UniverCity Alliance
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

UNIVERCITY
BETTER • PLACES • TOGETHER

REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIPS



Community Application

The UniverCity Partnership program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison is looking for local government partners.

Could this be your community? We can create BETTER PLACES TOGETHER

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

WHAT IS THE UNIVERCITY PROGRAM?

The UniverCity Partnership program is a collaboration between UW–Madison and Wisconsin communities.

The concept is simple. Community partners identify projects that would benefit from UW–Madison expertise. Faculty from across the university incorporate these projects into their courses, and UniverCity staff provide administrative support to ensure a successful collaboration.

The results are powerful. Partners receive big ideas and feasible recommendations that spark momentum toward a more sustainable, livable, and resilient future.

WHAT DO WE BRING TO COMMUNITIES?

UW–Madison faculty, staff, and students are eager to help local governments think creatively about issues happening in cities, counties, towns, villages, school districts, or quasi-governmental agencies. The UniverCity Partnership program has the capacity to match local issues with upper-level undergraduate or graduate courses and several hundred hours of supervised student time.

Our partners have chosen to address broad issues facing their communities, like sustainability, diversity, economic development, education, social services, health, and housing.

Some of the deliverables students have produced include: a mental health media campaign, recommendations to improve childcare opportunities, strategies for harvesting blue-green algae, affordable housing plans, best practices for criminal justice reform, and ways to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Experienced UniverCity staff will guide the partnership every step of the way. We will work with you to write a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between our campus and your municipality, define the scope, manage logistics, coordinate media relations, troubleshoot, and generally take care of setting up, running, promoting, and evaluating the effort. We are here to make the partnership as successful and as easy as possible.

WHAT'S EXPECTED OF COMMUNITIES?

A successful UniverCity collaboration requires the local government partner to identify a partnership lead – usually a senior staff person directly accountable to the local government's executive – who supervises and coordinates the partner's participation. This person also oversees the process of identifying key issues and assigns government staff to support individual projects. Applicants should invite local organizations, businesses, and non-profits to help envision and plan UniverCity projects. We strongly encourage projects that address social justice. Local Extension staff could be a good resource for developing your application.

WHAT WILL THIS COST COMMUNITIES?

To help offset the program's operational costs, the local government partner must make a financial commitment to the effort. The typical cost is approximately $5,000-$10,000 per project. The community must indicate under "Financial Contribution" below how much it can contribute to the partnership.

We can help you apply for grants or solicit donors to help fund this effort.

REQUIRED DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT

For an application to be considered, the community must demonstrate organizational support for the application in one of two ways:

1. Resolution: We **strongly encourage** that communities adopt a resolution through its governing body authorizing the submission of an application to the UniverCity program to ensure awareness and buy-in from elected officials. UniverCity staff are happy to present at a Council/Board meeting and can also provide template resolution language based on examples from past partners.

   -OR-

2. Letter of Support: Include a letter of support with signatories from both an elected official (e.g., mayor, city/county/village/town board/council member) and professional staff (e.g., administrator, department heads) indicating their willingness to help support the project financially and with staff time. Describe collaboration with local organizations for this project. Communities are welcome to submit more than one letter, but it is not expected.

HOW ARE APPLICATIONS EVALUATED?

While this is not a competitive application process and it is highly unlikely that community applicants will not be selected as a UniverCity partner, staff have found that applications which have resulted in the most successful partnerships include:

TOP-LEVEL ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT AND CAPACITY: The city/county manager or administrator, mayor, elected officials, and department managers indicate a willingness to involve UniverCity program staff and provide resources. There is sufficient staff capacity to successfully engage in a multi-year partnership with numerous projects and to carry work forward at the end of the collaboration.

LIKELIHOOD OF MATCH WITH COURSES: Projects are within the capability of UW-Madison faculty and students and involve rigorous research or technical needs.

