

A Year of Building, A Year of Becoming: Community Engagement at Michigan Tech

by Office of Community Engagement

Michigan Technological University's Office of Community Engagement finished its first full year this summer. Looking back, the office built an expanding portfolio of work that connects Michigan Tech students, faculty, and researchers with communities from Detroit to Suriname, and it is now turning its attention to a major goal for the year ahead: pursuing the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement.

A Growing International Partnership in Suriname

The office initiated and conducted the Suriname Project, which integrates research, study-away experiential learning, and international collaboration in support of Suriname's goals of sustainable development, biodiversity protection, and climate resilience. The project brings together the Centre for Agricultural Research in Suriname and Anton de Kom University of Suriname with Michigan Tech's College of Forest Resources and Environmental Science (CFRES) and Pavlis Honors College.



Investing in Detroit

The Student Experiences in Educational Discovery (SEED) Program has now served more than 300 Detroit youth with hands-on lessons in drone technology, GIS mapping, water quality, and urban forestry, drawing more than 180 students this July alone across two sites, Maheras-Gentry Park and Milliken State Park. The program has included students and faculty from Tuskegee University alongside partners such as The Greening of Detroit and Healthy Kidz Inc.



Growing a Pipeline of Scholars

Michigan Tech's Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program continued to build its pipeline toward doctoral study, graduating 10 students this year, with seven continuing on or intending to continue on to graduate school. McNair Scholars have presented at the University's Summer Undergraduate Research Symposium in both summer 2025 and summer 2026, including 13 scholars at this year's event, which was the program's largest and best-attended symposium to date. The program also featured Michigan College/University Partnership (MICUP) Program, Health Research Institute (HRI) Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF), and Integrated Circuits and Semiconductor Processes to Promote Responsible Engineering and Sustainability (REU InSPIRES) researchers, with visiting scholars from institutions including Carnegie Mellon, Cornell, Penn State, UC Berkeley, and Tuskegee.

Building Partnerships with Tuskegee University

The Office of Community Engagement facilitated the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Tuskegee University and CFRES, which has already produced two jointly written Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) proposals and successful student exchanges bringing Tuskegee students to Michigan Tech and CFRES summer and fall camps. The partnership currently includes one Tuskegee student in a Michigan Tech Ph.D. program and two in the University's 3+2 program.

Expanding Campus Resources

In conjunction with the Van Pelt and Opie Library, the office developed the Community Engagement Collection, a resource supporting engaged scholarship and practice across campus.

Supporting Research Collaboration

The Office of Community Engagement also collaborated on a Transdisciplinary T32 Grant in Health-Integrated Technologies, totaling \$1,897,717, which is an investment that reflects the growing reach of community-engaged research at Michigan Tech.

What's Next

Having met with more than 60 stakeholders across campus and among our community constituents in the past year, the Office of Community Engagement is now channeling that momentum into its next major milestone: Michigan Tech's application for the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement, a national designation that recognizes institutions for embedding community partnership into their mission, culture, and daily practice. The office has stood up a Community Engagement Council, begun tracking engagement activity across campus, and defined a working institutional definition of community engagement, which are foundational steps toward classification.



When reflecting, Dr. Wayne Gersie, Vice President for Community Engagement stated, “Michigan Tech stakeholders have a long legacy of engaging with local, regional, national, and international communities to leave an indelible mark. Our students, faculty, and staff build relationships rooted in true reciprocity and co-creation. Our team feels privileged to serve as a thought leader, connector, and initiator across University efforts to advance our work as a deeply community-engaged institution.”