

Thriving Congregations Application

Riverside Innovation Hub and the Minneapolis Area Synod

The Minneapolis Area Synod (MAS) and Augsburg University's Riverside Innovation Hub (RIH) were both awarded a Thriving Congregations grant through the Lilly Endowment to support work with area congregations. These individual projects share a commitment to accompanying congregations as they discern their call to BE neighbor, rooted in their faith and opened to the neighborhood.

Our two organizations are partnering to support each other in this work. While the particular experiences of congregations who participate in either project will differ in some key ways, our mutual efforts and curiosities are in sync with each other. This opens room to collaborate and learn together over the life of this initiative.

Our collaboration begins in offering a joint application for congregations interested in either (or both) of these projects. Whether you are interested in Minneapolis Area Synod's "Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices" learning community or Augsburg's "Riverside Innovation Hub" learning community, we are providing a single application process. Our staff members are partnering closely to offer congregations a straightforward and thoughtful experience as you discern the exciting opportunities that our Thriving Congregation's Grants are making available.

For more information:

- Thriving Congregations MAS + RIH Project Descriptions & Distinctions [PDF Handout](#)
- Riverside Innovation Hub: [Thriving Congregations: Learning Partnership Application Process](#)
- Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices: mpls-synod.org/for-congregations/faith-neighboring
- Official Application Form: <https://forms.gle/Mt9nAaP5xbph4abQ9>

Contact us:

If you need any assistance or accommodations filling out the application form, or if you have additional questions, you can reach out to: Amanda Vetsch with RIH (vetsch@augzburg.edu), Kristina Fruge with RIH (frugek@augzburg.edu), or Nick Tangen with MAS (n.tangen@mpls-synod.org).

Next Steps for Congregations:

1. Attend a joint information session hosted by Minneapolis Area Synod and Augsburg's Christensen Center for Vocation ([Google Form to RSVP](#))
2. Involve other key leaders (staff and lay) in your congregation in discussing these opportunities.

3. Submit a “Letter of Intent.” ([Google Form to Submit Letter of Intent](#)) Letters of intent will be accepted on a rolling basis during the application period, but the earlier it is submitted, the sooner our organizations can begin communicating directly with you about next steps. This purpose of this form is to:
 - a. Allow congregations to indicate which project they are considering and why.
 - b. If you are considering both projects, why.
 - c. Help MAS and Augsburg staff streamline communications as the application process moves forward.
 - d. Help your congregational leaders move through the application process in a timely and thoughtful way.
4. Recruit your senior pastor and one lay leader to complete the application and involve others from your congregation in the process as relevant for your context (ie council leadership, staff, lay leaders.)
5. Submit your application by midnight on April 15, 2021.
6. Selected congregations receive their offer into either project on May 15, 2021. MAS will be inviting 15 congregations to their learning community. Augsburg will be inviting 12 congregations to their learning community. Congregations will not be invited into more than one project.
7. Selected congregations have until May 28, 2021 to accept their invitation.
8. MAS’s “Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices” learning community begins September 2021. Augsburg’s “Riverside Innovation Hub” learning community begins July 2021.

Application Instructions:

1. This is a joint application that includes three main sections. The bulk of the questions are in the “Primary Application” section. The other two sections include a few additional questions relevant to each project. Applications only need to complete the supplemental questions for the project they are applying for. If applying to be considered for both, complete all three sections.
 - a. “Primary Application” - completed by ALL applicants.
 - b. “MAS Questions” - completed by those applying for MAS’s “Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices” project.
 - c. “Augsburg Questions” - completed by those applying for Augsburg’s “Riverside Innovation Hub” project.
 - d. “Both MAS and Augsburg” - eligible congregations are welcome to apply for both opportunities, however if selected, you'll only be invited to participate in one.
2. We strongly suggest completing the application offline in a word or google document and then copy and pasting answers into the [official google form application](#).
3. Application should be completed in collaboration with your senior pastor and a lay leader from your congregation.

Primary Application

This section is to be completed by ALL applicants.

1) **Congregational Information**

- a) Congregation's Name, Location, Website, Social media
- b) Contact Information (lead pastor & lay leader completing the application)
- c) Summary Description of your Congregation (in 75 words or less)
- d) Summary Description of your broader context or neighborhood (in 75 words or less)

2) **Christian Identity and Sense of Call:** We want to hear how your congregation lives out your Christian identity and sense of call.

- a) Share a Biblical theme or story that shapes your congregation's identity and sense of call.
- b) Share a ministry story that has shaped the identity of your congregation.
- c) Share a story of conflict that has shaped the identity of your congregation.

3) **Neighbor and Neighborhood:** These questions will help us hear how your congregation is engaged with its context.

