 3, 1989), 1.

¹⁷⁹ Ela Rausch, *Environmental Scan of Twin Cities Latino Community Results* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2007).

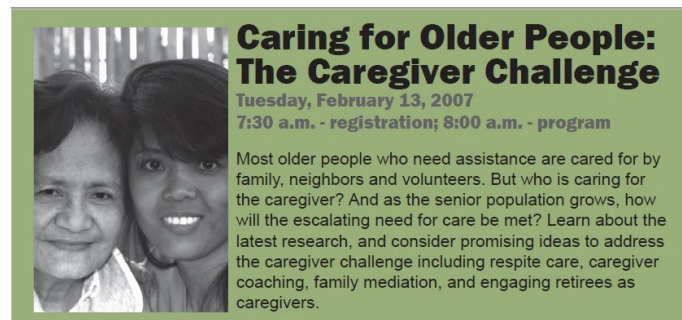
Wilder Research also supported the Wilder Foundation’s president, Leonard Wilkening, during the 1980s and early 1990s with the development and operation of the Human Services Council. This group had the goal to foster communication among several major public and private entities regarding human service issues. Members met every one to two months at the Minnesota Club on Washington Street in Saint Paul. The members included the Mayor of Saint Paul (Mayors George Latimer, Jim Scheibel, and Norm Coleman all participated in the Council during their terms as mayor), a Ramsey County Commissioner, administrators from The Saint Paul Foundation, Northwest Area Foundation, H.B. Fuller Foundation, St. Paul Companies Foundation, and the president of the Wilder Foundation. For the regular meetings, Wilder Research provided supporting information and did some of the meeting facilitation. Wilder Research completed research for several large projects of the Council, including a major initiative to welcome and provide assistance to Southeast Asian immigrants and refugees, an initiative to address teenage pregnancy, and several initiatives related to employment and education.

Joint work with the Wilder Center for Communities

In the early 2000s, Wilder Research engaged in several projects each year in cooperation with the Wilder Center for Communities. That division of the Wilder Foundation acted to build the strengths of community organizations and community leaders. It provided technical assistance and training for nonprofit organizations. It also operated a specialized leadership program for nonprofit managers and a training program for neighborhood-level leaders who wanted to influence local and state policies. Eventually staff from that division moved into office space alongside Wilder Research, and some administrative functions became shared. Ronnie Brooks, the director of the Wilder Center for Communities became part of the Wilder Research management team. The 2011 strategic plan for Wilder Research presumed a merger with the Wilder Center for Communities. After MayKao Hang became president, she changed the direction of the proposed merger. The two divisions resumed separate operations, and the Wilder Center for Communities relocated to a different area in Wilder Center.

Wilder’s Perspectives Series

Between 2005 and 2010, the work of Wilder Research often provided topics for the Wilder Foundation’s Perspectives Series – events (usually breakfasts held at a downtown Saint Paul hotel) which the Foundation’s Development Office sponsored for the purposes of fundraising and networking to support the Foundation’s operations. Two examples of such events, in which Wilder Research played a significant role, occurred in 2007.



Wilder Foundation Perspective Series event description (2007)

The April 2007 Perspectives event offered the opportunity to provide highlights from the 2006 statewide study of homelessness in Minnesota. Wilder Board Chair, Sandy Kiernat, greeted the participants, along with Reverend Ronald Smith, Sr., the Pastor of UNITY Baptist Church. Paul Mattessich walked the audience through the latest study results and described trends from previous statewide surveys, along with major implications. Richard Amos from St. Stephen’s in Minneapolis painted a picture of the experiences of homeless people. Tom Kingston closed the presentation portion of the program with remarks about Wilder’s vision and programs. Following those formal presentations, Greg Owen took the audience into a deeper dive on the topic by moderating a panel of leaders of organizations serving the homeless.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ George Stone from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Bret Byfield from the Saint Paul Police Homeless Outreach Project, Richard Amos, a formerly homeless person and ex-offender, then on staff at St. Stephen’s, and Laura Kadwell from the state of Minnesota.

Several different types of studies – community surveys, evaluations of programs serving older people, and demographic research with Minnesota Compass – pointed toward the growing need for the services of caregivers, both formal health care practitioners of various sorts and friends and family members who provide informal social support to older people and others with care needs.

Recognizing the potential issues faced by communities related to caregiving, the Wilder Foundation organized a Perspectives event to examine “The Caregiver Challenge.” Similar to the Perspectives event on homelessness, this event in February 2007 included welcoming remarks from the Wilder Foundation’s board chair and the CEO, along with a presentation on the caregiving challenge by Paul Mattessich, a personal story from a caregiver, Wilder board member Barbara Roy, and a description of potential approaches to supporting the caregiving process, from Susan Wenberg of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Then, Greg Owen moderated a panel of four practitioners to take a deeper dive into the topic.¹⁸¹

Mattessich sabbatical

From September 2000 through August 2001, Paul Mattessich pursued a sabbatical opportunity in Belfast, Northern Ireland. While remaining active in major decision-making regarding Wilder Research, and while remaining active in some project teams, Mattessich largely stepped back from day-to-day management. Organizationally, a year without the executive director present was intended to offer other management staff in Wilder Research the opportunity to collaborate in new ways. Everyone, it was hoped, would develop new perspectives and skills.

While in Northern Ireland, Mattessich provided technical assistance, strategic planning consultation, and research consultation to nonprofit and government organizations that supported youth development and/or promoted the peace process. He spent the largest proportions of his time with Public Achievement Northern Ireland and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland. For the Youth Council, he completed several projects to improve the Council’s effectiveness and its capacity to do more strategic funding of organizations serving young people and families. He also met with applied research organizations in the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands to share information about Wilder’s work and to promote the use of publications from Wilder Research.

Working in physical space and virtual space

From 1917 through 1969, research staff worked in the Wilder Administration Building at 355 Washington Street in Saint Paul (current site of the Ordway Theater), which housed the headquarters of the Wilder Foundation beginning in 1913. The Central Registration Bureau and the Family Centered Project operated in that location as well.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the staff of Wilder Research spent major portions of their time in office space on the fourth floor of the Wilder Administration Building on Washington Street. After the Wilder Foundation sold that property for the construction of the Ordway Theater, Wilder Research moved its offices, in June 1982, to 919 Lafond Avenue in Saint Paul (currently the site of Frogtown Farm). Work activities took place offsite for many staff for a variety of reasons – for example, meetings with other organizations, meetings with Wilder program staff at other Wilder Foundation sites, conducting interviews, carrying out library research, and doing presentations. Some of the data collection staff of Wilder Research conducted intake interviews at the facilities of Wilder Programs, such as the multiple sites of the Child Guidance Clinic.

¹⁸¹ Kim Anderson from Securian, Hal Freshley from the Minnesota Board on Aging, Theresa Neal from the Saint Paul Public Schools, and Kathryn Ringham from the Wilder Foundation’s Home Health and Support Services.

A typical work day lasted from 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Beyond that, staff had reasons to work outside of those hours – for example, conducting interviews in the evening and on weekends, participating in community meetings, writing reports, and doing presentations. Research staff could do some work at home, but laptops and remote connections to a central computer server had not yet become available. Some projects involved travel within and/or outside of Minnesota.

Steady growth of Wilder Research during the first half of the 1980s produced a need for additional office space. In June 1986, Wilder Research moved from the Wilder Foundation campus at 919 Lafond Avenue to the Atrium Office Building at 1295 Bandana Boulevard North in Saint Paul’s Energy Park. The Wilder Foundation had collaborated in the renovation of the Atrium Office Building and had strong motivation to bring tenants to the building.¹⁸² Wilder Research staff initially filled about 6,000 square feet of space. Subsequently, Wilder Research leased several thousand more feet of space in different locations of the building. Sometimes, on a temporary basis through the early 2000s, a large scale project required additional space, and interviewers used telephone stations at 919 Lafond Avenue and at Bandana Square (at that time a retail facility in Energy Park).

During the 1980s and 1990s, technology evolved significantly and enabled more flexibility in work arrangements. Portable, laptop computers became effective for the activities of Wilder Research, and they became affordable. As a result, some staff could spend more time working in remote locations. Options expanded for the process of collecting data for surveys. Interviewers could use computers, rather than record responses on paper, for both phone and in-person surveys. Respondents could use computers to respond to survey questions.



As part of a process to reduce real estate owned by the Wilder Foundation, the Foundation’s president and board of directors made a strategic decision in the early 2000s to consolidate as much of the Foundation’s operations as possible in a new administration building. Consequently, in January 2008, Wilder Research moved to its current location: Wilder Center, 451 Lexington Parkway North in Saint Paul, the former site of Lexington Park, a minor league baseball field for more than half of the 20th century. Wilder Research occupied the entire fourth floor of the building.

Wilder Center, 451 Lexington Parkway North, Saint Paul (2008)

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, most staff worked remotely during 2020 through 2022, although some staff needed to work onsite. Almost all meetings occurred as videoconferences during that time. For projects that required one-on-one interviews, the interviewing occurred via telephone or in-person, depending on the protocol for each study.

¹⁸² The Atrium Office Building was developed and managed by the AHW Corporation, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation. The city of Saint Paul and the Saint Paul Port Authority partnered with Wilder in redeveloping land between Lexington Parkway and Snelling Avenue, an area which had previously contained several industrial facilities, a large railway yard, and train repair facilities. The Atrium Office Building had been converted from a locomotive repair shop into offices.

Creating impacts in a changing world

From 2009 to 2022, Paul Mattessich and the Wilder Research management team continued to lead the organization in the implementation of high quality, social scientific work of relevance to significant social issues that gained traction during the 21st century. They continued to direct efforts toward improving social policies, and they collaborated with nonprofit and government organizations to improve the planning, implementation, and effectiveness of services.

The world at that time

At the beginning of this stage in the history of Wilder Research, the world found itself pulling out of a financial crisis, the Great Recession. A breakdown in the housing sector of the economy, caused by inappropriate lending practices, precipitated deep economic contraction. Although defined as lasting less than two years, this recession had long-term, negative effects on employment and student debt.¹⁸³ By increasing unemployment, the recession likely impaired health and educational attainment among many people.¹⁸⁴

Economically, the negative effects of the Great Recession fell disproportionately upon populations of color. The recession worsened economic racial disparities. Black and Latino individuals had been more than two times as likely as White individuals to receive a subprime loan.¹⁸⁵ Black and Latino households lost almost half of their wealth, while White households lost about a quarter.¹⁸⁶ In Minnesota, the Occupy Homes movement, comprised of a coalition of homeowners and activists, sought to prevent foreclosures. The “Wall of Forgotten Natives” emerged as an encampment that stretched along Hiawatha Avenue in Minneapolis, comprised of primarily Native American residents who represented a variety of Tribes.

Mass shootings shocked the nation including unimaginable attacks on school children (e.g., in Newtown, Connecticut, and Parkland, Florida) and other attacks in public spaces (e.g., a Colorado movie theater, an African American church in South Carolina, a music festival in Las Vegas, a medical clinic in Buffalo, Minnesota). The year 2020 saw the largest total number of gun deaths ever recorded in the United States.¹⁸⁷

Barak Obama became president of the United States in 2009 – the first African American to serve in that position. Two of his notable achievements related directly to the health and well-being of the nation’s population. The Affordable Care Act “reduced the number of uninsured people to historically low levels and helped more people access health

¹⁸³ Iwan Brankay, Matthew Bidwell, Olivia S. Mitchell, Peter Cappelli, Peter Conti-Brown, and Susan Wachter, “How the Great Recession Changed American Workers,” *Knowledge at Wharton*, September 10, 2018, <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/great-recession-american-dream/>

¹⁸⁴ See, for example: Lucie Kalousova and Sarah Burgard, “Effects of the Great Recession: Health and well-being,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 41 (2015): 181–201.

¹⁸⁵ Jacob Faber, “Racial Dynamics of Subprime Mortgage Lending at the Peak,” *Housing Policy Debate* 23, no. 2 (2013).

¹⁸⁶ Fenaba Addo and William Darity, “Disparate Recoveries: Wealth, Race, and the Working Class after the Great Recession,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 695, no. 1 (2021): 173-192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162211028822>

¹⁸⁷ John Gramlich, “What the Data Says about Gun Deaths in the U.S.” *Pew Research Center*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>

care services, especially low-income people and people of color.”¹⁸⁸ The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act invigorated the economy and reduced unemployment.

Structural (or systemic) racism became more widely recognized. Researchers had identified structural racism years earlier, as the cumulative effects of the legacy of slavery, racial bias, and discriminatory policies and practices. Work intensified in the early 21st century to define and document, both in academic writing and in the popular media, the impacts of structural racism on all aspects of the well-being of people of color – health, education, employment, housing, safety, and other conditions of life.¹⁸⁹ Citigroup Bank estimated that the U.S. gross domestic product lost \$16 trillion as a result of discriminatory practices which it examined.¹⁹⁰

The Black Lives Matter movement addressed structural racism, and it took shape during the mid-2010s, motivated by incidents such as the killings of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. Dakota Action Pipeline protests both attacked structural racism and raised intense calls for environmental justice.

The murder of George Floyd by several police officers in May 2020 sparked vigils and protests around the United States and in other parts of the world. Floyd’s murder stimulated policy changes and police reforms throughout the United States.¹⁹¹ Unfortunately, peaceful protests in Minnesota led to violence, vandalism, and fires which prompted Minnesota Governor Tim Walz to activate National Guard troops. Most of the losses associated with protests occurred in Minneapolis and Saint Paul. In Saint Paul, businesses along University Avenue, many of them operated by people of color, bore the brunt of the damage from the civil unrest. The *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* noted: “In St. Paul, the irony of self-proclaimed advocates — many of them white — arriving from outside the city to burn down large strips of ethnic neighborhoods in the name of racial justice hasn’t been lost on residents of the Midway.”¹⁹² The offices of Wilder Research existed along University Avenue at this time at Wilder Center which suffered only minor vandalism.