PROJECT RELEVANCE: Projects directly relate to the community's short-term and long-term strategic goals, as embodied in a strategic plan, work plan, sustainability plan, policies, programs, etc.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION: The financial contribution indicates that the community is committed to and values the partnership.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION: Projects reflect efforts to collaborate with local organizations to envision, plan, and shape a shared future.

THRIVING COMMUNITIES: Projects that explore making communities a place for all people to thrive.

TYPICAL PROGRAM SCHEDULE

These estimates are based on average timelines for past projects. These are approximations, and timelines may be shorter or longer based on when the application is received, the nature and complexity of the projects identified, and other factors.

Given that the UniverCity program operates on an academic calendar, applications received January through March may take longer to match with the following fall semester courses. If you have questions about the best time to apply based on your community's needs, please contact UniverCity Alliance staff at UniverCityAlliance@wisc.edu.



ROLLING DEADLINE: Applications received by UniverCity staff.

1- 3 MONTHS: UniverCity program staff and local government staff meet to deeply discuss the scope of work and final deliverables for each project.

2-6 MONTHS (depending on when the application is received relative to the academic calendar): UniverCity program staff match projects to faculty and courses for the upcoming semester.

8-9 MONTHS (depending on the number and nature of the projects)**:** Classes work on UniverCity projects.

FOR UP TO ONE YEAR AFTER PROJECTS ARE COMPLETED (depending on the needs of the community)**:** UniverCity program staff and faculty provide follow-up assistance for project implementation.

ANNUALLY: The UniverCity program publishes a report summarizing projects and recommendations.

TESTIMONIALS

"UniverCity is important because it brings that experience at UW-Madison ... right down to the local community and says, 'Here's what's possible."

– Mike Olson
President and CEO, Bank of Brodhead

"To do that kind of work on such diverse, different topics would have never been done at the county level without being a part of UniverCity."

– Dave Mack,
Program Manager, Marathon County
Conservation, Planning & Zoning Department

"We see this as an opportunity to bring resources to issues that have been identified by our communities in their comprehensive plans and other planning processes, but without funding or staff, have been delayed."

– Cara Carper
Former Executive Director
Green County Development Corporation

"There is benefit not just to a county looking for assistance with projects ... but for our future workforce as well by students gaining practical experience they're going to see in the real world, that they may not see in the classroom."

– Phil Rentmeester
Director,
Marathon County Emergency Management

"We have moved the needle on some of the most important work that we need to do that often gets buried under the day-to-day grind."

– Todd Schmidt
Village of Waunakee Administrator

PHOTO CREDITS
Cover: University of Wisconsin-Madison
Page 4: Patrick Bodell

APPLICATION

The UniverCity Partnership program is flexible to the needs of its local government partners. Partnerships can range from a small number of rapid response projects to a multi-year collaboration. Applicants are encouraged to contact UniverCity program staff before applying. We are also available to visit your community to discuss the UniverCity Partnership with local government leaders.

Applicant Community	City of Two Rivers, Wisconsin
Website Address	https://www.two-rivers.org
Primary Contact Person	Contact Name: Mike Mathis, Director of Parks & Recreation Email Address: mmathis@two-rivers.org Phone Number: 920-793-5591
Secondary Contact Person	Contact Name: Email Address: Phone Number:
Financial Contribution Identify how much the community can contribute toward this partnership.	$ 5,000-10,000; existing budgets, donations or grants
Demonstration of Support Attached (At least one is required, check all that apply)	☐ Resolution approved by governing body (strong recommended) ☐ Letter(s) of support including at least one elected official and one professional staff member

PROPOSED PROJECTS

Please identify and provide brief descriptions of projects you are hoping to accomplish through a partnership with UniverCity. Projects do not need to be finalized, but they should reflect a coherent idea, explain the questions you would like to have answered, and provide a brief background about the issue. There is no minimum or maximum number of projects that communities can propose, so please list as many as you would like and feel free to attach additional sheets as necessary.

Questions to think about for brief project descriptions:

1. What questions are you trying to answer?
2. What added value are you expecting?
3. What do you want to do with the expected final deliverable?
4. Are there any existing plans, reports, or other documents that are relevant to the project?

