Resilient Communities Project
Request for Proposals for 2015–2016

The University of Minnesota (U of MN) is accepting proposals from cities and counties to be the community partner for the Resilient Communities Project (RCP) for 2015–2016.

RCP is a year-long partnership between the U of MN and one community in Minnesota. Through the partnership, students and faculty from across the University collaborate with the partner community to address its self-defined sustainability-related needs through course-based projects. The collaboration results in on-the-ground impact and momentum for a community working toward a more sustainable and livable future. The program serves communities addressing sustainability at the local or regional scale. Cities, counties, and clusters of communities (for example, along a transportation corridor, around a regional center, or within a watershed) are eligible to apply. To minimize travel time and costs, applicant communities should ideally be located within a two-hour drive of the Twin Cities, where RCP is based. Communities located further away from the Twin Cities may be considered if additional funds are contributed for overnight travel costs. Former and current community partners include the Cities of Minnetonka (2012–2013 academic year), North St. Paul (2013–2014 academic year), and Rosemount (2014–2015 academic year).

The RCP model provides the partner community with efficient access to the broad base of sustainability expertise at the U of MN. RCP staff work closely with the partner community to match their projects with students and faculty from a wide range of disciplines—from architecture, planning, and engineering to environmental sciences, public health, and the humanities. Many projects combine multiple disciplines to address problems from diverse perspectives. Expertise is available related to all aspects of sustainability (e.g., environmental health, economic opportunity, social equity, and community livability) and all stages of sustainability efforts (analysis, planning, design, implementation, and evaluation). Through work with RCP, the community is able to enhance its own capacity to advance sustainability. In addition, U of MN students benefit from real-world opportunities to apply their knowledge and training. They also bring energy, enthusiasm, and innovative approaches to address difficult, persistent problems.

The partner community must support the effort through dedicated staff time and a local funding contribution. The selection process is competitive. The deadline for applications is 4:30 PM on Friday, February 13, 2015. The community partner for the 2015–2016 partnership year will be announced in March 2015.
Benefits of Partnership with RCP

RCP provides numerous benefits for the community partner, including:

- A high rate of return on investment, with thousands of hours of concentrated student work on community-identified projects
- Access to an interdisciplinary group of faculty experts with first-hand knowledge of cutting-edge sustainability research and practice
- Data collection, analysis, research, concept plans, designs, and policy recommendations that can energize staff, increase the range of options available, and get “stuck” projects moving
- Greater support from residents for proposed solutions through student outreach in the community
- Publicity in local, state, regional, and national publications and venues, highlighting your community as a forward-thinking and sustainable community
- Faculty, students, and staff who serve as ambassadors for your community by sharing their experiences through conference presentations, community meetings, and informal conversations
- Engaged students with on-the-ground knowledge of the community who may be candidates for future internships or staff positions

How the RCP Partnership Works

RCP will select one community partner for the 2015–2016 academic year (September 2015 to May 2016). Staff from RCP and the community will begin work on the year-long collaboration with a series of planning workshops in spring 2015 to refine the scope of locally identified projects, begin matching projects with relevant graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses at the U of MN, and involve local project stakeholders/partners in the collaboration.

RCP Program Timeline

- **Spring 2015:** Community partner for 2015–2016 identified. RCP and the community refine the scope of locally identified projects, begin matching them with U of MN courses and faculty, and involve local project stakeholders/partners as appropriate.
- **May 2015:** RCP 2014–2015 end-of-year celebration with City of Rosemount.
- **Summer 2015:** RCP staff and faculty meet with community staff and local project stakeholders/partners to develop scope-of-work documents for each project and participating course for fall semester. Community staff provide background information, reports, and data for projects. RCP and community partner develop and sign contract.
- **Fall 2015:** RCP kick-off event in the partner community (September). Fall-semester classes work on RCP projects (September–December). Final scoping of spring semester courses (October–December).
- **Spring 2016:** Spring-semester classes work on RCP projects (January–May). Fall-semester student reports delivered to community.
• **May 2016:** RCP 2015–2016 end-of-year celebration  
• **Summer 2016:** Spring-semester student reports delivered to community. Optional follow-up work with RCP staff to outline next steps and priorities for the community’s efforts to advance sustainability and resilience.

**University Commitment**

During summer 2015, RCP staff and faculty will meet with community staff and project partners/stakeholders to develop a comprehensive scope-of-work document for each project and participating course to guide work throughout the semester. The scope of work will include a problem statement, potential issues or directions for student exploration, specific project activities, final deliverables, and a project timeline. Depending on the community’s matching funds available, RCP has the capacity to address approximately 15–30 local projects during the partnership year, matching each project with one or more courses to complete the necessary work.