- a) What are the things about your congregation's neighborhood that spark your congregation's curiosity or grab your attention?
- b) How does your congregation understand its relationship with your neighborhood?
- c) Share a story that illustrates your relationship with a neighbor (person, family, business, org, etc.).
- d) Reflect on your congregation's understanding of how racism and white supremacy impact your congregation's ability to connect with your neighbor and neighborhood.

4) **Why:** We'd like you to reflect on "why" your congregation is called to participate in this opportunity. There can be many reasons motivating you and your faith community to dig into this work. Articulating your "why" will help us understand what you hope for in this learning partnership and help you be rooted in the work.

- a) Imagine 5 years from now. Share a story of what you imagine or hope to see transpiring in your congregation and neighborhood as this work unfolds.
- b) Given that story you have imagined, in 1-3 sentences, state your "why." Why does your congregation want to participate in this learning experience?
- c) As you name your "why", what characteristics and assets does your congregation have that might help you live into this story?
- d) What characteristics or barriers exist within your congregation that might get in the way of living into this story?

5) **Change and Risk:** We'd like you to reflect on your congregation's experiences navigating change and taking risks.

- a) We usually have a healthy response to navigating change and taking risks. 1: rarely, 2: occasionally, 3: somewhat consistently, 4: consistently, 5: very consistently.
- b) Share a story about a time your congregation was confronted with needing to change. What was the outcome?
- c) As you reflect back on the challenges of this past year, what has your congregation learned about it's capacity and limitations to take risks and navigate change?
- d) After this tumultuous year, what do you sense God calling your congregation to set down so that you can more fully follow God's call in your place, in this time?

6) Anything else?

- a) Is there anything we haven't asked in this application that you would like to share with us?
- b) Which opportunity are you applying for?
 - i) Minneapolis Area Synod - Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices. *Please proceed to answer the "Minneapolis Area Synod Supplemental Questions" on page 5.*
 - ii) Augsburg University's Christensen Center for Vocation - Riverside Innovation Hub. *Please proceed to answer the "Augsburg University Supplemental Questions" on page 6.*
 - iii) Both MAS and Augsburg opportunities *Please proceed to answer both the Minneapolis Area Synod Questions and the Augsburg Questions. In the google form, you'll be directed to a section that includes all of the questions for both supplemental sections, pages 5-6.*

Minneapolis Area Synod - Supplemental Questions

This section should be completed by those applying for the Minneapolis Area Synod's Faith Practices and Neighboring Practices.

1) *Potential Barriers to Commitment*

Congregations accepted in this project will be making a 2-year commitment to participating in a learning community. This will include: monthly cohort meetings, four retreats, and a leading role in the summit. Do you anticipate any barriers that might prevent your congregation from fully participating in this learning community? What are they?

2) *Leadership*

A leadership team of 5 people from your congregation will steward your congregation's experience of this partnership. Your congregation will need to commission four lay leaders and the lead pastor for this work. One of the lay leaders should be a teenager or young adult. You are also welcome to invite a community leader/non-member to join the cohort. Who will you recruit for this work and why?

3) *Demographics*

- a) languages spoken by worshippers and in the surrounding community
- b) race/ethnicity of worshippers and in the surrounding community
- c) number of paid staff and total FTEs
- d) average weekly worship attendance
- e) % of offerings given away to others and the larger church

4) *Faith Practices:* We want to hear how your congregation practices its faith.

- a) How would a majority of your people respond to this statement: I engage in faith practices... 1: rarely, 2: occasionally, 3: somewhat consistently, 4: consistently, 5: very consistently.
- b) How would people in your congregation describe faith practices?
- c) (for lay leaders) What is the best sermon you have heard lately?

Augsburg University - Supplemental Questions

This section should be completed by those applying for Augsburg's Riverside Innovation Hub

1) **Potential Barriers to Commitment**

Congregations accepted in this project will be making a 2-year commitment to participating in a learning community. This will include: monthly meetings - rotating between large group learning events, cohort meetings, and team meetings, and a leading role in the learning summit.

Additionally, teams will be expected to practice the learnings and wonderings in their geographic neighborhoods. Do you anticipate any barriers that might prevent your congregation from fully participating in this learning community? What are they?

2) **Leadership**

A leadership team of 5 people from your congregation will steward your congregation's experience of this partnership. This team will consist of one staff person with the influence to create culture change in the congregation and four congregational leaders who have the capacity and characteristics of faithfulness, leadership, creativity, collaboration, and drive. Who will you recruit for this work and why?

3) **Core Theological Convictions:** We want to hear about the core theological convictions your congregation is rooted in. How does what your community believes to be true about God shape your congregation's identity and sense of call.

- a) Share at least 3 core theological convictions.
- b) Why are they the most important ones to your congregation?
- c) Share a story about how they have shaped the identity and/or action of this congregation.