Donald Trump campaigned for president of the United States in the mid-2010s, with a strongly populist platform and an anti-establishment image that appealed to a large portion of the voting public. He won the election of 2016, and served as president from 2017 through 2021. He initiated activities, which largely failed, to reduce Affordable Care Act benefits, and he initiated activities, which partly succeeded, to reduce the number of people receiving food stamps.¹⁹³ His one term as president, with underpinnings of anti-immigrant sentiment, racism, and sexism,¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ David Blumenthal, Sara R. Collins, and Elizabeth J. Fowler, “The Affordable Care Act at 10 Years — Its Coverage and Access Provisions,” *New England Journal of Medicine*, published online Feb. 26, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.26099/5d64-x278>

¹⁸⁹ For example: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: a social study* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899). Massey Douglas and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: segregation and the making of the underclass* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993). Ruqaiyah Yearby, Brietta Clark, and José F. Figueroa, “Structural Racism In Historical And Modern US Health Care Policy,” *Health Affairs* 41, no. 2 (2022). N’dea Yancey-Bragg, “What is systemic racism? Here’s what it means and how you can help dismantle it,” *USA Today*, June 15, 2020. Justin Worland, “America’s Long Overdue Awakening to Systemic Racism,” *TIME*, June 11, 2020.

¹⁹⁰ Adedayo Akala, “Cost Of Racism: U.S. Economy Lost \$16 Trillion Because Of Discrimination, Bank Says,” *National Public Radio*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/09/23/916022472/cost-of-racism-u-s-economy-lost-16-trillion-because-of-discrimination-bank-says>

¹⁹¹ Ram Subramanian and Leily Arzy, “State Policing Reforms Since George Floyd’s Murder,” *Brennen Center for Justice*, May 21, 2021, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/state-policing-reforms-george-floyds-murder>

¹⁹² Frederick Melo and Mara Gottfried, “Arson suspects face federal charges in connection with unrest after death of George Floyd,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 10, 2020.

¹⁹³ Samantha Putterman, “Trump’s State of the Union claim about welfare, food stamp declines is off,” *Politifact*, February 6, 2020, <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2020/feb/06/donald-trump/trumps-state-union-claim-welfare-food-stamp-declin/>

¹⁹⁴ Vanessa Williamson and Isabella Gelfand, “Trump and racism: What do the data say?” *Brookings Institution*, August 14, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2019/08/14/trump-and-racism-what-do-the-data-say/>

concluded amidst great partisan divisiveness. He became the first U.S. president to be impeached twice, with the second impeachment occurring as a result of his incitement of an insurrection on January 6, 2021. After leaving office, he continued to make false claims that he had won the election of 2020.

The second pandemic experienced by Wilder Research emerged in the United States during the first quarter of 2020: COVID-19. That pandemic, in the words of the World Health Organization, “led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work.”¹⁹⁵ Racial disparities occurred with respect to the impacts of COVID-19. Infection, hospitalization, and death were much more likely among persons of color than among Whites.¹⁹⁶

Remote work became more prevalent as a result of the pandemic, and it remained so for many workers even after the end of the pandemic. The delivery of health services via telemedicine became more common.

Research activities

As of the writing of this history, the Wilder Research Library’s database includes several thousand public reports published by Wilder Research, dating from 1917 to 2022. Staff produced about 60% of those items since 2009. In addition to the formal reports accessible on the Wilder Research website, people who seek research information have had the ability to go to those web pages to access other types of articles, essays, and aggregated statistics. Similar types of information, with a focus on demographic trends, appear on the Minnesota Compass website, developed by Wilder Research.

Wilder Research engaged in 200+ projects each year during the most recently completed stage of its history. Many of these projects led to one or more formal reports. In addition, other outputs came from these projects, including lectures and presentations, journal articles, essays for news media, blogs, legislative testimony, and other resources. During this time, Wilder Research served broad audiences with the work it completed locally and nationally, including: service providers and policymakers; organizations that requested customized studies; persons seeking social indicators information. A small proportion of the work occurred specifically for the Wilder Foundation’s programs and administration.¹⁹⁷

Descriptions of some of the projects of Wilder Research between 2009 and 2022 appear in the following sections. These examples illustrate the range of work, partners involved, sources of financial support, and uses of the results of the research completed during this time. However, the examples do not tell the full story. Readers who would like to obtain additional historical perspective can peruse all public reports of Wilder Research at www.wilderresearch.org.

¹⁹⁵ World Health Organization, “Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems,” *World Health Organization*, October 13, 2020, <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>

¹⁹⁶ Centers for Disease Control, “Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity.” June 17, 2021. <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/107296>

¹⁹⁷ At the beginning of this time period, the Wilder Foundation engaged in a significant downsizing which did not directly affect the activities of Wilder Research, but which did decrease the demand from Wilder Programs for Wilder Research’s services. See, for example: Dave Orrick, “St. Paul’s Wilder Foundation Cuts Services, 260 Jobs,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 14, 2009.

Aging

As noted previously, research on aging by Wilder Research staff, from the 1970s through the early 2000s, included large scale surveys and comprehensive needs assessments, along with some program evaluation studies. The impetus for that research derived from the recognition that the aging of the population – more people living to older ages – constituted a highly significant change for all communities, with impacts predicted to extend well into the middle of the 21st century. From 2009 to the present, research by Wilder Research staff on the topic of aging has tended to focus on specific dimensions of the life of older people and/or to explore the experience of aging among specific portions of the older population.

Based on the recognition that an inadequate supply of housing programs existed with supportive services that can accommodate the needs of low-income older adults with health and functional impairments, Wilder Research collaborated with the Minnesota Department of Human Services to study “customized living.” The study examined the service model for customized living, used in the Wilder Foundation’s Aging Services Division, examined similar programs elsewhere, assessed the costs of such programs, and identified the benefits and challenges of the programs. The researchers concluded that providing customized living services in a subsidized living setting has benefits for both the State and for the residents served by the program.¹⁹⁸

To raise awareness of health and housing challenges for American Indians, particularly Native elders, Wilder Research facilitated a discussion in 2018 at the Minneapolis American Indian Center. The gathering focused on available services and other resources, and it elicited barriers encountered by people seeking services. Participants suggested possible steps that government and nonprofit agencies could take to better serve American Indian elders.¹⁹⁹

The process of caregiving for the older population, especially the role of families and friends in providing social, emotional, and instrumental support, remained a topic of focus for Wilder Research. Demographically, steady growth in the number of older people continued to occur during the early decades of the 21st century, including growth in the number of older people of color. Cultural groups differed in their perspectives on the accessibility and appropriateness of care provided by government and nonprofit organizations. They also held different traditions regarding the responsibility of family members to provide care for elders. To inform efforts by the Minnesota Department of Human Services to better address needs among the increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population of older adults, Wilder Research identified opportunities for engaging and supporting African American and Hmong caregivers. A synthesis of relevant research identified important features of in-home and community-based services that would increase the acceptability and effectiveness of those services. It also suggested means for building a supportive environment for people who provide care to their elderly relatives.²⁰⁰

Studies related to dying and care for the dying began in the 1980s and continued through this stage in the history of Wilder Research. For example, Wilder Research completed a two year evaluation assessing the efficacy of, and recommending improvements for, presentation materials and training modules created by the Minnesota Area Agencies on Aging and the Minnesota Network of Hospice and Palliative Care. The materials and training modules had the purpose to build the capacity of home and community-based service providers to deliver information and resources to consumers about advance planning and end-of-life care. They cover topics related to palliative care, hospice, advance care planning, veterans’ benefits, and Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Christin Lindberg, Greg Owen, and Cael Warren, *Understanding the Benefits of Providing Assisted Living-Like Supports to Older and Disabled Adults in Subsidized Housing Settings* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

¹⁹⁹ Greg Owen and Nicole MartinRogers, *American Indian Elders Housing and Homelessness Summit* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019).

²⁰⁰ Christin Lindberg, *Live Well At Home: Engaging African American and Hmong Caregivers*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2017).

²⁰¹ Christin Lindberg and Greg Owen, *Minnesota Network of Hospice and Palliative Care*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

Children and youth

Research related to children included many evaluation studies conducted at the request of organizations that wanted to improve their effectiveness.



Cookie Cart

An evaluation of a first-time job experience for teens

NOVEMBER 2015

Prepared by:
Thalia Hall and Sarah Gehrig

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Report cover for Cookie Cart evaluation (2015)

The Cookie Cart youth employment program in North Minneapolis offers training and employment experience to young people, age 14 to 17, and most of them youth of color. A Wilder Research study demonstrated the impacts of that program on more than 20 employment-related skills and attitudes. For example, it revealed improvements in participants' readiness to obtain and keep a job, their ability to work as a team member, their ability to interview for a job, and their willingness to carry out responsibilities.²⁰²

A process evaluation of the Children's Trust Fund focused on the implementation of the Parent Leadership Team, a new component of the Trust Fund, which had the goal to increase the voice of parents in influencing child welfare policies and programming in Minnesota. While reporting general satisfaction on the part of parents and officials of the Minnesota Department of Human Services who participated, the researchers suggested deliberate action to build the capacity of parents to have an impact and to increase the agility of the system to respond.²⁰³

Research related to children also included the development of literature reviews, the compiling of social indicators, and the preparation of documents that synthesized information useful for planning effective services and developing effective policies.

Increased recognition during the early 20th century of the deleterious, cumulative effects of traumatic events upon children and their parents motivated many health and human service organizations to increase their capacity to provide trauma-informed services. An overview by Wilder Research of promising, trauma-informed approaches for mental health care offered a resource to assist these organizations to identify therapeutic interventions with potentially greater effectiveness than conventional interventions. The overview noted specific techniques that service providers could adopt in order to provide age-appropriate, culturally specific care that engaged both children and their parents. It emphasized that children and families who have experienced trauma very typically have complex needs that require a range of services. For greatest effectiveness, service organizations should provide those services or establish collaborative arrangements with other agencies to provide services as a network.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Thalia Hall and Greg Owen, *The Cookie Cart: An Evaluation of an Innovative Youth Employment Program*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011). Thalia Hall and Ellen Shelton, *Evaluation of Cookie Cart: Parent Perspectives and Follow-up Employment Outcomes for Youth Participating in a First-Time Job Experience*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

²⁰³ Krysten Rypa-Tures, Maggie Skrypek, Jessica Meyerson, Michelle Decker Gerrard, and Monica Idzelis Rothe, *Minnesota Children's Trust Fund: Summary of Evaluation Findings*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

²⁰⁴ Melanie Ferris and Cheryl Holm-Hansen, *Children's Mental Health: Trauma-Informed Care*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009).

Critical Issues in Child Abuse offered statistics on victimization as well as on services for victims. It identified preventive models and protective factors that can reduce the risk of victimization.²⁰⁵ Some reports from the Wilder Research Minnesota Homeless Study (described elsewhere) focused specifically on homeless children.²⁰⁶

Several staff in Wilder Research contributed to the development of a nationally recognized body of work related to children with incarcerated parents. The later section of this history on public safety and criminal justice describes this research.

Collaboration

As noted previously, books and articles on collaboration achieved widespread recognition for Wilder Research. The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory experienced steady use from the time of its inception, as a free tool for measuring the extent to which a collaborative initiative contains the ingredients that increase the likelihood of success. In addition, during the 2010s, Wilder Research staff conducted research on many collaborative projects.

Research which specifically focused on collaborative initiatives, or which studied collaboration in a significant way, included studies for the East Metro Mental Health Roundtable, the Wilder Foundation’s Achievement Plus program, Northside Achievement Zone, and the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs initiative (all described elsewhere).

Other examples include research for:

- Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative, which had the goal “to improve access to and resources for high-quality, culturally and economically supportive mental health services for infants, children, youth and families within Hennepin County through working partnerships with family service collaboratives, county and state government, adult mental health systems, parents, schools, and health systems”
- Kid City, “a partnership between the City of Maplewood Parks and Recreation and Z Puppets Rosenschnoz, with the goal of bringing people together through theater, puppetry, and interactive art installations”
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build a Healthier America, a commission of nonpartisan leaders convened by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation “to identify opportunities to improve the health of all Americans by creating environments that protect and actively promote health.”²⁰⁷ Wilder Research staff presented the results of their research at hearings held by the Commission to Build a Healthier America in Washington, D.C., in 2013.

In some cases, nonprofit organizations sought to explore merging with one another as a means to increase impact, become more efficient, and improve sustainability. To help organizations and their funders assess merger as an option, MAP for Nonprofits²⁰⁸ joined with Wilder Research to conduct a multi-phase study to identify factors that influence merger outcomes and characteristics of successful mergers. This initiative led to the development of a research-based guide which described and illustrated principles for success and which provided practical advice for organizations wishing to accomplish an efficient, productive merger.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Cheryl Holm-Hansen, Monica Idzelis Rothe, and Amy Leite Bennett, *Critical Issues in Child Abuse*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010).

²⁰⁶ For example, Wilder Research, *Homeless Children in Minnesota and Their Families* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010).

²⁰⁷ See: Julie Atella and Cheryl Holm-Hansen, *Hennepin County Children’s Mental Health Collaborative: 2017 Annual Metrics Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2018). Ryan Evans, *Kid City: Year 3 Goals and Evaluation Findings* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2018). Paul Mattessich and Ela Rausch, *Collaboration to Build Healthier Communities: A Report for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Commission to Build A Healthier America*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013).

²⁰⁸ Management Assistance Program for Nonprofits eventually became Propel Nonprofits.

²⁰⁹ Greg Owen, Brian Pittman, Laura Martell Kelly, and Ron Reed, *Success Factors in Nonprofit Mergers* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

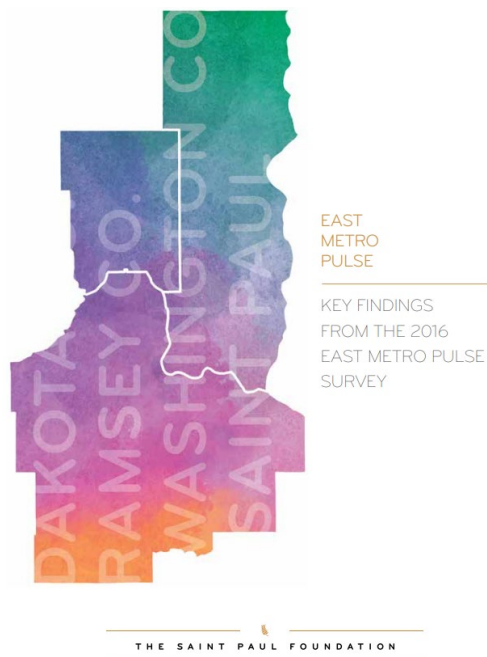
Collaborative databases for data-informed decision-making

Computer technology of the late 20th and early 21st centuries enabled organizations to pool their data with data from other organizations. As a group, organizations could examine the characteristics of people who receive services, the finances associated with service delivery, trends, and outcomes in order to gain insight for improving effectiveness. Aggregated information from several organizations could offer a reference point which practitioners could use to better interpret their own agency's performance.