Projects will be carried out as part of graduate and upper-level undergraduate courses held during the fall (September through December 2015) and spring (January through May 2016) semesters. RCP staff with expertise in sustainability, project management, and communications will provide ongoing support throughout the semester to ensure high-quality outcomes that meet the partner community’s needs. Support will include coordinating University resources, scheduling and facilitating project scoping meetings, identifying and coordinating delivery of data and background information for projects as needed, maintaining a partnership website, coordinating media outreach, soliciting periodic feedback from participants, and troubleshooting projects as needed. This coordination by RCP staff offers significant benefits and efficiencies over stand-alone projects in which the community might participate with an individual faculty member.

Outcomes from each University course will be documented in a final report and/or presentation at the conclusion of the fall or spring semester. Project results will be shared with the community, and disseminated through the RCP website, social media, and traditional media outlets.

**Community Staff Commitment**

A key element of a successful RCP partnership is commitment and involvement from community staff. The community partner must have one or more organizational champions for RCP, preferably a city/county manager or another person within the organization who has the authority and ability to direct and motivate staff to participate in the partnership. The community will be expected to identify a senior staff person who will be the primary **program coordinator**, serving as a liaison between the community and RCP, and working directly with RCP’s program manager to oversee all projects. The program coordinator should be engaged enough in each project to know the staff involved and to understand the project’s scope and current status. The program coordinator’s time commitment will vary based upon the number
of projects and their level of involvement with each project. In general, however, they should expect to spend an average of 5–7 hours per week for 12–15 months to coordinate 15 projects involving 20–30 courses. The number of hours will vary, with more time required during scoping and initial work on the project, and less time required once the project is under way. If you are applying to RCP as a multi-community partnership, each government entity will need to designate a program coordinator responsible for all projects involving that entity.

In addition, for each project that is successfully matched with one or more University courses, the community partner will be expected to identify a project lead who will be the primary point of contact for students and faculty working on that project. The work of project leads may include preparing background materials for students; accompanying students on site visits; attending project meetings with RCP students, faculty, and staff; coordinating the participation of residents, community organizations, or other stakeholders in the project; participating in reviews of student work throughout the semester; coordinating and attending final presentations of student work on the University of Minnesota campuses and/or in the community; and participating in kickoff and end-of-year events. Depending on the number of courses matched with the project, project leads should anticipate spending an average of 2–4 hours per week on the project for each semester the project is in progress.

Before the start of the academic year in September 2015, project leads will be expected to compile and provide background documents for each project, including but not limited to background reports and memos, GIS maps and data layers, community datasets, aerial photographs, prior concept plans, and computer-aided drawings.

**Financial Cost of Participation**

RCP offers the partner community a high level of access to the wide-ranging expertise at the University of Minnesota related to fostering sustainable and resilient communities. RCP staff identify and facilitate one-to-one connections between city staff and faculty members from a variety of disciplines to develop meaningful projects that respond directly to local needs. Project work will be completed primarily by graduate students, with direct oversight by faculty instructors. RCP provides program management and project coordination support; reimbursement of project-related travel and material costs to support student participation in the program; student and faculty site visits to and field work in the community; compilation and distribution of final reports; publicity for and hosting of kickoff and end-of-year celebration events; student-created materials for display in the partner community; publicity through social, print, and broadcast media; and digital archiving of student coursework materials. RCP works closely with the University Relations Office and University News Service to coordinate publicity, and with University Libraries to coordinate the network of sustainability resources available to students and the partner community. The value of these items is estimated at more than $250,000 for the partnership year.
RCP receives some funding and in-kind support from the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) and Institute on the Environment, but asks for a **local financial contribution** from the partner community. Partner communities may choose to fund their local contribution through a collaboration with other groups, such as county and state agencies, school and watershed districts, private developers, business partners, and chambers of commerce. The local contribution amount is negotiable depending on local resources. Contingent on the amount of the local contribution, RCP can scale up its capacity to address a greater number of locally identified projects through additional University courses.

Prospective partner communities must specify in their proposals the amount of the local financial contribution. Regardless of where these funds are obtained from, the **selected partner community is responsible for making a one-time payment to RCP for the full amount of the local financial contribution no later than August 31, 2015**. The local contribution is one of a number of factors that will be considered in selecting the 2015–2016 partner community.