Proposed Projects:

1. Community Wayfinding & Trail Connectivity

Design coordinated signs and navigation connecting downtown, parks, trails, waterfront and businesses.

2. Citywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan

Update the bicycle/pedestrian plan: map network gaps, prioritize safe routes and crossings, and phase investments.

3. Hamilton Property Waterfront & Trail Destination

Explore resilient public access, recreation, habitat and trail concepts for waterfront redevelopment.

4. Community-Wide Parks & Recreation Accessibility Assessment

Assess parks, facilities, waterfront access and programs; prioritize practical improvements for inclusion.

5. Washington Street Complete Streets & Downtown Revitalization

Build on the Main Street AARP audit; assess street layout, bike access, crossings, parking and downtown design.

6. Sustainable Parks, Facilities & Municipal Operations

Identify energy, water, landscape and maintenance efficiencies; evaluate costs, savings and pilot opportunities.

7. Two Rivers Youth Sports Coaching Academy

Create and pilot volunteer coach training emphasizing positive coaching, inclusion and athlete retention.

8. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park & Walsh Field Athletic Facility Master Plan

Inventory athletic facilities and utilization; create site concepts and phased investment priorities.

9. Great Lakes Climate, Storms & Weather Interpretive Experience

With NOAA, design climate, storm and weather exhibits for the visitor center.

10. Interactive Water Trail GIS & Outdoor Discovery Map

Map paddling destinations, amenities, natural areas, birding and fishing sites with likely species.

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Proposed UniverCity Partnership Projects

Ten potential project concepts | Expanded responses to the four application questions on page 6

The City seeks tangible research, design, and implementation tools to advance its Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) Action Plan and emerging Community Youth Sports Strategic Plan. These ten concepts are options for academic matching, not ten funding commitments. Final scope, project selection, and deliverables would be developed with UniverCity staff, faculty, and students.

1. Community Wayfinding & Trail Connectivity

RERC Action Plan: 1.1, 1.2, 1.4

Two Rivers has parks, trails, waterfront access, downtown destinations, and local businesses that should be easier to navigate as a connected experience.

1. Questions to answer. Where are existing signs inconsistent or missing? Which connections between downtown, Mariners Trail, parks, beaches, and visitor destinations are hardest to navigate? What sign types and destination hierarchy will serve walkers, cyclists, and motorists?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Students could combine field inventories, GIS mapping, visitor-centered design, and feedback from residents and tourism partners to develop a coordinated navigation system rather than isolated signs.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Use a mapped sign inventory, sign-family design standards, priority locations, sample destination maps, and preliminary cost/phasing recommendations to guide sign replacement, future capital projects, and grant requests.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (Goals 1 and 3); City park and trail maps and existing signage; current destination materials from tourism and downtown partners. Findings would be coordinated with the proposed bicycle/pedestrian plan.

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2. Citywide Bicycle & Pedestrian Transportation Plan

RERC Action Plan: 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 3.5

A connected active-transportation network would make it safer and easier to reach schools, parks, neighborhoods, downtown, and the waterfront without a car.

1. Questions to answer. Where are the highest-priority network gaps, unsafe crossings, and barriers to everyday walking and bicycling? How should improvements connect existing trails to destinations? Which routes and projects should receive short-, medium-, and long-term priority?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. UW–Madison could bring GIS network analysis, field assessments, community route mapping, transportation design expertise, and an objective process for evaluating alternatives and priorities.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Create an updated bicycle/pedestrian network and gap map, conceptual route and crossing improvements, a prioritized project list, planning-level cost ranges, and a phased implementation/funding strategy for City capital planning.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 3.5); Mariners Trail and City trail maps; available bicycle/pedestrian plans and City transportation data; Two Rivers Main Street AARP Walkability Audit; the proposed Washington Street study.

3. Hamilton Property Waterfront & Trail Destination

RERC Action Plan: 3.5, 4.1, 4.6

The former Hamilton property is identified in the RERC plan as a potential waterfront destination and a key link in a broader trail network.