Wilder Research initiated this type of work in the 1980s, as noted in a previous section of this history. Then, in the early 2000s, Wilder Research led the development of a statewide database: the Minnesota Homeless Management Information System, also described earlier.

From 2011 through the present, the Sprockets database has enabled a network of youth-serving organizations to pool data regarding out-of-school-time activities that those organizations provide. The Sprockets network has the goal to coordinate Saint Paul out-of-school-time programming efforts. The network developed standards for program quality, including standards for collecting and using reliable data. Sprockets has also identified professional development needs among youth workers and has then proceeded to provide learning opportunities to meet those needs. Under the leadership of research scientist Edith Gozali-Lee, Wilder Research has managed the network's shared database system and conducted program evaluation. Sprockets organizations receive training and technical support in the collection and use of data for improvement. In addition, Saint Paul city agencies, along with nonprofit organizations, look at the age, gender, race/ethnicity, and neighborhood of the young people who enroll in out-of-school-time programs to understand which of the city's youth do and do not access free and low-cost programming.

Community surveys and needs assessments



East Metro Pulse report cover (2016)

The 2010s included a large number of community surveys and needs assessments conducted by Wilder Research. Some focused on broad dimensions of the quality of life of community residents. Some narrowed their attention to obtain information specifically for organizations interested in the needs for certain types of services.

The Wilder Research tradition of conducting large-scale community surveys, first implemented in 1917, and pursued intensively in the 1970s through the 1990s, continued in 2016 with the East Metro Pulse initiative. In that year, The Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation contracted with Wilder Research to conduct a survey of 1,950 residents in Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington counties. The project had the goal to gather information for action to increase connectedness among neighbors and ensure a healthy community. The survey covered education, health, housing, transportation, community connectedness, residents' trust in institutions, and other topics.²¹⁰

²¹⁰ The Saint Paul Foundation, *East Metro Pulse: Key Findings from the 2016 East Metro Pulse Survey* (Saint Paul, MN: The Saint Paul Foundation, 2017). Sera Kinoglu and Nicole MartinRogers, *East Metro Pulse: Detailed Results and Methodology for the 2016 East Metro Pulse Resident Survey* (Saint Paul, MN: The Saint Paul Foundation, 2017).

Subsequent East Metro Pulse surveys occurred in 2018 and 2021, which enabled the Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation to examine trends over time. In addition, the 2021 report explored the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic upon the lives of residents of Dakota, Ramsey, and Washington counties.²¹¹ During 2022, based on analyses of data from the series of East Metro Pulse surveys, the Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation posted infographics on their website for the topics of COVID-19, employment, education, and critical issues (that is, issues which survey respondents considered most significant).²¹²

Nicole MartinRogers and her team created “data parties” as an innovative approach to disseminating the results of the 2018 East Metro Pulse survey. As described on the Wilder Research website in 2022:

*Data parties are an approach to participatory data analysis designed to demystify data and help people learn how to use it to make data-informed decisions. The East Metro Pulse data parties included fun and practical hands-on activities that help participants analyze and understand the data, and how they might use it to make decisions in their programs, staffing, strategic planning, policies, fundraising, and more. The data parties also provide some basic data best practices, such as only interpreting a difference between groups as a real and practical difference if there is a gap of 10 percentage points or more (anything less could be insignificant or not meaningful due to margins of error in the data).*²¹³



Wilder Research staff Emma Connell, Nicole MartinRogers, and Sheila Bell facilitate a data party (2019)

Surveys on a smaller scale than East Metro Pulse also occurred during the 2010s.²¹⁴ For example, findings from a mailed survey supported the efforts by the Woodbury Community Foundation to promote collaboration among organizations in that city, in order to address needs related to economic status and employment, housing, community engagement, and other aspects of community living. A mental health wellness campaign for Anoka County relied on data gathered by Wilder Research. A community assessment, including a survey of 683 caregivers of children, provided information on the living conditions of families in the 250-block Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood to support

²¹¹ Emma Connell and Nicole MartinRogers, *East Metro Pulse, Volume 2: Data Book, Detailed Results and Methodology* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019). Emma Connell and Nicole MartinRogers, *East Metro Pulse, Volume 3: Data Book, Detailed Results and Methodology* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2022).

²¹² “East Metro Pulse,” The Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation website, <https://www.spmcf.org/what-we-do/invest-in-community-led-solutions/east-metro-pulse-report>

²¹³ “Facilitating Data-Informed Decisions: East Metro Pulse Data Parties,” Wilder Research, <https://www.wilder.org/courageous-stories/facilitating-data-informed-decisions-east-metro-pulse-data-parties>

²¹⁴ Examples of reports from these studies include: Nicole MartinRogers and Ela Rausch, *Woodbury Basic Needs Assessment: A Study of Woodbury Community Foundation, Summary*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Cheryl Holm-Hansen and Laura Martell Kelly, *Mental Wellness Campaign for Anoka County: 2010 Community Mental Health Survey Results* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010). Muneer Karcher-Ramos, Nicole MartinRogers, Dan Mueller, and Paul Mattessich, *Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood: Summary of Results from the 2011 Community Assessment and Segmentation Analysis* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011). Anna Granias and Nicole MartinRogers, *Community Needs Assessment for the Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver & Dakota Counties: Summary of Key Findings* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015).

the work of planning the Promise Neighborhood initiative. Surveys took place in Amharic, English, Hmong, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, and Vietnamese.

Community Action Agencies, which provide services such as job training, early childhood education, energy assistance, and emergency housing throughout Minnesota, occasionally invited Wilder Research to undertake needs assessment surveys. For example in 2015, this included both the Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver, and Dakota Counties and the Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties.

Community surveys and needs assessments such as those mentioned above typically focused on one or more topics such as education, employment, housing, health, safety, food security, transportation, and others.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (the ACA), enacted in 2010, mandated that hospitals operating as charitable organizations must conduct community health needs assessments of the residents within their catchment areas at least every three years. To provide this information, Wilder Research staff sometimes gathered new data from the communities served by a hospital, using mail surveys, phone surveys, or other means; they sometimes used social indicators or other data compiled by other entities, such as the U.S. Census Bureau or the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.²¹⁵ In addition to community data, some needs assessment studies gathered data from a hospital's patients. For example, a study for Gillette Children's Hospital, which incorporated a survey of patients, identified priority needs among the people it served: more centralized care coordination; greater access to appropriate care and treatment, especially in greater Minnesota; and more caregiver support services.²¹⁶

From the 1970s onward, Wilder Research incorporated advisory committees extensively into its community-focused research and program evaluation studies. Advisory committees engage varied types of people who have a stake in the research, and they bring multiple perspectives into the process of designing and implementing research projects. The credibility of a project increases by virtue of inclusion of public representatives who amplify transparency. The methodological integrity of a project increases by virtue of inclusion of scientific and professional experts who hone the rigor of the project's social scientific methods. Advisory committees can also promote the distribution and use of a project's findings. In 2012, Paul Mattessich explained the functions and benefits of advisory committees for a research project in a professional journal.²¹⁷

Early childhood

The Invest Early, Early Childhood Initiative became a focus for more than a decade's worth of studies by Wilder Research. Supported by the Blandin Foundation, Invest Early consists of comprehensive early childhood education and related services intended to strengthen children and families in Itasca County, Minnesota. An overall report identified what led to the program's success.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ For example, Amanda Petersen and Nicole MartinRogers, *Benton County SHIP Community Health Profile* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2014). Melanie Ferris and Anna Granias, *Children's Minnesota 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment: Data Summary Packet* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

²¹⁶ Lida Gilbertson, Amanda Hane, and Rebecca Sales, *2016 Community Health Needs Assessment* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2017).

²¹⁷ Paul Mattessich, "Advisory committees in contract and grant-funded evaluation projects," *New Directions for Evaluation* 2012, no. 136 (Winter 2012): 31-48.

²¹⁸ Jennifer Valorose and Richard Chase, *Invest Early: 15 Years of Impacts: Evaluation Results* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020). Wilder Research issued its first report on this program 13 years earlier: Richard Chase, *Invest Early*,

To serve communities, organizations, and families statewide, Wilder Research published “risk, reach, and resilience” information. Staff worked in partnership on this with the Institute of Child Development, University of Minnesota, and the Minnesota departments of Education, Health, and Human Services. The Irving Harris Foundation provided a grant to support the research. The 2018 report described potential risks to the healthy development of young children and the extent to which publicly funded services covered their early learning, health, and basic needs. This report also included new and emerging indicators of risk, reach, and resilience. Minnesota Compass assumed responsibility for displaying risk, reach, and resilience information on its website – including, for example, data on family poverty, adequacy of prenatal care, low-weight births, as well as other measures.²¹⁹

The reporting of risk, reach, and resilience information in the 2010s, which provided insight regarding the status of Minnesota’s children, benefitted from earlier collaborative relationships and the indicators reported in prior projects conducted for Minnesota Build and the Minnesota Department of Health in 2008 and for the Minnesota Community Foundation in 2009.²²⁰

Wilder Research staff examined the characteristics of Minnesota’s child care workforce, specifically those individuals serving children in licensed family child care homes, child care centers, preschools and school-age programs. In addition to describing the workforce, this research looked at the needs that child care providers had for training, at providers’ motivations for participating in training and professional development, and at barriers which inhibited participation.



Child Care Workforce in Minnesota

2011 Statewide Study of Demographics, Training and Professional Development

Final Report

Child Care Workforce in Minnesota report cover (2011)

The Minnesota Department of Human Services commissioned a study to inform the implementation of the child care professional development system and to ensure that professional development opportunities are inclusive of, and accessible to, all providers. Wilder Research had completed a similar study in 2006. Based on input from the study’s advisory committee, the research team offered recommendations, including a recommendation to support further efforts to increase the diversity of the child care workforce, and a recommendation to ensure that trainers of child care providers have high levels of qualifications.²²¹

Early Childhood Initiative: Year One Implementation and Outcomes Evaluation Summary (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2007).

²¹⁹ See: Richard Chase, Erin Spaeth, Steven Aviles, Elizabeth Carlson, and Alison Giovanelli, *Minnesota Early Childhood Risk, Reach, and Resilience: Key Indicators of Early Childhood Development in Minnesota, County By County* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2018). See also: Minnesota Compass website.

²²⁰ Richard Chase, *Babies in Minnesota: The Well-being and Vulnerabilities of our Youngest Children* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Richard Chase, *Early Childhood Minnesota: Indicators and Strategies for Minnesota’s Early Childhood System* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2008).

²²¹ Jennifer Valorse and Richard Chase, *Child Care Workforce in Minnesota: 2011 Statewide Study of Demographics, Training and Professional Development* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

During the 2010s, Wilder Research published a series of reports that focused on how family and community knowledge systems influence child development. These reports offered practical advice for early childhood educators, child care providers, and others to sharpen their skills to provide culturally competent care.²²² Relatedly, Wilder Research staff collaborated with the African American Babies Coalition to explore and describe the knowledge and behavior patterns evident in the ways parents of African American children nurture those children. The study informed the production of materials for parents, professional care providers, and others, to improve child-rearing and care-giving practices in order to promote healthy child development.²²³

Research on early childhood by Wilder Research sought to manifest a balanced and comprehensive view of healthy human development through a strengths-based perspective, appreciating the context of diverse families and communities. Richard Chase reflected on this in an op-ed, “If deficits are all we see when we look at some kids, we’d better widen our lens,”²²⁴ and he asserted in a policy paper made widely available through the U.S. Department of Education:

*Reaching the goal of optimal healthy development for all children requires concerted, interconnected policy efforts across public and private sectors and disciplines and in partnership with families.*²²⁵

In 2016, Wilder Research published *A Comprehensive, Racially-Equitable Policy Plan for Universal Healthy Child Development*, jointly with the Institute of Child Development at the University of Minnesota, and Development & Training, Inc. This plan drew from the large body of scientific literature on child development and from local research on living conditions and needs of children in Minnesota. In addition, it incorporated input from approximately 50 community leaders and from conversations with more than 360 diverse stakeholders, including families, in community listening sessions across Minnesota.

The plan exhorted public institutions to revise their priorities, primarily by emphasizing equity – the opportunity for all children, regardless of race, to receive the resources and support they need to prosper and to reach their full potential. It encouraged taking a holistic view of child development, that is, recognizing that healthy development of children results from combined efforts of parents, extended families, communities, and public and private organizations. Recommendations in the plan ranged from general – e.g., to support multigenerational family networks and to support community economic development – to specific – e.g., to increase insurance reimbursement for doulas and to allow undocumented immigrants who have proof of filing a Minnesota income tax return to acquire a driver’s license.²²⁶

²²² See, for example: Betty Emarita and Richard Chase, *Minnesota’s Knowledge and Competency Framework: Family and Community Knowledge Systems: Culture* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019). Betty Emarita and Richard Chase, *Family and Community Knowledge Systems: New Tools for Engagement* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012). Also, note an earlier publication by Wilder Research that focused on the role of the family in education: Gozali-Lee, *Family Involvement to Promote*, 1999.

²²³ Sameerah Bilal-Roby and Richard Chase, *Promoting the healthy development of African-American babies* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

²²⁴ Richard Chase, “If deficits are all we see when we look at some kids, we’d better widen our lens,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, May 18, 2019.

²²⁵ Richard Chase, *Championing Early Childhood Policies that Prevent Social, Economic, and Educational Inequities*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015), 8. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615507.pdf>

²²⁶ Richard Chase, Betty Emarita, Elizabeth Carlson, and Allie Giovanelli, *Prenatal to Age 3: A Comprehensive, Racially-Equitable Policy Plan for Universal Healthy Child Development* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

Education

In the opening years of the 21st century, educators, other education experts, public officials, and the general public voiced strong concerns regarding the process and outcomes of kindergarten through 12th grade education in the United States. Some lamented the standing of students in the United States relative to students in other countries of the world. Some focused on the ominous implications of disparities in educational performance among racial groups.

The federal government took major steps to attempt to improve education. In 2001, the U.S. Congress passed the No Child Left Behind law which mandated standardized testing in elementary schools. In 2009, the Obama administration initiated Race to the Top, which also focused attention on standardized test scores.

At the local level, calls for reform and educational alternatives intensified. In 1991, Minnesota had passed the first charter school law in the United States, and in 1992, City Academy in St. Paul became the nation's first publicly funded, privately run charter school. By 2012, Minnesota's charter schools enrolled about 5% of the total kindergarten through 12th grade students in the state.²²⁷

Against this backdrop, Wilder Research engaged in a variety of education-focused studies.

