REQUEST FOR PARTNERSHIPS

UniverCITY
BETTER • PLACES • TOGETHER

2024-2027

The UniverCity program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is looking for local government partners to apply in 2024.
Could this be your community? We can create
BETTER PLACES TOGETHER

WHAT IS THE UNIVERCITY PROGRAM?

The UniverCity program is a multi-year partnership 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 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, 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 the issue-area themes and assigns government staff to support individual projects. Applicants should invite local organizations, businesses, and non-profits to help envision and plan UniverCity Year 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 – approximately $30,000-$40,000 for each issue-area or theme. Partners generally identify themes that each include five to seven projects. If you have a smaller number of projects or limited funds, please contact UniverCity program staff. We can help you apply for grants or solicit donors to help fund this effort.

WHEN WILL THIS HAPPEN? **

LATE SUMMER 2024: UniverCity program staff and local government leaders agree on the partnership content (at least in issue-area themes), staffing, expected outcomes, and sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

FALL 2024: Local government staff add specificity to projects and issue areas, and get buy-in from their community. Both partners agree on a robust project list to be matched with courses and faculty at UW-Madison and other campuses.

FALL 2024-WINTER 2025: UniverCity program staff and local government staff meet to deeply discuss the scope of work and final deliverables for each project.

SPRING-SUMMER 2025: UniverCity program staff match projects to faculty and courses.

FALL 2025: Fall semester classes work on UniverCity projects.

SPRING 2026: Spring semester classes work on UniverCity projects.

SUMMER 2026: The UniverCity program publishes a report summarizing projects and recommendations.

FALL 2026-SUMMER 2027: UniverCity program staff and faculty provide follow-up assistance for project implementation.

**** OFF-CYCLE APPLICATIONS:** If your application falls outside of our regular timeline, please contact UniverCity Alliance staff: UniverCityAlliance@wisc.edu

HOW ARE PROPOSALS EVALUATED?

UniverCity program staff and campus stakeholders will evaluate applications based on the following criteria:

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.

INCLUSIVITY & BELONGING: Projects explore aspects of social and environmental justice, and seek to elevate equity, diversity, and inclusion as part of a sustainable future for all.

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WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Applicants are encouraged to contact UniverCity program staff before drafting a proposal. We are available to visit your community to discuss the UniverCity program with local government leaders. Call 608.261.1141 for more information.

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

COMMUNITY INFORMATION:
Provide your website address and contact information for your community leadership and the person who will serve as your UniverCityYear partnership lead.

DEMONSTRATION OF SUPPORT:
Include one support letter from a mayor, administrator, elected official, or department head 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.

FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTION:
Identify how much you can contribute.

PROPOSED PROJECTS:
Describe one to five issue areas (themes) in one to two paragraphs each. What are the questions? What added value are you expecting? f your projects do not fall into a common theme, give a short overview of each project in list format. Projects do not have to be finalized, but they should reflect a coherent idea, explain the questions you would like to have answered, and provide background about the issue. You can reference existing plans, reports or other documents that are relevant to the project (web links are helpful).

WHEN ARE PROPOSALS DUE?

Proposals are due on August 1, 2024. Contact us to discuss off-cycle options. Email your completed proposal in PDF format to

UniverCityAlliance@wisc.edu

TESTIMONIALS

"UniverCity Year 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