**Application Process**

RCP staff are available to assist you with your application at any stage—including introducing the RCP program to staff, elected officials, or local project partners/stakeholders; helping to brainstorm ideas for or frame potential projects; and finalizing your proposal for submission to RCP.

**Identifying Potential Projects**

Projects may be drawn from individual community departments (e.g., public works, community development, administration, public safety, health and community services, environmental management, parks and recreation) or be pursued through cross-departmental partnerships. A list of successfully matched projects from our partnerships with the Cities of Minnetonka (http://rcp.umn.edu/minnetonka-projects/), North St. Paul (http://rcp.umn.edu/home/2013-2014-partner/fall-projects/), and Rosemount (http://rcp.umn.edu/home/communities/2014-2015-projects/) are available on the RCP website. These should provide a general idea of the range of projects that students can address, although other projects and topics not listed here are certainly feasible.

Applicants are **strongly** encouraged to contact RCP’s program manager during preparation of their application to discuss their proposed projects. Development of a project list is best accomplished through dialogue in which (1) the community proposes a preliminary list of projects and project partners; (2) RCP and community staff meet to discuss each project and possible modifications to better match the project scope and scale with availability and interest of University courses and faculty; and (3) RCP suggests additional projects, based on the University’s capacity and the community’s interests, that could meet the applicant’s sustainability goals. Our experience is that such dialogue is critical in generating project lists that directly meet the community’s needs and closely match the capacity of RCP and U of MN.
In formulating projects, applicants are strongly encouraged to actively collaborate with other entities, such as neighboring cities, county or state agencies, watershed districts, transit providers, school districts, nonprofit organizations, local businesses, professional or business organizations, and research or educational institutions. These entities may serve as stakeholders for individual RCP projects, become partners who assist with implementation, and/or provide funding to support the community’s participation in the RCP program.

Application and Selection Process Timeline

- **October 29, 2014:** RCP issues request for proposals for 2015–2016 partner community and begins accepting applications.
- **November 2014–February 2015:** RCP staff are available for phone conferences and in-person meetings to discuss potential projects with communities, as well as informational presentations to staff, elected officials, or potential partner organizations and agencies. *We strongly suggest that communities interested in applying to the program schedule a preliminary in-person visit with RCP to introduce the program to city staff and community partners, as well as additional meetings to discuss individual projects that may be included in the application.*
- **February 13, 2015:** Applications are due to RCP by 4:30 pm.
- **March 2015:** RCP notifies the community selected for the 2015–2016 partnership. RCP and the community coordinate media to announce the 2015–2016 Resilient Communities Project community partner. RCP and the community partner begin collaborating to match proposed projects with U of MN courses and faculty.

Application Components

Your RCP application must include all of the following components:

1. **Community Information:** Provide the name of your community, the name of your community manager/administrator, and the name and contact information (email, phone, mailing address, department, and staff role) of the person who will serve as your RCP program coordinator and will be the primary contact for your application. [Note: If your application involves multiple communities, please provide the above information about each of the communities, but designate only one primary contact person for your application.]

2. **Sustainability Statement:** Provide a statement that demonstrates your community’s interest in and commitment to sustainability and resilience, as well as how a partnership with the Resilient Communities Project will both build upon and advance these efforts. If your community has a sustainability action plan, strategic plan, or other adopted document that demonstrates this commitment, you should explicitly reference this document in your application and provide a web link where it can be viewed.

3. **Proposal development process:** Briefly describe the process by which your proposal was
developed, including how and by whom this process was led, how project leads participated in the selection of projects and development of project descriptions, how elected officials and senior staff were involved in the process, and how potential community partners or stakeholders were engaged.

4. **Administrative Capacity:** A successful partnership will require an ongoing commitment of staff time to coordinate and manage individual projects and the overall partnership. This section should demonstrate the community’s general capacity and specific approach for managing individual projects; effectively engaging community partners or stakeholders; providing updates to elected officials, senior staff, residents, and others not directly involved in projects; and administering the overall partnership with the University.