For several years, Wilder Research staff conducted studies of programs intended to increase the interest and competencies of young people in STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). STARBASE Minnesota, part of a nationwide U.S. Department of Defense program, aimed to motivate and increase the knowledge of urban students underrepresented in STEM to explore learning and improve their skills in those areas. Caryn Mohr and Dan Mueller used a rigorous quasi-experimental design to assess program impacts, and their study revealed a variety of long-term, positive effects several years after students completed the program.²²⁸ The STEM Pathways program had goals similar to those of the STARBASE program, and Wilder Research did a rigorous evaluation of that program as well.²²⁹

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) began in 2008 as a collaboration of community organizations with the mission to build a culture of achievement in a portion of North Minneapolis, in order to assure all youth graduate from high school, ready for college. From 2009 to the present day, NAZ has contracted with Wilder Research to independently evaluate its work. The evaluation examines academic achievement (reading and math), and other measures of academic progress, and it includes community surveys and a return-on-investment analysis. NAZ used the results of the evaluation research to enhance its strategies and continually improve operations.²³⁰ When the U.S. Department of Education first announced the availability of competitive grants for the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, they included materials from Northside Achievement Zone, some of them produced by Wilder Research, to illustrate expectations for sites around the country. Sondra Samuels, the leader of NAZ, developed a national reputation for the work of NAZ.

²²⁷ Claudio Sanchez, "From A Single Charter School, A Movement Grows," NPR Weekend Edition Sunday, August 31, 2012.

²²⁸ Caryn Mohr and Dan Mueller, *STARBASE Minnesota Long-Term Follow-Up Study: Overall Results* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

²²⁹ See, for example: Edith Gozali-Lee, Dan Mueller, Anna Granias, Emma Connell, and Stephanie Peterson, *2015-16 STEM Pathways Evaluation: Final Results of a Three-Year Pilot Project of Informal STEM Education Partnership* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

²³⁰ See, for example: Natalie Alizaga and Ellen Shelton, *The State of NAZ Partnerships At the Starting Point: Results from Two Baseline Surveys of Northside Achievement Zone Partner Organizations* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010). Ellen Shelton, Greg Owen, Cael Warren, and Monica Idzelis Rothe, *NAZ 2012 Evaluation Summary* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013). Ellen Shelton, *NAZ 2016 Annual Report: Including Accomplishments Over Five Years As A Promise Neighborhood* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2017). Ellen Shelton, *Family Engagement and Learning in North Minneapolis: Emerging Picture in the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ)* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2017).

Wilder Research staff have collaborated, to the present day, in research related to the Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood. This work has included demographic studies, needs assessments (mentioned elsewhere in this history), and other research to support the planning of the initiative. They have also completed evaluation research related to the initiative.²³¹

Charter schools received attention from Wilder Research. The Saint Paul Foundation funded a case study of LIFE Prep to identify core components of the school's model, key success factors, and areas for future refinement.²³² Serving a predominantly low income and racially diverse student population, LIFE Prep earned recognition from the Minnesota Academic Excellence Foundation, the Minnesota Business Partnership, and the *Star Tribune* for the academic achievements of its students. Higher Ground Academy, which describes itself as a kindergarten through 12th grade Afro-centric charter school, also served as the focus of a case study. Wilder Research conducted a study of the school to understand, document, and share its model.²³³

A series of quantitative studies documented the academic achievement of students enrolled in New City Charter School in Minneapolis. This school, which opened in 2003, uses a “responsive classroom philosophy,” which emphasizes the integration of social and academic learning.²³⁴

Relatedly, Wilder Research produced a report that synthesized findings from 21 studies in which students voiced their perceptions about education and indicated why they chose to attend charter schools or alternative schools, or chose to drop out of school.²³⁵

Beginning in 2012, Wilder Research helped to evaluate the statewide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) initiative. PBIS has continued for a decade, managed by the Minnesota Department of Education and implemented by hundreds of schools. It offers a framework for helping schools select and organize evidence-based behavioral interventions that can enhance academic and social behavior outcomes for all students. The project team issues annual updates and special reports.²³⁶ In 2013, six students in an advanced statistics seminar at St. Olaf College obtained data from the database for this study to do a special analysis, the results of which they delivered to representatives of the Minnesota Department of Education. The students discovered through their analysis the importance of implementing the program with fidelity – which means implementation closely in accordance with the plan. Schools which implemented PBIS with fidelity had stronger positive impacts on reading achievement over a two-year period, compared with schools not implementing with fidelity.

Wilder Research examined the Minnesota Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) initiative. This initiative acts comprehensively to create many inter-connected supports that can enhance the school environment for learners to

²³¹ For example: Francie Streich, *Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood Rental Assistance Program Evaluation: First Year Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015). The Saint Paul Promise Neighborhood operates in a similar fashion to other Promise Neighborhoods around the United States. However, it never received the official formal designation as a Promise Neighborhood, along with the associated federal funding. It has existed as a program of the Wilder Foundation, with a community advisory board.

²³² Caryn Mohr, Amanda Petersen, and Dan Mueller, *LIFE Prep Charter School Case Study* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013).

²³³ Muneer Karcher-Ramos, Caryn Mohr, and Dan Mueller, *Higher Ground Academy: A Case Study* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

²³⁴ See, for example: Monzong Cha and Edith Gozali-Lee, *Student Demographics and Academic Achievement: Evaluation of New City Charter School in 2014-2015* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015).

²³⁵ Ryan Evans, *Nobody Ever Asked Me Why I Left High School...* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

²³⁶ For example, Amanda Petersen, *Winter 2020-21 PBIS Training & Implementation Fidelity Updates: Summary of Results from Cohorts 15 and 16* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021).

succeed. The Minnesota Department of Education promotes the use of MTSS in Minnesota’s public schools to increase the number of students meeting grade-level standards and graduating with skills for further education and careers.²³⁷

Activities by Wilder Research contributed to advancing Generation Next, an initiative focusing on the improvement of educational attainment by young people in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. That initiative began in 2012, spurred by community-wide perception of “an educational emergency in the Twin Cities.”

The number of young people who are from backgrounds that, on average, experience low rates of educational success is large and growing...

At every step on the educational ladder, students of color and low-income students in the Twin Cities are on the wrong side of a gaping achievement gap from their white and more affluent peers. In Minneapolis, for example, 94% of white students start kindergarten fully ready to learn, compared to 36% of Hispanic students, 63% of American Indian students, 67% of Black students and 70% of Asian students.²³⁸

Eric Kaler, the president of the University of Minnesota, and Kim Nelson, the president of the General Mills Foundation, initially co-chaired the initiative, which created networks and working groups comprised of organizations involved in supporting learning throughout the Twin Cities. Literature reviews, demographic analyses, and data collection assisted Generation Next to make decisions about where and how to focus its efforts.²³⁹ From 2012 through 2022, Wilder Research Executive Director Paul Mattessich chaired the Data Committee of Generation Next and served on its Leadership Council and Executive Committee.

Immigrants and refugees

From 2012 to 2015, Wilder Research undertook a major study of immigrants and refugees from five groups in the Twin Cities: Hmong; Karen; Latino; Liberian; and Somali. Called Speaking for Ourselves, this study partly replicated the Speaking for Themselves study conducted 15 years earlier, while it also covered additional topics and used different approaches for sampling respondents.

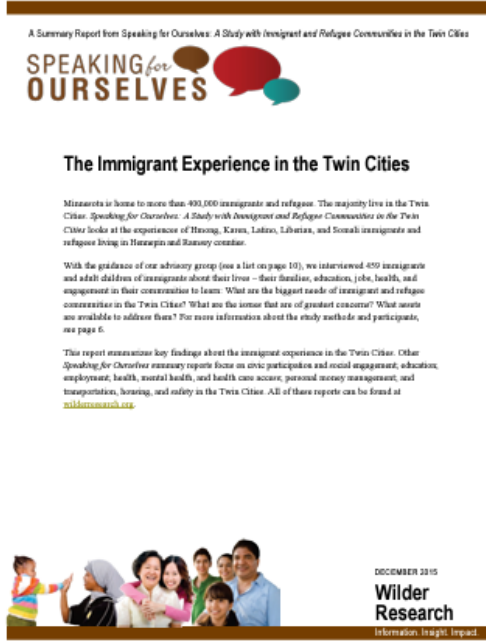
A community kick-off event on December 17, 2012, publicly set the research in motion and established broad community engagement in the research process.²⁴⁰ The study included interviews with 459 immigrants and adult children of immigrants about their families, education, jobs, health, and engagement in their communities. The study identified needs among these groups – e.g., related to health care, employment assistance, housing, and food support. It also identified assets available to address needs.

²³⁷ Edith Gozali-Lee, *Funding Minnesota Multi-Tiered System of Supports* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021).

²³⁸ University of Minnesota College Readiness Consortium, “The Case for Creating a Strive Partnership in the Twin Cities,” 2012, p. 1. Note that the initiative, first known as Twin Cities Strive, joined the national Strive network of organizations doing similar work in cities around the United States. Eventually, its name changed to Generation Next.

²³⁹ See, for example: Edith Gozali-Lee and Dan Mueller, *Early Literacy: A Review and Analysis Conducted for Generation Next* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013). Dan Mueller and Edith Gozali-Lee, *College and Career Readiness: A Review and Analysis Conducted for Generation Next* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013). Craig Helmstetter and R. T. Rybak, “Addressing 3 “social determinants” of education,” *Minnesota Compass* 2015, www.mncompass.org/data-insights/articles/addressing-3-social-determinants-education. (After completing his service as mayor of Minneapolis, Rybak became executive director of Generation Next.)

²⁴⁰ The community advisory board for the study included representatives from: Lao Assistance Center of Minnesota; Angel Eyes Foundation; Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota; Saint Paul Public Schools; Wells Fargo Foundation; The Advocates for Human Rights; HACER; University of Minnesota Medical Center, Fairview; Vietnamese Science and Cultural Center – Minnesota; Amherst H. Wilder Foundation; Minneapolis Public Schools; City of Minneapolis; African & American Friendship Association for Cooperation and Development; The SEAD Project; Pillsbury United Community – Waite House; La Asamblea de Derechos Civiles; ECHO; and Crossing Barriers.



Speaking for Ourselves report cover (2015)

Due to the difficulty of finding samples of individuals from relatively small groups within the total population, Wilder Research staff learned and used a new technique: respondent-driven sampling. This technique, which public health researchers had refined for use with small and/or hard-to-contact segments of a community, increased the feasibility of doing research with immigrant communities.

The study highlighted ideas for action. Several organizations formally committed to follow-up activities: HACER; Hennepin County Public Health; Wilder Foundation Southeast Asian Services; Twin Cities Public Broadcasting Service and ECHO; Minnesota Historical Society; The Science Museum of Minnesota; and EMERGE.²⁴¹ Results were shared at an action summit that involved these organizations, along with members of immigrant communities, and other organizations.

The *Star Tribune* recognized the knowledge that Wilder Research had developed through special studies, such as *Speaking for Ourselves*, through the work of Minnesota Compass to compile information on immigrants, and through other research conducted with and for organizations that served immigrants. Their editorial board invited Paul Mattessich to write a lead essay to a series the newspaper developed regarding immigrants in Minnesota. The essay, “A State of Immigrants,” offered an overview of the challenges and opportunities engendered by the entry of large numbers of foreign-born individuals into the communities of the state and concluded that:

Moving forward, communities with immigrant residents should strive to incorporate newcomers’ voices into the development of policies and plans. Mayors and city councils who promote values of inclusion will nourish economic and social vitality, especially noticeable in previously declining or struggling neighborhoods. Efforts to foster continued success for today’s immigrants —private and public efforts alike, collective and individual —will pay rich dividends and honor our own immigrant pasts.²⁴²

After the mid-2010s, the pace of research on immigrants and refugees slowed at Wilder Research. Nonetheless, for an international audience at The Hague, Netherlands, in 2017, staff prepared a report that blended the expertise they had developed while producing *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* with the knowledge gained from the *Speaking for Ourselves* study. The report authors suggested that the United States could benefit from models of collaboration developed in Canada. Further, in noting the strong social networks existing within immigrant populations, they recommended that organizations working with and serving these populations can increase their effectiveness by ensuring that their efforts reflect the research-based principles, identified by Wilder Research, for successful inter-organizational collaboration.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Nicole MartinRogers, *Speaking for Ourselves: Summary of Key Findings and Ideas for Action* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015). Nicole MartinRogers, *Ideas at Work: Addressing Needs and Assets in Immigrant and Refugee Communities*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016).

²⁴² Paul Mattessich, “A State of Immigrants,” *Star Tribune*, December 6, 2015.

²⁴³ Paul Mattessich, Anna Granias, and Nicole MartinRogers, “Developing Effective Supports for Immigrants and Refugees: Collaboration across Institutions and Community” (International Metropolis Conference, The Hague, Netherlands, 2017).

Also, since the mid-2010s, a limited number of needs assessments by Wilder Research have used social indicators data and survey data to analyze the well-being of immigrants.²⁴⁴

Nutrition and food access

Prior to 2009, Wilder Research staff completed very few studies that directly focused on food access. They had conducted a limited number of needs assessments with food access components, social trends analyses that related to food access, and evaluations related to food shelf programs. Then, in the early 21st century, as part of increased attention to social determinants of health (described in the following section), access to nutritionally beneficial food became a focal point for organizations with an interest in improving health and well-being.

Reports from Wilder Research covered varied dimensions of food access. Some took a local perspective; some took a statewide perspective. One looked at the situation of college students; another explained the relationship between food access and health equity. Several studies examined the nutrition-related components of Statewide Health Improvement Programs (SHIP, described in the next section). Reports typically contained recommendations for approaches that would increase access to healthy, affordable food.²⁴⁵

Public health

The earliest studies by Wilder Research – focusing on housing and health conditions in the city of Saint Paul – fell into the category of public health research. During the next 90 years, Wilder Research conducted a limited amount of public health research. Then, in about 2008, Wilder Research greatly increased its volume of work on this topic. Research related to public health stands ever since as a major portion of the total portfolio of studies completed every year.

Wilder Research engaged in a large number of projects related to the Minnesota Statewide Health Improvement Partnership (SHIP), created by the Minnesota Legislature in 2008. SHIP had the goal to work at the local level throughout the state to support community-driven solutions to reduce chronic diseases by expanding opportunities for active living, healthy eating, and tobacco-free living. Staff created more than 100 evaluation research reports, some for limited distribution and some for public distribution, describing community impacts produced by SHIP initiatives implemented by cities, counties, and other entities.²⁴⁶

A 2012 study of community health workers in four states, conducted for the American Cancer Society, examined how those public health workers serve as a link between health and social services and the residents of communities.