1. Questions to answer. How could public access, trails, gathering spaces, habitat, recreation, and future development fit together on the site? Which ideas are compatible with harbor operations, shoreline conditions, flood risk, and realistic redevelopment phases?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Interdisciplinary student teams could assemble constraints, compare alternative land-use concepts, visualize visitor experiences, and evaluate trade-offs that are difficult to examine through a single departmental perspective.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Use conceptual site plans, trail-connection options, a constraints/opportunities map, and a phased opportunity matrix to inform public discussion, partner coordination, future technical investigations, and fundraising. Concepts would not replace engineering or environmental approvals.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (3.5, 4.1 and 4.6); existing Hamilton property documents; available shoreline/harbor, environmental, flood and infrastructure studies; City waterfront and trail planning materials.

4. Community-Wide Parks & Recreation Accessibility Assessment

RERC Action Plan: 2.2

Accessible recreation requires both usable physical spaces and programs that people of different ages and abilities can find and participate in.

1. Questions to answer. What barriers exist at parks, playgrounds, trails, waterfront access points, and recreation facilities? Where do program design, communication, or transportation create additional obstacles? Which improvements would benefit the most users?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. University expertise could support consistent field-audit methods, GIS documentation, accessible-program review, and structured engagement with people with disabilities and their caregivers.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Develop a facility/program accessibility inventory, prioritized barrier-removal recommendations, indicative costs, and practical program adaptations. Use the results in capital budgeting, staff work plans, and applications for accessibility funding.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (2.2); City park and facility inventories, site maps, recreation program materials, and available community feedback; applicable ADA accessibility guidance used as a technical reference.

5. Washington Street Complete Streets & Downtown Revitalization

RERC Action Plan: 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 4.4, 4.5

The RERC plan and Two Rivers Main Street AARP Walkability Audit identify opportunities to improve Washington Street as a safe, attractive downtown corridor.

1. Questions to answer. What feasible street configurations could improve pedestrian crossings and bicycle access while accommodating traffic, parking, deliveries, and businesses? Where would streetscape improvements most increase safety, accessibility, and downtown activity?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Students could translate documented community observations into tested street-design alternatives, traffic/parking considerations, accessible public-space concepts, and clear visualizations for public discussion.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Use corridor concepts, sample cross-sections and renderings, short-term pilot ideas, a priority improvement map, and planning-level cost/phasing estimates to guide City review, partner discussions, and future engineering or funding.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (1.3, 4.4, 4.5); Two Rivers Main Street AARP Walkability Audit; available City traffic and parking information; downtown planning materials; proposed citywide bicycle/pedestrian plan.

6. Sustainable Parks, Facilities & Municipal Operations

RERC Action Plan: 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5

The City wants to protect natural resources while containing ongoing costs for facilities, parks, landscape management, and public operations.

1. Questions to answer. Which practical changes in maintenance, landscape design, energy or water use could lower long-term costs without sacrificing service? Which assets or practices are the best candidates for low-cost demonstration projects?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. University teams could establish performance baselines, compare life-cycle costs, examine ecological effects, and test operational changes against real staffing and maintenance constraints.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Produce a prioritized efficiency opportunity inventory, cost/benefit comparisons, recommendations for selected pilots, and metrics to track operating savings and environmental benefits. Use findings to plan routine improvements and pursue outside funding.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (Goal 5); City facility and grounds inventories; utility consumption, maintenance, and purchasing records where available; existing environmental and landscape management initiatives.

7. Two Rivers Youth Sports Coaching Academy

Youth Sports Strategic Plan initiative; RERC 2.1

Community discussions identify coach development as a practical way to improve sports experiences, strengthen belonging, and keep children participating.

