



Earl E. Bakken Center for  
**SPIRITUALITY & HEALING**  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

# IMMERGENT

## HEALING TOGETHER

ADVANCING COMMUNITY WELLBEING  
THROUGH THE ARTS



## The Need

Experiencing a great deal of fear, humans across the globe are feeling disconnected from themselves, their communities, and the earth. Turbulence and chaos from the COVID-19 pandemic, racial injustice, climate destruction, pervasive violence, economic instability, and political discord has eroded wellbeing and contributed to a growing divide and distrust. Look to the streets, the boardrooms, the classrooms, and the halls of government and you will find personal and public crisis.

The American Psychological Association reports that more than three-quarters of adults (76%) state that the future of our nation is a significant source of stress in their lives. Additionally, mental health is considered a global emergency with nearly 20% of high school students reporting serious thoughts of suicide and 9% having made an attempt to take their lives. (NAMI, 2022). We are without a doubt being called to heal, learn, and adapt in new ways.

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## Healing Together

Healing the divisions, trauma, and wounds is not a small matter. Safe spaces need to be co-created where people can grow in their own self-awareness, find inspiration, and feel supported to participate in meaningful experiences that lead to deeper trust and mutual understanding. Music and the arts have always been forces that can bring people together who may never otherwise come together, spark conscious learning and connection to one's sense of self, and lift hearts and spirits. The arts uniquely help us shed light on the fact that we are more the same than we are different.

# The Partnership

Immergent and the Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing at the University of Minnesota are joining forces to lift up wellbeing practices to connect, inspire, re-imagine, and heal. Blending innovative approaches to the arts, education, spirituality, and science, this partnership will also evaluate and disseminate results, thus seeding a broader movement.

Immergent has a rich history of creating participatory and co-creative music, story, and artistic experiences that help move people from fear to love, from isolation to connection. Through these catalytic events and experiences, communities identify their unique histories, challenges, expressions, and resources. They co-create processes that bring people together in unique and creative ways.

By practicing inclusion and gathering people across differences, the practices engender empathy and create an experience of embodied belonging. It is a collaborative process designed to intentionally create the conditions for diverse connections to thrive, which builds interconnected communities and allows for collective wisdom to emerge. This wisdom is the antidote to the extreme polarization and divisiveness of our time.

Examples of these experiences and processes include OPUS:, which weaves intergenerational communities together to learn from and honor end of life journeys, and FIREROCK, which helps communities come together around climate disruption through music, story, and connection events that intertwine roots and inspire long-term engagement.

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Since 1995, The University of Minnesota's Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing has focused on advancing health and wellbeing in people, organizations, and communities through transformative education, rigorous research, and community engagement that spans the globe. Bakken Center faculty and staff have deep expertise in integrative and whole person health and healing. This partnership builds upon years of work of the Bakken center to support learning and healing and activates critical new forms of engagement responding to our times.



# Where the Healing Happens

The creative community healing processes that are the heart of all Immergent-Bakken partner projects seek to catalyze healing forces and capacities in local settings. Encompassing the expertise and wisdom of both organizations, these activities draw upon time-tested, diverse approaches to community healing. They include listening practices, participatory co-design of events, creation of artistic works that express and lift voices of host communities and local participants, education and training for wellbeing and healing, and community learning and witnessing events.

To cultivate this work and bring it out into the world, Immergent-Bakken have planned projects ranging from arts-based immersive productions – such as *Waking the Oracle*, the new long-term in-house project at the Bakken Center led by Molly Sturges – to experiential research. Each project is collaboratively designed to amplify a community's voice, help to address struggles, celebrate successes, and learn from one another.

Using established and ground-breaking methodologies, the projects enable communities to come together to create new stories and promote greater levels of consciousness, understanding, and interconnectedness in individuals.

From ancient days to today, people have sought out oracles, shamans, and elders for **guidance.**