²⁴⁴ For example: Melissa Serafin, Melissa Adolphson, and Barite Dawud, *Well-being among New Americans in Clay County* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2022). Bunchung Ly, *Community Needs Assessment of Minnesota's Cambodian Population: A Summary of Findings from Key Informant Interviews* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2022).

²⁴⁵ For example: Bunchung Ly and Nicole MartinRogers, *Department of Indian Work: Food Shelf and American Indian Youth Enrichment Program* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021). Amanda Hane, Melanie Ferris, and Sera Kinoglu, *Food Access and Insecurity in St. Louis Park: Results from a Local Food Access Assessment* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020). Christin Lindberg and Madeleine Hansen-Connell, *Food Insecurity on College Campuses: A Review of Literature and Perspectives from the Field* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019). Paul Mattessich and Ela Rausch, *Healthy Food Access: A View of the Landscape in Minnesota and Lessons Learned from Healthy Food Financing Initiatives* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016). Melanie Ferris, *The Impact of Access to Healthy Food on Health Equity: Key Concepts and Resources* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2016). Natalie Alizaga, *SHIP School Nutrition Initiative: Final Evaluation Report* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

²⁴⁶ For example, Melanie Ferris and Amy Leite Bennett, “*Carver-Scott SHIP Executive Summary: Overview of SHIP-Funded Initiatives Implemented in Carver and Scott Counties*,” (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

The study revealed the unique role of community health workers to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery. The study report identified steps to take to sustain community health workers and strengthen the bridging they provide between care providers and care recipients, so that they become stronger agents for prevention of serious illness.²⁴⁷ Rachel Hardeman, the study's lead author, left Wilder Research to complete a Ph.D. and subsequently became a nationally recognized professor in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota.

Initiatives to prevent use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATOD) constituted a major focus for some staff in Wilder Research. The ATOD-related work included surveys, evaluation research, needs assessments, and other forms of research to support organizations and coalitions involved in prevention and treatment activities.²⁴⁸ Staff produced a toolkit to provide prevention-oriented coalitions with a set of resources to use when conducting community assessments.²⁴⁹

In both 2010 and 2015, Wilder Research published reports based on surveys conducted in 19 Minnesota counties. Through those surveys, the counties' public health department and related organizations sought to learn about the health and health habits of residents related primarily to nutrition, physical activity, and tobacco use.²⁵⁰

Over more than 10 years through the present day, Wilder Research conducted research related to Women's Recovery Services, an initiative of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division. Grantees across Minnesota provide treatment support and recovery services for pregnant and parenting women who have substance use disorders and their families. Research has examined the impacts of services provided by organizations across Minnesota. The most recent summary report revealed mixed results of the services – that is, some services produced positive impacts, others did not, with respect to sobriety, housing stability, employment, schooling, and arrests for criminal activity.²⁵¹

As a practical resource to support efforts to limit substance use among youth, Wilder Research developed a toolkit which had the purpose to help communities weave equity and cultural responsiveness into the planning and implementation of their prevention efforts. The toolkit contains tips, templates, and case studies.²⁵²

For almost a decade, Wilder Research has partnered with the East Metro Mental Health Roundtable. The Roundtable brings together leaders from hospitals, other health care organizations, social service agencies (including the Wilder Foundation), law enforcement, and government agencies who address mental health care in the Twin Cities east metro area. The activities of Wilder Research have primarily supported the Measurement Committee. This sub-committee of the Roundtable has the charge to quantify the effects of the Roundtable's efforts to reduce barriers to patient flow between hospitals and community services, better match available resources to needs, and reduce gaps in the

²⁴⁷ Rachel Hardeman and Michelle Gerrard, *Community Health Workers in the Midwest: Understanding and developing the workforce*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012).

²⁴⁸ For example, June Heineman, Maggie Skrypek, and Amy Leite Bennett, *Limiting Youth Access to Alcohol from Commercial Establishments: ATOD Planning & Implementation Grantee Progress Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011). Lida Gilbertson and Kristin Dillon, *2012 ATOD Coalition Survey Results*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013).

²⁴⁹ Melanie Ferris, Cheryl Holm-Hansen, and Laura Martell Kelly, *Assessing Community Needs and Readiness*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011).

²⁵⁰ For example, Wilder Research, *Pipestone County Data Book: 2010 Southwest/South Central Adult Health Survey*, (2010). Anna Granas and Nicole MartinRogers, *Data Book for Pipestone County: 2015 Southwest/South Central MN Adult Health Survey*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015).

²⁵¹ Jackie Aman, *Women's Recovery Services in Minnesota: Key Findings from 2017-2021*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021).

²⁵² Melissa Adolphson, Kristin Dillon, Melissa Serafin, and Jennifer Valorose, *Infusing Equity and Cultural Responsiveness in Local Youth Substance Use Prevention Efforts: Tips and Tools*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021).

continuum of care. Metrics produced for the Roundtable include health indicators, service delivery statistics, patient disposition data, and other indicators.²⁵³ The metrics have often appeared in news reports and in other documents serving as resources for needs assessment and planning with respect to mental health services.

During the 2010s, public health experts and health care deliverers increasingly recognized the significance of social determinants of health. They realized that a person’s physical and mental health, a person’s susceptibility to diseases, and the number of years that someone will likely live depend greatly on social, economic, and environmental factors, such as income, education, housing, racism, public safety, and social connections. Wilder Research staff built the analysis of social determinants of health into many of their studies, and they sought to bring knowledge to practitioners concerning the importance of social determinants for diagnosing, treating, and preventing illnesses, especially among historically underserved populations.²⁵⁴

A project conducted on behalf of United States of Care included a feasibility study to identify possible initiatives that might eliminate health inequities in Minnesota. The study focused heavily on the potential role of health care systems and health plans in addressing social determinants of health to eliminate health disparities. The final report from the study offered a “Systems Transformation Framework” to guide collective action by organizations from multiple sectors and to establish common goals.²⁵⁵

Access to care makes up an important element of the social determinants of health. The extent to which individuals can access health care can have a strong influence on physical and mental health and well-being. Wilder Research conducted research to examine access to care in general. A study of residents of Anoka County, for example, revealed that, during the year previous to the survey conducted by Wilder Research, 30% of respondents did not receive, or delayed receiving, medical care they thought that they needed. Staff also conducted studies that focused specifically on access to oral health care, sponsored by Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation.²⁵⁶

Public safety and criminal justice

During this stage in its history (2009-2022), Wilder Research approached public safety and criminal justice from several angles.

A series of studies, spanning more than a decade, reflects a longstanding interest of Wilder Research staff in the effects of parental incarceration upon families and children.²⁵⁷ This research has identified the impacts of parental incarceration with respect to mental health, chemical use, and academics among children with parents in prison.

²⁵³ For example, Melissa Serafin, Sophak Mom, and Kristin Dillon, *East Metro Mental Health Roundtable: Community Metrics: January through June 2020 Summary Statistics*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

²⁵⁴ See, for example: Melanie Ferris and Paul Mattessich, “Reducing Health Inequities: What Physicians Can Do,” *Minnesota Physician* XXVI, No. 5 (August 2012).

²⁵⁵ Melanie Ferris and Dimpho Orionzi, *The Role of Health Care in Eliminating Health Inequities in Minnesota*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

²⁵⁶ See: Edith Gozali-Lee, Emma Connell, Kerry Walsh, and Sharon Oswald, *Access to Dental Health Care for Older Adults: Promising Practices and Opportunities to Expand Care*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019). Anna Granias and Amanda Peterson, *Adult Health Status and Health Care Access in Anoka County*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019).

²⁵⁷ For example: Jessica Meyerson and Christa Otteson, *Strengthening Families Impacted by Incarceration: A Review of Current Research and Practice*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Jessica Meyerson, Christa Otteson, and Krysten Lynn Ryba-Tures, *Highlights from Childhood Disrupted: Understanding the Features and Effects of Maternal Incarceration*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2010). Julie Atella, *Mental Health Outcomes of Youth with an Incarcerated Parent in Minnesota*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015). Julie Atella, *Academic Outcomes among Youth with Incarcerated Parents in Minnesota*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015). Rebecca Shlafer and Julie Atella, *Who Has an Incarcerated Parent in Minnesota*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2014). Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, Jessica Meyerson, and Julie Atella, *Through the Eyes of a Child: Life with a Mother in Prison*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013).

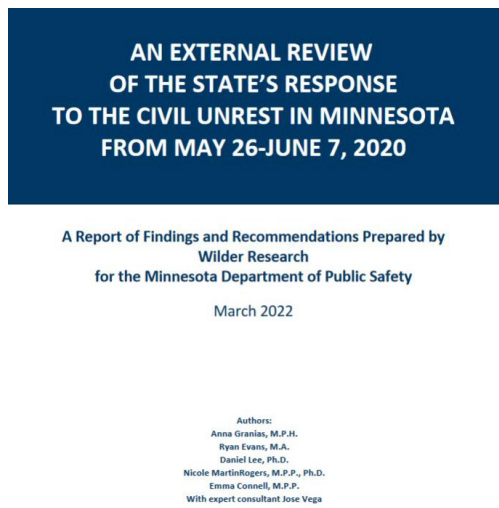
The research has provided an overview of their characteristics and needs. It has also examined services for families that include an incarcerated parent. Many studies of this topic occurred in collaboration with Volunteers of America’s national and regional offices. Some of the research contributed to the literature on evidence-based practices.

The U.S. Department of Justice funded a study of the Radius program. This research had national significance due to the uniqueness of Radius as one of the nation’s first gender responsive programs for girls in the juvenile justice system. Using longitudinal data, Wilder Research staff identified the strengths and limitations of the program, and they documented the effects of the program on girls’ relationships, self-improvement, and educational performance. The research team also documented the effects of program participation on recidivism, and they examined the potential economic savings of this type of program for government and taxpayers.²⁵⁸

In recent years, Wilder Research completed several high profile studies focusing on public safety issues locally, but with national importance.

Desire for police reform and racial justice, in the aftermath of incidents of police violence, motivated Brooklyn Park to engage Wilder Research for a literature review, survey, and focus groups that would inform that municipality’s government in its efforts to enhance their public safety practices.²⁵⁹

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women’s Task Force, created by the Minnesota Legislature, asked Wilder Research to do research to inform policy development and system reform for prevention of the “MMIW injustice” in Minnesota (the fact that Indigenous women are far more likely to become missing or be murdered than women of other races). The report lists specific changes relevant at state, Tribal, county, and local levels of government for prevention and law enforcement.²⁶⁰ The research formed the basis for legislative testimony and an op-ed. It received attention in other states and Canadian provinces that would like to make similar changes in their policies and practices, and the project staff collaborated on similar work in Utah. The report won a “Notable Document” award from the National Conference of State Legislatures.²⁶¹



At the request of the Minnesota Department of Public Safety (DPS), Wilder Research undertook a review of the state’s response to civil unrest following the murder of George Floyd. DPS requested the review in order to:

- Objectively evaluate what the state did well and did not do well.
- Identify actions and options that may have produced different, or possibly better, outcomes.
- Provide recommendations to the Commissioner of Public Safety to assist state and local governmental units, including cities and counties, in responding effectively to potential periods of regional or statewide civil unrest in the future.

Report on Minnesota’s response to civil unrest in 2020 (2022)

²⁵⁸ Julie Atella, Kristin Dillon, Lida Gilbertson, and Brittney Wagner, *Evaluation of RADIUS: A Program for Justice-Involved Girls in the Twin Cities*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015).

²⁵⁹ See, for example, Lindsay Turner, Julie Atella, Virginia Pendleton, and Sophak Mom, *Brooklyn Park: Improving Safety and Policing, Evaluation Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2021).

²⁶⁰ Nicole MartinRogers and Virginia Pendleton, *Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force: A Report to the Minnesota Legislature*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2020).

²⁶¹ “LRL Notable Documents Awards,” National Conference of State Legislatures, <https://www.ncsl.org/legislative-staff/lrl/notable-document-award>

The key findings from the review indicated both strengths in the state’s response and areas for improvement, which provided the basis for a set of recommendations. Several recommendations specifically focused on improving the state’s response to civil unrest. They emphasized the development of multi-agency coordination, better planning, more collaboration, improved communication, and other changes. Other recommendations addressed structure and process changes related to prevention of, preparation for, and recovery from, civil unrest. For example, several recommendations in the report strongly encouraged greater communication and engagement among community members, businesses, protest groups, and law enforcement.²⁶²

Expectably, stories about the report appeared extensively in the media, both within Minnesota and elsewhere. National news services emphasized the negative aspects of the state’s performance.²⁶³ As one news outlet stated:

*The report by Wilder Research, commissioned by the Department of Public Safety and made public Thursday, said the state set up a multi-agency command center too late – four days after Floyd was killed. And the center had a “chaotic beginning,” with no clear chain of command, while the city of Minneapolis continued to operate its own emergency operations center with competing law enforcement strategies.*²⁶⁴

Return-on-investment research, cost-benefit analysis, and economic impact studies

Wilder Research continued to conduct return-on-investment analyses (also referred to as cost-benefit analyses) from 2009 through 2022, either as stand-alone studies, or as components of larger studies. This type of research compares the economic and social values of the benefits of programs and policies with their associated costs. Topics included, for example, school readiness programs and supportive housing.²⁶⁵

In 2010, the Fisher Foundation in Detroit commissioned a study that demonstrated the economic value, to state government and to the public, of investing in school readiness for “just one more child at risk of academic failure in Detroit and in Michigan as a whole.”²⁶⁶ The one-child school-readiness dividend could be saved or wasted depending on the investment in early development. Using the approach designed for this study, Wilder Research staff produced similar one-child dividend estimates for Minnesota, Michigan, Ohio, and Mississippi.

In 2013, staff at Wilder Research received many requests for analyses of the economic impacts of colleges within the Minnesota State College system. They completed approximately 25 such studies.²⁶⁷

To provide insights and tools to others with an interest in quantifying the economic impacts of fatherhood programs, Wilder Research produced a report commissioned by the Fatherhood Resource and Practice Network. This report

²⁶² To review the findings and see all of the recommendations, see: Anna Granias, Ryan Evans, Daniel Lee, Nicole MartinRogers, and Emma Connell, with expert consultant Jose Vega, *An External Review of the State’s Response to the Civil Unrest in Minnesota from May 26 to June 20, 2020*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2022).

²⁶³ For example, Amy Forliti, “Report criticizes response to unrest after Floyd’s killing,” *Associated Press*, March 31, 2022. Omar Jimenez, “Report finds flaws in Minnesota state law enforcement response to George Floyd protests in 2020,” *CNN*, March 31, 2022.