5. **Proposed Projects:** Provide individual descriptions of at least 15 and no more than 30 well-formulated projects. Projects should address high-priority issues for the community, and involve research questions or technical assistance needs that are appropriate for graduate-level work. For each project, you should provide the following information:

   A. **Project name/title.**
   B. **Project lead.** Identify one community staff person, their title and department, e-mail address, and phone number.
   C. **A one-paragraph description of the project.** What is the purpose of the project? Why is this project important to the community at this time? What are the community’s ultimate goals or objectives related to the project?
   D. **2–3 specific questions, issues, ideas, or problems you want students to address.**
   E. **An explanation of how student work would be used.** How will work that addresses these questions/issues/ideas/problems advance the community’s efforts related to this project?
   F. **One or more specific impacts of the project relative to community sustainability and resilience.** This section should explicitly reference the relationship of the project to local actions, plans, or priorities, and to the sustainability statement (item #2) included with your proposal.
   G. **Existing plans, reports, or other documents** that are relevant to the project. If these are available online, include a web link.
   H. **Stakeholders or partners** (beyond city staff) that will be invited to participate in the project. Describe specifically how these individuals or organizations will be involved, what they will do, and how their participation will benefit the project.

We strongly encourage applicants to contact RCP Program Manager Mike Greco (mgreco@umn.edu, 612-625-7501) for assistance developing their project descriptions.

6. **Public Involvement:** Meaningfully engaging residents can be critical to the success of
local sustainability efforts. How will the general public be informed about and involved in the RCP partnership?

7. Long-Term Benefits: Describe what you anticipate as the long term benefits and/or outcomes of the year-long RCP partnership.

8. Next Steps: Describe the community’s general strategy for identifying “next steps” for individual projects at the conclusion of the year-long RCP partnership in May 2016. What will the community do with all of the information produced from the partnership?

9. Demonstration of Support: Include letters of support from one or more of the following: city/county manager or administrator, mayor, elected governing body, department heads, partner organizations or agencies, and/or funding entities.

10. Local Financial Contribution: Indicate the amount of the local financial contribution and the source(s) of those funds. Note that regardless of where these funds are obtained from, the selected partner community is responsible for making a one-time payment to RCP for the full amount of the local financial contribution no later than August 31, 2015.

Submitting Your Application

Applications are due February 13, 2015, by 4:30 pm. E-mail your completed application in PDF format to:

Mike Greco, RCP Program Manager
mgreco@umn.edu

Application Evaluation Criteria

RCP will evaluate applications based on the following criteria:

1. Top-Level Support and Administrative Capacity: City/county manager or administrator, mayor, elected officials, and/or department heads indicate a willingness to direct organization staff to participate in RCP program, and provide resources and devote time to identified projects. Community has sufficient staff capacity to engage successfully in a year-long partnership across multiple projects, and to carry work forward at the conclusion of the partnership.

2. Clear Sustainability and Resilience Focus: Projects clearly build upon and advance the community’s overall sustainability and resilience efforts, and include specific sustainability- or resilience-related goals such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, fostering active living, supporting alternative modes of transportation or energy generation, enhancing social equity, enhancing public participation opportunities, engaging underserved or marginalized groups, creating a stronger sense of community or place, enhancing livability, conserving or restoring environmental resources, preserving or enhancing ecosystem services, increasing housing density or mix,
improving urban form, reducing energy use, finding adaptive reuses for existing structures, redeveloping underutilized land parcels, promoting equitable economic development, or ensuring fiscally prudent infrastructure investments. [Note: This list is for illustration only and is by no means exhaustive.]

3. **Project Relevance and Impact**: Projects are well formulated and directly relate to the community’s stated short-term and long-term strategic goals (ideally as embodied in a strategic plan or work plan). Projects should demonstrate the potential to have a measurable positive impact on community sustainability and resilience. Demonstrated relationship to community comprehensive or sustainability plans, policies, programs, or indicators is also helpful.

4. **Community Engagement**: Application demonstrates a commitment to meaningfully and appropriately engage residents throughout the partnership as a means of integrating local knowledge, and strengthening and broadening support for community sustainability and resilience efforts.

5. **Likelihood of Match with University Courses**: Projects must be within the capability of University of Minnesota faculty and graduate students, and should involve appropriate research and/or technical assistance needs, not menial tasks or low-level administrative work. RCP will identify faculty who are able and willing to supervise course-based projects based on their curricular and research needs and interests. Coordinating with RCP as your organization develops its project list will help facilitate a strong match. However, RCP cannot guarantee that all locally identified projects will be matched with a course.

6. **Local Financial Contribution**: The local financial contribution offers an indication of community commitment and the value attributed to the partnership. Applicants are encouraged to seek partnerships to support the local contribution.

7. **External Partnerships**: Projects that involve other organizations—such as transportation districts, school districts, state agencies, nonprofit organizations, business or professional organizations, businesses, or research or educational institutions—are especially desirable. Your application should specifically indicate how these partnerships would function and how participation of these entities would enhance the project.