1. Questions to answer. What core skills do volunteer and first-time coaches need at different ages? How can coaching emphasize fun, inclusion, safety, positive communication, and age-appropriate development? What training format can local organizations sustain?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Faculty and students with education, sport, and youth-development expertise could adapt evidence-informed instruction to local needs, build training materials, and evaluate a pilot with coaches and partner organizations.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Implement a modular coaching curriculum, facilitation guide, sample workshops, short video/resources plan, and feedback tools through the City, school district, and sports groups. Use evaluation results to improve and repeat the academy.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. Youth Sports Summit discussions, available youth and parent survey findings, and the City's youth sports implementation ideas (coach training, women coaches, school coordination); emerging Community Youth Sports Strategic Plan; RERC 2.1.

8. Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park & Walsh Field Athletic Facility Master Plan

Youth Sports Strategic Plan initiative; RERC 2.1

The City seeks a coordinated view of athletic facility needs so community organizations can prioritize investments and make effective use of existing fields.

1. Questions to answer. How are facilities currently used, where are condition/capacity or scheduling issues, and which upgrades would improve accessibility and the athlete/spectator experience? How should improvements be phased around budgets and shared uses?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Students could develop a documented facility inventory, analyze utilization, conduct stakeholder interviews, and prepare alternative conceptual site designs and planning-level comparisons.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Use conceptual master-plan options, an inventory of conditions and uses, an accessibility and circulation review, a phased priority list, and rough cost considerations to inform the capital improvement program, grants, and partnerships.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. Youth sports implementation ideas identifying a Vietnam Veterans/Walsh Field master plan and facility inventory; available field schedules, maintenance data, and site plans; emerging Community Youth Sports Strategic Plan; RERC 2.1.

9. Great Lakes Climate, Storms & Weather Interpretive Experience

RERC Action Plan: 4.7, 5.5

In partnership with NOAA Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary, the proposed new visitor-center interpretive space could tell compelling stories about Lake Michigan's weather, storms, and changing climate.

1. Questions to answer. How can visual storytelling make severe weather, waves, changing lake levels, shoreline change, and climate science understandable and memorable? How can historical storms and shipwreck accounts illuminate these topics while keeping scientific distinctions accurate?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. Students could combine atmospheric science, history, education, and exhibit/visual design to develop and test accessible narratives, hands-on activities, digital concepts, and visitor experiences with NOAA and community partners.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Develop an interpretive storyline, exhibit concept layouts and renderings, interactive prototype ideas, school/family learning elements, and a phased production budget to support partners, grant applications, and future exhibit fabrication.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (4.7 and 5.5); NOAA sanctuary educational and historical resources; available new visitor center layout/program materials; existing City coastal and shoreline studies and local maritime history sources.

10. Interactive Water Trail GIS & Outdoor Discovery Map

RERC Action Plan: 1.2, 1.4, 2.4, 3.1, 3.2, 4.6, 5.5

A public-facing digital water trail could combine trip planning with discovery of recreation destinations and important natural places around Two Rivers.

1. Questions to answer. How can users find paddling routes and launches, amenities, activities, natural areas, birding sites and public fishing access in one intuitive map? Which bird and fish species might be encountered by location/season, and what information must be verified or withheld to protect sensitive habitats?

2. Added value expected from UW–Madison. UW–Madison could contribute web GIS development, geospatial data assembly, mobile usability testing, natural-resource information design, and a repeatable data verification/update method with knowledgeable partners.

3. Intended use of final deliverables. Publish or further develop a mobile-friendly GIS site/prototype featuring destinations, routes, amenities, natural areas, birding/fishing profiles, potential species, and safety information. Use an accompanying data guide, hosting estimate, and maintenance plan to keep the resource current.

4. Relevant existing plans and materials. RERC Action Plan (Goals 1-5 as cited); City water trail planning and existing paddling/launch maps; public Wisconsin DNR and conservation datasets as available; local birding, fishing, and tourism partner information, with species/site details verified before publication.

Partnership funding: Anticipated contribution of $5,000-$10,000 would be supported through existing budgets, donations, and/or grants, without a request for new City appropriations. Project selection depends on resources and course/faculty fit. Governing-body authorization will be attached if and when adopted.