²⁶⁴ Forliti, “Report criticizes.”

²⁶⁵ Richard Chase, Paul Anton, José Diaz, Nicole MartinRogers, and Ela Rausch, *Cost Savings Analysis of School Readiness in Michigan: Executive Summary*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2009). Richard Chase, Omar Da’ar, and José Diaz, *Return on Investment in Supportive Housing in Minnesota: Final Report*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2012). José Diaz, *Return On Investment in the Jeremiah Program, Summary* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2014).

²⁶⁶ Richard Chase and José Diaz, *Cost Savings of School Readiness Per Additional At-Risk Child in Detroit and Michigan* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2011), 1.

²⁶⁷ For example, José Diaz and Gabriel Pina, *The Economic Impact of Metropolitan State University* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2013).

provided a framework for estimating the monetary value of two-generation outcomes for responsible fatherhood programs. It offered a strong economic case for investing in comprehensive programs, which would include, for example, GED programming, job placement services, diversion services as an alternative to incarceration, and parenting education with play and learn groups.²⁶⁸

The Constellation Fund instituted regular grant making in 2019 to support poverty-fighting nonprofit service providers in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul area. That organization enlisted Wilder Research as a partner. Wilder Research staff participated in the development of metrics to assess the impacts of programs receiving financial resources and other types of assistance from the Constellation Fund.

Supported by a grant award from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Wilder Research staff collaborated with staff from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis to do an extensive study of metropolitan areas in the United States. The study had the goal to determine how the health of the residents in a metropolitan area influences economic activities in that area. Analyzing census, health, and economic data that spanned a 15-year period, the study produced evidence that worse population health in metropolitan areas is linked to a less robust regional economy. Higher rates of morbidity led over time, for example, to lower labor force participation and lower household income among a region's residents. At the invitation of Dr. Jerome Adams, the surgeon general of the United States, the research team presented the findings from this study to a national group of government, business, and nonprofit leaders in Washington, D.C., in November 2019.²⁶⁹

Strategic business areas

In about 2017, Wilder Research formalized a process for focusing on specific topics – some of them topics on which staff had already worked extensively, some of them topics that seemed to merit exploration. Groups of staff could coalesce around specific topics, called strategic business areas or SBAs, which received special attention internally and special promotion externally.

The creation of strategic business areas had multiple goals. For one, participation in the SBAs would strengthen researchers' capacity and effectiveness to address specific topics. This included the development of topical expertise, refinement of methodological skills, and enhancement of connections among stakeholders who shared interests in a topic. Relatedly, the SBAs had the goal to open pathways within Wilder Research for mid-career researchers to assume more autonomy and responsibility for developing research initiatives which interested them and which would have beneficial impacts on communities. SBAs also had the goal to increase the external recognition of staff in Wilder Research as “go-to” people for doing research on the topics on which the SBAs focused.

Staff considered and tested various topics. By 2021, nine topics had formal recognition and a small amount of seed funding which they could receive annually: aging; arts, culture, and informal education; community safety and criminal justice; education, trainings, webinars, and workshops; food access and environmental sustainability; health care, health plans, managed care; mental and chemical health; data-informed decision-making; and trauma-informed research. Meanwhile, alongside these strategic business areas, Wilder Research still continued to pursue other topics.

²⁶⁸ Richard Chase, *Potential Monetary Value of Responsible Fatherhood Program Outcomes for Fathers and Children* (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019).

²⁶⁹ Paul Mattessich, Ela Rausch, Emma Connell, Mark Anton, Michael Williams, and José Diaz, *Linking Health and Economic Prosperity: A Study of U.S. Metro Areas*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2019).

COVID-19 research

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in several research initiatives, primarily directed by the Minnesota Compass team in Wilder Research. As mentioned earlier, in partnership with WCCO-TV news in 2020, Compass mapped areas of the Twin Cities at highest risk of severe COVID-19.

To learn more about some of the impacts of the pandemic on residents of Minnesota, the Family Housing Fund and Wilder Research partnered to analyze unemployment and housing instability data. Methods included quantitative analysis of DEED unemployment data and review of existing cost-burden and housing stability data.²⁷⁰ An op-ed by Nicole MartinRogers, along with University of Minnesota researchers and Tribal and state leaders, in the *Star Tribune* shed light on the impacts of COVID-19 on American Indians.²⁷¹

Wilder Foundation program evaluation

By 2010, the involvement of Wilder Research staff in evaluation research for Wilder’s programs had declined substantially. Limited, small studies occurred in many programs. The Foundation created an evaluation fund of approximately \$200,000 per year to support some of those studies. That funding stopped in 2022. Some Wilder Research staff participated in the Wilder Outcomes Task Force which advised on the development of logic models and evaluation designs for programs.

Service gap study

Beginning in 2014, Wilder Research engaged in a multi-year project to identify service gaps, at the request of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. The goal, as mandated by the Legislature, was to identify how services are meeting needs for people with disabilities, older adults, and children living with mental illness. In a first study, Wilder Research gathered information through surveys and other means to identify and measure gaps in service around the state.

To increase the impacts of that research initiative, Wilder Research then added an additional dimension: action planning. Over the course of two additional two-year study cycles, Wilder Research developed a process by which the state and collaborating partners reviewed the information on gaps and then developed action plans to address those gaps. This led to the development of comprehensive strategies for addressing gap-producing issues within the system of care. The strategies reflected the input of counties, Tribes, managed care organizations, service providers, people who use services, and the Department of Human Services. Mary Olsen Baker, from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, viewed the result of this work very positively:

*The collaboration with Wilder Research has helped to streamline the process while developing broader stakeholder engagement and enthusiasm for this effort.*²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Stephanie Nelson-Dusek, Justin Hollis, and Anne Li, “Housing and Unemployment: The Twin Cities’ Hardest-Hit Neighborhoods One Year into the Pandemic,” (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research and Family Housing Fund, 2021).

²⁷¹ Nicole MartinRogers, Elizabeth Wrigley-Field, Sarah Garcia, Shannon Geshick, and Dan Milbridge, “American Indians in Minnesota experience worse COVID impacts than reported,” *Star Tribune*, December 15, 2020.

²⁷² Wilder Foundation, *2018 Annual Report*, 7.

Other activities

Supporting organizational change in the Wilder Foundation

In 2015, Paul Mattessich collaborated with Kristine Martin, the Wilder Foundation vice president for Wilder Center for Communities, to form the Program Evaluation Learning Team (the PELT). The team consisted of a cross-section of members from throughout the Foundation, including several staff from Wilder Research. The PELT focused attention on results of evaluation studies of Wilder Programs and related research. It offered a forum for Wilder’s programs to exchange information on program-related research and to discuss opportunities for improving their operations.

A critical history of the Wilder Foundation

Wilder Research staff partnered with others inside and outside of the Wilder Foundation to write a “critical history” of the Foundation. This history had the purpose to place context around the activities and achievements of Amherst H. Wilder – namely a context of settler colonialism wherein Wilder and others of his time profited from an inequitable system which generated wealth at the expense of marginalized populations. The report explicates how Amherst Wilder’s businesses affected Indigenous people and people who were immigrants or enslaved.

The Wilder Foundation’s Executive Team hoped that the history would support the ongoing efforts of the Foundation to plan and implement its actions with major attention to equity and the correction of injustice. In 2022, the Foundation placed the report on its website, explaining that, in order to meet its aspirations as “an organization working toward a future where all people have opportunities to thrive, we must understand how the Foundation’s origins, history and role in community inform our work and relationships today.”²⁷³

Within Wilder Research, Research Librarian Amanda Eggers supplied source materials from the Wilder archives and collaborated in maintaining historiographical standards for the report. Eggers played a liaison role with two professionals under contract: Paige Mitchell, who did the research and writing for the report; and Brenda Child, who wrote the introduction. Other Wilder staff contributed as well.

Supporting research accountability at the University of Minnesota

In 2004, a patient died while participating in a clinical research project conducted by the Psychiatry Department at the University of Minnesota. The circumstances of the patient’s death raised serious ethical concerns. In subsequent years, additional concerns arose regarding ethical lapses and conflicts of interest in research activities of members of the Psychiatry Department. Independent reviews of the situation led the University of Minnesota to suspend all psychiatry research, pending adequate resolution of well-documented problems. In 2015, a former governor of Minnesota, Arne Carlson, publicly called for the University of Minnesota president to resign over the matter.²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Paige Mitchell and Brenda Child, *Toward a Critical History: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Foundation, 2020).

²⁷⁴ Michelle Griffith and Dylan Miettinen, “Fifteen years ago, a young man died by suicide during a University clinical trial. What has changed since?” *Minnesota Daily*, December 12, 2019.

The independent reviewers made a recommendation, approved by the Faculty Senate and the University's Board of Regents, to create a Community Oversight Board. This board would include members, mostly independent of the University, with expertise in research and/or treatment that involves vulnerable patients.

In 2015, the University invited Paul Mattessich to recruit and chair the board. Mattessich did so until his retirement, with communications and logistics assistance from Wilder Research staff members, Nina Eagin and Ann Somers, as well as support from University of Minnesota staff member, Bethany Hansen. The board reviewed the work of several academic departments engaged in research, solicited community input, and delivered recommendations for improving the University's relationships with the community and the relationships of researchers with patients and research study participants.

Innovations in communication

Along with the Wilder Foundation's Communications department, the communications staff of Wilder Research increased the use of social media during this stage of the history of Wilder Research. Use of Facebook and Twitter and posting of research materials on the internet with links distributed to potential users of that research – all became increasingly common.

In 2018, Wilder Research instituted a podcast, Talking Through the Numbers. Each episode focused on a specific study or topic, and it ranged in length from about 22 to 35 minutes. Each episode included a Wilder Research staff person and one to two guests from partner organizations. Paul Mattessich served as moderator for each episode. Mattessich had two goals for the podcast series: first, to make information widely available and second, to strengthen alliances between Wilder Research and current and potential partners. Listeners could access the podcasts on SoundCloud, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.

The management of Wilder Research did not make publication of research in professional journals a high priority. Nonetheless, some staff had a strong interest in producing and publishing research that would have value broadly for researchers and practitioners. Previous sections of this history mentioned some examples. During this latest stage of the history of Wilder Research, several Wilder Research staff took opportunities to publish in professional journals, both as a means to advance knowledge within professional sectors and as a means to build the national reputation of Wilder Research.²⁷⁵ In some cases, Wilder Research staff collaborated as co-authors with staff from Wilder Programs or staff from organizations that partnered with Wilder Research.

For similar reasons, Wilder Research staff occasionally contributed essays to print and online newspapers, related to significant social issues or to the results of studies conducted by Wilder Research. These essays helped to forge connections to community leaders and thought leaders.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ See, for example: Joseph E. Gaugler, Deborah Pestka, Heather Davila, Rebecca Sales, Greg Owen, Sarah A. Baumgartner, Rocky Shook, Jane Cunningham, and Maureen Kenny, "The Complexities of Family Caregiving at Work: A Mixed-Methods Study," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 87, no. 4 (2018). Ebony L. Ruhland, Laurel Davis, Julie Atella, and Rebecca J. Schlafer, "Externalizing Behavior Among Youth With a Current or Formerly Incarcerated Parent," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 64, no. 1(2019). Paul W. Mattessich and Ela J. Rausch, "Cross-sector collaboration to improve community health: A view of the current landscape," *Health Affairs*, 2014. Paul W. Mattessich, Daniel P. Mueller, and Cheryl A. Holm-Hansen, "Managing for Program Improvement at the Wilder Foundation," *New Directions for Evaluation* 121(2009). Paul Mattessich, "Social Capital and Community Building," in *An Introduction to Community Development*, ed. Rhonda Phillips and Robert Pittman (New York: Routledge, 2014). Nicole MartinRogers, Ryan Evans, and Paul Mattessich, "Foundation Support of Immigrant Communities: Insights from a Survey of Immigrants in Minnesota's Twin Cities," *Foundation Review* 8, no. 3(2016).

²⁷⁶ See, for example: Owen, Greg, "What have we learned from 30 years of studying homelessness in Minnesota?" *MinnPost*, June 1, 2015.

Wilder Research productivity, structure, and size in the 21st Century

During the first two decades of the 2000s, the number of staff in Wilder Research, both full and part-time regular²⁷⁷ positions, fluctuated between about 80 and 100. This reflected growth from earlier periods – e.g., 18 in 1983, 29 in 1985, and 40 in 1995. The staff roster, as of mid-2022, the end point of this history, listed 76 individuals employed by Wilder Research. It appears in a table which indicates the name of each, their position, and year hired.

Complete demographic information on Wilder Research staff does not exist for all the years throughout its history, but demographic statistics do exist for some years. In 1983, two-thirds of Wilder Research staff members were female and 5% persons of color. In 2022, Wilder Research staff were approximately 80% female and 18% persons of color.

As of 2022, the Wilder Research Library contains 2,655 reports written by Wilder Research staff with publication dates between 2000 and 2009. Anyone can access more than 1,100 of those reports; the remainder are written for specialized or more limited audiences. The Library contains 3,977 reports and related products with publication dates of 2010 through 2022, with approximately 1,600 of them accessible to anyone, and the remainder for specialized or more limited audiences.

Wilder Research Staff – July 2022

Staff member	Position	Joined WR	Staff member	Position	Joined WR
Melissa Adolfson	Research Scientist 2	2019	Sera Kinoglu	Research Scientist 1	2014
Anna Alba	Communications Specialist	2019	Tshiacha Lee	Research Associate 1	2021
Jackie Aman	Research Scientist 2	2013	Anne Li	Research Associate 3	2019
Ryan Ander-Evans	Research Scientist 1	2013	Christin Lindberg	Research Associate 3	2012
Mark Anton	Data Analysis Manager	2001	Allison Liuzzi	Research Manager	2012
Julie Atella	Research Manager	2008	Heather Loch	Library Services Manager	1993
Carrie Au-Yeung	Research Associate 3	2021	Bunchung Ly	Research Associate 2	2018
Jessie Austin	Research Associate 3	2019	Nicole MartinRogers	Research Scientist 3	2002
Barry Bloomgren, Jr.	Research Analyst	2015	Paul Mattessich	Consulting Scientist	1978
Walker Bosch	Research Analyst	2011	Ryan McArdle	Administrative Specialist	2002-
Chris Bray	Research Scientist 3	2020	Jennifer McCleary	Research and Development Supervisor	2022-

²⁷⁷ Staff in “regular” positions include people employed for an indefinite length of time, with no established termination date. This contrasts with people in “temporary” positions who serve for a limited length of time – usually during a number of weeks or months when a research project requires staff with their skills. The number of temporary staff positions can vary greatly within and across years. Those positions are not reflected in any of the numbers described in this section.

Staff member	Position	Joined WR	Staff member	Position	Joined WR
Heather Britt	Executive Director	2022	Maureen McGovern	Communications Specialist	2020
Leanna Browne	Data Collection Specialist	2018	Shannon McLevish	Senior Financial Manager	2018
Megan Chmielewski	IT Analyst 2	2011	Julia Miller	Research Associate 2	2019
Jen Collins	Senior Administrative Specialist	2016	Sophak Mom	Research Associate 2	2014
Marilyn Conrad	Admin/Business Manager	1986	Dan Mueller	Consulting Scientist	1981
Phil Cooper	IT Manager	1981	Christina Munoz-Pinon	Research Assistant	2022
Barite Dawud	Research Associate 1	2021	Audrey Mutanhaurwa	Research Assistant	2022
Allison Devney	Data Collection Specialist	2016	Stephanie Nelson-Dusek	Research Scientist 2	2012
Kristin Dillon	Associate Director of Research	2008	Greg Owen	Consulting Scientist	1981
Amanda Eggers	Research Librarian	2007	Amanda Petersen	Research Scientist 2	2012
Rachel Fields	Research Librarian	2015	Margaret Peterson	Data Collection Specialist	1999
Sarah Garcia	Research Scientist 1	2022	Maria Robinson	Research Associate 3	2018
Michelle Gerrard	Senior Research Manager	2000	Miguel Salazar	Data Collection Specialist	2004
Kyla Goux	Research Associate 1	2021	Rebecca Sales	Research Scientist 2	2011
Edith Gozali-Lee	Research Scientist 3	1995	Liz Schiferl	Research Intern 1	2022
Anna Granias	Research Scientist 2	2015	Lisa Sell	IT Analyst 2	1996
Briellen Griffin	Research Scientist 1	2021	Melissa Serafin	Research Scientist 1	2016
Thalia Hall	Research Associate 2	2003	Ellen Shelton	Research Scientist 3	1997
Caitlin Hamrock	Research Scientist 2	2021	Ann Somers	Senior Administrative Specialist	2017
Maddie Hansen	Research Scientist 1	2014	Dan Swanson	Data Collection Manager	1998
Katherine Harter	Data Collection Specialist	2016	Austin Thao	Research Associate 2	2022
Justin Hollis	Research Scientist 2	2018	Jessica Tokunaga	Research Associate 3	2018
Sheri Holm	Sr. Communications Specialist	2019	Karen Ulstad	Research Associate 2	1984
Wendy Huckaby	Communications Manager	2016	Jennifer Valorose	Research Manager	2008
Monica Idzelis Rothe	Research Scientist 3	1997	Kerry Walsh	Sr. Communications Specialist	2007
Nora Johnson	Research Scientist 1	2012	Cael Warren	Research Scientist 1	2011
Alissa Jones	Associate Director of Operations	2022	Piere Washington	Research Associate 3	2022

COVID-19

On March 31, 2020, the staff of Wilder Research opened their email to discover a jarring message.

WR colleagues,

All areas of the Foundation are making difficult decisions about temporary staffing adjustments. Based on the current situation, I have made the decision to reduce hours for some of our staff and furlough a few. Their names appear below. Supervisors have spoken to each employee directly affected by this decision, and I want you all to be aware as well.

There is never a good time for decisions like this – the COVID-19 crisis affects us all – including colleagues we care about. The harsh reality is that we must take these measures now to make sure Wilder is here well into the future.

Let's find ways we can support and connect with our colleagues affected by these decisions.

The work of Wilder Research has never been more important. Despite the challenges ahead, we will get through this together.

If you have any questions or comments, feel free to get in touch.

Thank you.

Paul

Several weeks earlier, Wilder Research staff had begun to perform their duties outside of Wilder Center as much as possible. By the end of March, only those staff whose positions required onsite presence remained working at the building. Videoconferencing for all meetings became the norm.²⁷⁸

At the time of the March 31st email, Wilder Research reduced the hours of 22 people and furloughed four people – which in total amounted to just over 30% of the total staff. Great uncertainty faced the Wilder Research team in two respects. On the one hand, many projects needed to pause; some had cancellations. Research partners and clients needed to assess their capacity to proceed with work. On the other hand, personal circumstances and expectations for each staff person and their family members could not easily be predicted – due to, for example, infection by the virus (self or family member), school closures, remote learning for children, or child care closures.

In subsequent months, schedule adjustments occurred for many staff, to adapt to the evolving exigencies of pandemic life. Staff gradually returned to a full-time or part-time status similar to before the pandemic, although they usually worked remotely and frequently needed to work at different times of day than they had worked previously. Wilder set up several ad hoc, temporary committees to help improve work interaction and to reduce the complications of remote work. These included committees for technology, health and safety, work culture/climate/expectations, and peer mentoring.

Within approximately six months, all staff who wanted to resume their previous duties and hours did so, with the exception of one furloughed staff member whose position was eliminated because it involved services Wilder Research no longer needed for in-office computer technology.

²⁷⁸ The Wilder Foundation's Information Technology Department officially adopted WebEx for videoconferences. Many staff also used Zoom on a frequent basis, and occasionally other videoconferencing software.

Associate directors: operations and research

By the end of 2021, several changes in senior leadership had occurred. Dan Mueller, the long-time associate director, had retired a few years earlier. Richard Chase, a senior research manager who expanded the reputation of Wilder Research and contributed significantly to the development of products and services, had also retired. Matt Kinney, director of operations, retired in 2021. Nicole MartinRogers, a senior research manager, transitioned to a part-time research scientist role. Phil Cooper, who had spent over four decades in leadership of information technology activities, data analysis, and other quality control functions, transitioned to a revised, part-time role. These personnel changes, plus the anticipated retirement of the executive director scheduled for July 2022, precipitated a decision to create two associate director positions.

An associate director for operations would assume overall leadership of the core units. Alissa Jones joined Wilder Research to take this position in February 2022. Jones' experience included research and operational oversight in academic, for-profit, and nonprofit research institutions.

An associate director for research would assume overall leadership of the research units. A search that produced internal and external candidates led to the promotion of Kristin Dillon, a research manager at Wilder Research, into this position in February 2022.

Cross-cultural competence and diversity, equity, inclusion

In the early 2000s, Wilder Research began to take a more critical look at the cross-cultural competence of its research activities and then began to look at its own culture. A cross-cultural research group formed and met regularly to discuss how Wilder Research could continuously adapt its methods – broadly defined to include stakeholder engagement, data collection techniques, statistical analysis, and reporting procedures – to optimally conduct research in an increasingly diverse environment. The work of that group led to Wilder Research-wide discussions and training at staff meetings. It also yielded written documents with guidelines to enhance the quality of research projects.²⁷⁹

Additionally, this group examined recruitment and hiring processes and produced a document which offered guidelines for removing bias. The principles and techniques that it recommended led to the revision of procedures for advertising positions, designing application forms, reviewing applications, conducting interviews, and making final hiring decisions. The Wilder Foundation's Human Resources Department adopted some of the document's recommendations to support the shaping of policies throughout the Foundation, and other organizations which wanted to improve their employee recruitment activities occasionally made requests to learn what Wilder Research had done.²⁸⁰

A 2016 survey of Wilder Research staff sought to provide information that would assist Wilder Research to recruit, hire, and retain a diverse workforce. Three quarters of the staff said that they wanted to continue working at Wilder Research for a long time. They enjoyed the work and the learning that comes with the work. They liked their colleagues. They felt that the work of Wilder Research benefited people's lives. Those who felt they would not like to work at Wilder Research for a long time most frequently gave reasons of a stressful workload, lack of advancement opportunities, and bureaucracy. Based on the survey, a Welcoming Workplace Environment Committee developed

²⁷⁹ In 2012, the cross-cultural research working group consisted of: Dan Mueller, Cheryl Bourgeois, Muneer Karcher-Ramos, Kristin Dillon, Melanie Ferris, Laura Schauben, and Ellen Shelton. One of its products was "Cross-Cultural Research at Wilder: Guiding Questions," Wilder Research, 2012.

²⁸⁰ Cross Cultural Research Work Group, *Report of the CCR Work Group 1.A: Increase the Racial & Cultural Diversity of WR Staff – Remove Barriers in the Hiring Process*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2015).

recommendations which informed strategic planning efforts in Wilder Research and which led to changes in policies and operations over the next five years.²⁸¹

In 2019, Wilder Research formed a design team to examine information gathered through the welcoming workplace survey, the aggregated results of the scores of Wilder Research staff on the Intercultural Development Inventory (which the Wilder Foundation administered periodically to all of its staff), and other activities to obtain insights about the culture of Wilder Research. The design team worked with a consultant to formulate recommendations, some of which led to additional changes in policies and operations.²⁸²

Zeta unit for Research Associates

In early 2021, with input from the Wilder Research Management Team, Paul Mattessich determined that Wilder Research could benefit from the creation of a new unit for research associates and a new process for assigning research associates to projects. Beginning in July 2021, existing and new staff in research associate positions became members of a new team: the Zeta Unit.

Mattessich expected that the new unit would offer a unique training opportunity for individuals entering the research profession, while at the same time it would strengthen Wilder Research overall to carry out its mission. Staff in research associate positions could have a high-level, well-planned, comprehensive learning experience to develop their skills for present and future positions. In addition, those staff would take on assignments in a variety of projects, to round out their development. The existence of the unit reflected values of diversity, equity, and inclusion by enabling diverse staff to obtain the necessary experience to advance in their careers. Kristin Dillon, a research manager at the time of the unit's creation, and Dan Swanson, the manager of the survey center, stepped forward to co-manage the Zeta Unit during its first year. Subsequently, Jennifer McCleary joined Wilder Research to serve as the manager.

²⁸¹ Welcoming Workplace Environment Committee, *Wilder Research Welcoming Workplace*, (Saint Paul, MN: Wilder Research, 2017). Members of the committee were Ryan Evans, Cheryl Holm-Hansen, Sophak Mom, Amanda Petersen, Laura Schauben, and Francie Streich.

²⁸² The design team consisted of Edith Gozali-Lee, Jessica Tokunaga, Anne Li, Anna Alba, Leanna Browne, Maria Robinson, Sophak Mom, Miguel Salazar, Beaty Thao, and Thalia Hall.

What does history say about the success of Wilder Research?

During the 105 years following its first study, Wilder Research appears to have acted productively in accord with the values and the vision of the original board of directors of the Wilder Foundation. The members of that board sought information to inform action. They solicited community input before making decisions. History attests to the large number of research projects carried out by Wilder Research over more than a century, along with the use and impacts of those projects. Does history suggest what contributed to the success of Wilder Research?

The historical evidence elevates a number of factors. These include external contributors to success – that is features of the social, economic, and political environment which stimulated and supported the growth of Wilder Research. They also include internal contributors to success – that is, features of the leadership, staff, and culture of Wilder Research which propelled the organization forward. Consideration of those factors can assist in interpretation of the past, and it can provide insights to those who seek to use history to inform their approaches to doing social research in the future, whether under the auspices of Wilder Research or elsewhere.

External factors contributing to the success of Wilder Research

Several factors created a demand for the services that an organization such as Wilder Research could provide.

External factors

- Community interest in understanding health and social needs
- Desire to improve the coordination and quality of services
- Philanthropic resources – finances, plus advice

Internal factors

- Quality plus relevance of research studies
- Mission focused
- Adaptability – innovative source of information
- Creative quantitative and qualitative methods
- Independence and multi-partisanship

Community interest in understanding health and social needs

Interest in quantification of community needs generated a call for research at three major inflection points: at the inception of Wilder Research in 1917; at the steep expansion of its activities in the early 1940s; and at the resumption of its operations in 1976 after a seven year pause.

Saint Paul's leaders invited Carol Aronovici to conduct a study that would document the extent of challenges the city's residents faced with respect to health and housing. That led to the creation of Wilder Research. Research activities slowed in the 1920s and 1930s. Then in 1941, a new director assumed leadership of Wilder Research and expanded its work in response to concern about social issues, such as juvenile crime, and in response to perceptions of possible, negative impacts of war time on families and communities. During the 1960s, other research organizations established themselves, and Wilder Research ceased its focus on documenting community needs and suspended external studies. In 1976, it returned to such work when philanthropic and community leaders felt that they lacked adequate information to plan and fund services for the changing population.

Interest in understanding health and social needs precipitated a variety of long-term initiatives and short-term studies. Minnesota Compass, a prominent initiative of Wilder Research, took shape as a result of the resolve of community leaders to collaborate with researchers to identify and measure significant elements of community well-being. After seeing what the measures told them, the leaders set objectives to implement action for the common good. Public and private institutions have supported Compass financially and provided other resources, as a result of their interest in understanding health and social needs.

The homeless studies from the 1980s onward had the goal of quantifying needs among people who lack permanent housing. During the most recent decade of activity at Wilder Research, interest in understanding community health needs has generated the large number of health needs assessments which Wilder Research staff conducted for hospitals, along with health impact assessments which staff conducted to examine the health implications of various policies and programs.

Clearly, community interest in understanding health and social needs has had a major influence on the operations of Wilder Research and on the types of studies which it has conducted. It has had positive impacts on the level of support needed to sustain the research enterprise.

Desire to improve the coordination and quality of services

Associated with an interest in understanding health and social needs, community leaders for more than a century have often expressed a desire to improve the coordination and quality of services for the community. In response, Wilder Research carried out studies to provide information and tools useful for planning and monitoring service delivery.

Esther Flint's 1919 study of health conditions and health services described the needs of Saint Paul's population, and it documented the types and amounts of services which agencies delivered at the time. Based on those data, Flint recommended steps to improve coordination, reduce inefficiency, and establish systems for monitoring, planning, and guiding service delivery into the future. That study responded directly to community leaders' concerns about the need for better overall management of the quality and accessibility of services.

Efforts to improve the coordination of services gave rise at Wilder Research to the design of census tract street index reports (80 years ago), inventories of health and human services (throughout the life span of Wilder Research), and tools and information on the Minnesota Compass website (during the past 20 years).

Questions raised nationally about how to develop effective strategies to improve the impacts of services motivated staff to publish books. In particular, interest in fostering collaboration among service-delivery organizations led Wilder Research staff to produce two significant resources: a book identifying research-based factors that promote the success of collaboration and a tool, the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory, which agencies can use to improve initiatives they conduct in common with other agencies.

Staff of Wilder Research, from the leaders of the housing and health studies of the early 20th century, to the leaders of the homeless studies of the early 21st century, have acted on requests from legislators and other public officials to draft legislation, program guides, and policies related to the funding of services.

Demand for studies that evaluate the effectiveness of programs influenced Wilder Research to pursue that type of work. Especially during the most recent 40 years, the historical record demonstrates the large number of such studies

conducted on human service programs of many different types. Contracts with organizations to evaluate their services, and contracts with foundations and government to evaluate the services of organizations receiving their funding, financed a portion of the growth in the number of Wilder Research staff.

Concurrent with increased demand for studies to evaluate the effectiveness of programs, the field of program evaluation evolved significantly from the 1970s onward. An internationally recognized leader in that field, Michael Quinn Patton, published, taught, and did research based in Minnesota. He influenced the development in Minnesota of a professional culture which enhanced the expertise of researchers in the state. The Minnesota Evaluation Association offered a means for researchers to develop their program evaluation skills. Greg Owen and Paul Mattessich played major leadership roles, including serving terms as president, to bring that organization into prominence during the 1980s. Nicole MartinRogers also served as president during a later decade. Access to professional tools and participation in professional development activities contributed to the capacity of Wilder Research to address the need for social research.

Philanthropic resources – finances, plus advice

Wise counsel from the Russell Sage Foundation encouraged the initial Wilder board of directors to pursue the path that led to the development of Wilder Research. From that time onward, private, community, and corporate foundations provided both advice and financial resources to support research activities. Without such support, Wilder Research would likely not have taken root and grown in size and scope.

The William T. Grant Foundation, established in 1938, has the mission to support research that improves the lives of young people. Within a few years of its founding, that foundation provided funding for research on Saint Paul's families and children. It enhanced the climate for research conducted in Saint Paul by Wilder Research. In turn, that led to nationally recognized publications which generated greater interest and further funding. Other national foundations have financially supported Wilder Research throughout its history, including larger foundations such as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and smaller foundations such as the Irving Harris Foundation in Chicago.

Minnesota Compass and the Minnesota Homeless Study would not exist in their present form without financial support from foundations. Several foundations have consistently provided grants and have participated in advisory committees – for example, the Saint Paul and Minnesota Foundation, McKnight Foundation, and Minneapolis Foundation. For research initiatives throughout Minnesota, on a variety of topics since the 1970s, foundations such as the Bush Foundation, The Blandin Foundation, and the Northwest Area Foundation have provided support. Corporate foundations, such as The 3M Foundation, H.B. Fuller Foundation, The Saint Paul Companies Foundation, and the Wells Fargo Foundation, have donated funds for research, but have also often provided in-kind resources, such as printing, employee volunteers, and supplies for studies.

As history illustrates, philanthropic foundations have directly supported research activities through financial grants and in-kind resources. They have also facilitated the growth of research by encouraging the use of data in careful planning to create social policies and human service programs.

Internal factors contributing to the success of Wilder Research

Quality plus relevance of research studies

As a hallmark, the most successful and impactful studies by Wilder Research involved the application of high quality social scientific methods to issues considered highly relevant for enhancing community well-being or for improving the effectiveness of human service programs. Quality and relevance appear as attributes of the work of Wilder Research from the health and housing study of 1917, to the studies of social casework in the 1940s, to the wide-ranging research projects of the first two decades of the 2000s.

As salient social issues arose over the years – related to education, public health, housing, criminal justice, and other topics – pressing questions emerged regarding how best to establish policies and develop effective human service programs. Wilder Research contemporaneously implemented studies to address those questions. It did so using social science methods likely to have the greatest reliability. The research thereby achieved credibility in the eyes of potential users of its findings. The design process for studies, which included paying attention to the most suitable social science methods and obtaining input from constituencies interested in the studies, maximized the probability that research data would lead to action. Respect for the work led to wide use, even if those who disliked a study’s findings occasionally expressed criticism.

Professionally, the research leaders at Wilder Research had extensive training and credentials. Beginning in 1917, almost all of the research leaders had doctorates. Many earned national, even international, reputations for their expertise – which serves as independent testament to the quality of their achievements.

Mission focused

The work completed by Wilder Research throughout its lifespan has evinced a consistent pursuit of a mission to improve community well-being. Wilder Research has operated with nonprofit status, and it has viewed its primary audiences as nonprofit organizations, government organizations, and community groups. It has collaborated with partners who share similar interests.

Two of the longest lasting, and most visible, initiatives of Wilder Research exemplify the mission focus. The Minnesota Homeless Study has sought to produce insights and offer solutions regarding homelessness – increasing the effectiveness of the network of public and private organizations seeking to solve society’s challenges in caring for people who lack suitable, permanent housing. Minnesota Compass has sought to strengthen the capacity of individuals and organizations of all types to understand and measure how well communities function. That initiative’s information and analyses support the implementation of strategies, policies, and programs to enable communities to thrive.

Staff competencies have reflected the mission focus over 100-plus years. Beginning with Carol Aronovici and his research team, the personnel at Wilder Research have carried the constellation of technical skills necessary for a successful research enterprise – research design, data collection, analysis, production, and others. They have applied those skills in a nonprofit setting for the purpose of achieving positive impacts for community well-being. History shows that the expertise of staff, their orientation toward community well-being, and the trust they built with research project partners produced requests for more and more research.

Adaptability – innovative source of information

Over the years, Wilder Research stepped forward when a need arose for information about social conditions or about human service programs. Wilder Research often grew by filling a niche that others did not fill. Sometimes, members of the community framed a research question or expressed interest in obtaining information on a topic; sometimes, Wilder Research staff identified research of potential value, which the community then accepted as important.

Directories of services, produced from the early 20th century to the early 21st century, helped to foster understanding of the capacity of community institutions to meet needs, and they made the process of service delivery more efficient. Community studies of the 1970s and 1980s filled an information vacuum and supported the development of policies and programs for aging people, children, and others. Computerized record systems assisted charitable organizations to plan, design, and deliver services in an optimal fashion. The homelessness studies, spanning three decades, brought coherence to the issues faced by people without permanent housing. Policymakers, service deliverers, advocates, and others could build coalitions or work independently, based on facts, not myths or stereotypes.

Throughout a quarter century, Minnesota Compass, one of the most visible efforts of Wilder Research, launched and maintained a system that tracked key measures of community well-being and made those measures easily accessible, first on paper and then through a website. In addition, Compass provided synthetic insights on the implications of trends in those measures, for the population as a whole and for different groups, based on characteristics such as geography, race, and income.

Conversely, throughout its history Wilder Research has chosen to sunset activities no longer crucial for it to manage. For example, after taking over responsibility from the University of Minnesota for the Census Tract Index in the 1940s, Wilder Research produced it until 1969, and then stopped issuing that publication when it no longer provided value. Research staff in the 1990s ceased providing consultation on computerized client records systems as computer technology and software packages became more widely available, and other consultants came into existence. After successfully managing a complex collaboration of agencies to establish the Homeless Management Information System in Minnesota in the early 2000s, Wilder Research passed that initiative to another entity.

As an extreme form of sunsetting, Wilder Research maintained minimal operations, even ceased operating, during two time periods identified in this history. Based on the available evidence, at least two factors that influenced decisions to pause operations were a lack of a strong, perceived need for unique activities that Wilder Research could accomplish and the availability of other organizations who could carry out the research that the Wilder Foundation considered necessary.

Creative quantitative and qualitative methods

The ability of Wilder Research staff to use up-to-date methods for gathering and analyzing information seems to have contributed to the impacts of its research. Though perhaps primitive by today's standards, the first study ever completed by Wilder Research attempted accurate depiction of health and housing conditions through effective survey sampling. It employed descriptive statistics effectively. In addition, it conveyed fuller understanding of the findings through qualitative accounts and pictures.

Studies in the 1940s exemplify program evaluation research long before that type of research became widespread. Innovative use of databases of client records during the 1940s and 1950s enabled Wilder Research to contribute to

the professional research and practice literatures. It also provided insights to community-serving organizations regarding how they could improve their effectiveness.

The Wilder Research repertoire of techniques for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information has had varied contents throughout history. Data collection has ranged from quantitative surveys to qualitative focus groups and case studies, using in-person, telephone, mail, videoconference, and other approaches. When necessary, staff have employed sophisticated statistical procedures such as factor analysis and discriminant function analysis. They have used creative means, such as ripple effects mapping, to identify program and policy impacts. Mixed-method studies, employing a range of techniques customized to suit the requirements of each specific research project, characterize most of the major work carried out by Wilder Research over the years.

The possession of content expertise in specific topic areas enhanced the ability of Wilder Research staff to use multiple social research and statistical methods that best fit the circumstances of each study that they undertook. Study designs, analyses, and conclusions had firmer grounding due to research leaders' in-depth knowledge of issues and the populations affected by those issues. The accumulated experience of staff made their recommendations practical and actionable for improving programs and policies.

Independence and multi-partisanship

While existing as a part of the Wilder Foundation, Wilder Research maintained an arms-length relationship with the Foundation. Research staff had the autonomy to design studies, collect information, and analyze and interpret that information in the ways that comported with their professional training and preferences – not out of allegiance to a political ideology, a cultural belief, or an institutional bias. In addition, Wilder Research staff interacted directly with the community, thereby creating direct interpersonal relationships and trust.

History shows that Wilder Research staff typically attempted to involve diverse constituencies in the design, implementation, and use of its larger studies. Notable examples include Minnesota Compass and the Minnesota Homeless Study. For Compass, more than 1,000 people participated in advisory groups, representing varied community, professional, and political perspectives. For the Homeless Study, service providers, policymakers, advocates, funders, and others routinely provided input into the design of the work. Broad engagement with diverse constituencies, including collaboration with public and private sector organizations, tended to enhance each project's design and to make each project more likely to gain acceptance and result in productive use of research findings.

Institutional decision-makers, such as public officials and leaders of nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, trusted the apolitical objectivity of Wilder Research studies. Similarly, Wilder Research endeavored, and largely succeeded, to earn trust with diverse, often marginalized, communities and organizations affected by public and private leaders' decisions. Wilder Research demonstrated that it could protect private and sensitive information held by communities and deliver findings and recommendations on their behalf.

A new era begins

Mattessich's retirement

In July 2021, Paul Mattessich announced that he planned to retire on July 1, 2022. He had served a total of 44 years at Wilder Research, 40 of them as Executive Director. Wilder Foundation President Armando Camacho initiated a national search for a successor.

An event honoring Mattessich's retirement on June 7, 2022, drew community leaders, staff from nonprofit organizations and foundations, staff from Wilder Programs and Wilder Research, as well as family and friends. In reflecting on Mattessich's tenure, speakers at the event noted key characteristics of his leadership which had propelled Wilder Research forward and facilitated its growth.²⁸³ These included a dedication to mission, high scientific standards, an emphasis on entrepreneurship for staff of all types, and great latitude afforded to researchers to pursue their professional goals.

President Camacho, just two years into his position at the Wilder Foundation, told the crowd that the achievements of Wilder Research and its value for the community had impressed him throughout his career. The reputation of Wilder Research had contributed to his motivation to bring his talents to the Foundation.



... there's more of a need than ever to provide trusted, credible, valid information that can truly improve the lives of people in our communities.

- Paul Mattessich

Dan Mueller pointed to the foresight necessary for the executive director:

We saw Paul attending meetings of the American Public Health Association. We wondered why, because we did not really do much public health research. But eventually, public health became one of the largest portions of our work.

Greg Owen noted the time and effort deliberately directed to attracting and training underrepresented groups for the research profession, and he suggested that Mattessich had facilitated the advancement of women within a traditionally male-dominated field.

²⁸³ Five people went to the podium at the event: Wilder Board Chair Julie Brunner, former Wilder Research Associate Director Dan Mueller, Wilder Research Consulting Scientist Greg Owen (who also emceed the event), former Wilder Foundation president Tom Kingston, and President Armando Camacho.

In an interview for the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, Mattessich described what brought him into the social research profession, and he reflected on the major accomplishments of Wilder Research over four decades. When asked for “big takeaways” surrounding research and its importance, he stated:

*One big takeaway is that research is more important than ever. When I started, things were somewhat simpler...Today, there's just more complexity and even more need for professional researchers to step in and to provide people with good information because people can quickly go to many different sources of information. That information is not necessarily valid and reliable.*²⁸⁴

New Executive Director, next steps in the journey for Wilder Research



Heather Britt (2022)

Wilder Foundation President Armando Camacho appointed a search committee consisting of Wilder Foundation board and staff members to work with an executive search consulting firm, to find a new executive director of Wilder Research. The national search yielded a highly qualified local candidate.

On June 13, 2022, Heather Britt, Ph.D., became the executive director of Wilder Research. Britt had served in leadership positions at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, Minnesota Hospital Association, and Allina Health. She had also spent time as part of the Safe & Healthy Learners unit at the Minnesota Department of Education and as a staff member at the Urban Coalition. In short, she had an eclectic resume that, in the mind of the hiring committee, exceeded all the professional experiential requirements of the leadership position. Britt’s educational credentials included a Ph.D. in epidemiology from the University of Minnesota, a master’s degree in public health from the University of North Carolina, and a bachelor’s degree in science from Cornell University.

²⁸⁴ Kian, Ava, “Doing the ‘Good Work’ of Social Research,” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, October 10, 2021.

As this portion of the history of Wilder Research draws to a conclusion, and a new stage begins in mid-2022, Britt and her management team plan to assess the opportunities for enhancing community well-being through research, solidify the ties of Wilder Research with other organizations locally and nationally, and take Wilder Research in the best possible direction for the next steps in its remarkable endeavors.

Learning from themes in the history of Wilder Research, new leadership will undoubtedly seek to build a strong vision for new research that improves the lives of individuals, families, and communities. They will likely work with the tenacity of their Wilder Research ancestors who, as history demonstrates, have created numerous works of social research that produced impacts from 1917 through the present. Innovative, creative thinking will likely transform Wilder Research as its research teams pursue new opportunities. Yet some traditions will probably remain intact, such as the vigorous pursuit of high quality research results in doing science for the public good.

Wilder Research, a division of Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, is a nationally respected nonprofit research and evaluation group. For more than 100 years, Wilder Research has gathered and interpreted facts and trends to help families and communities thrive, get at the core of community concerns, and uncover issues that are overlooked or poorly understood.

451 Lexington Parkway North
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104
651-280-2700 | www.wilderresearch.org

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