



## Resilient Communities Project

### Application Guidelines for the 2024–2025 Academic Year

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) is currently **accepting proposals for projects and partnerships for the 2024–2025 academic year** (September 2024–August 2025). RCP facilitates collaborative partnerships between local government agencies in Minnesota and the University of Minnesota around projects designed to advance community sustainability, equity, and resilience. Projects may address a broad range of local issues and needs, and can involve any department or division in your agency. RCP especially encourages projects that address racial or other inequities and disparities in Minnesota.

Local government agencies selected for an RCP partnership benefit from **applied research and technical assistance**, provided by graduate and professional students and faculty at the University from departments and disciplines relevant to your project. The scale of RCP partnerships is flexible, and can be sized to meet your agency's capacity and needs. Typically, partnerships range in size from 1 to 15 discrete projects, and in length from 6–18 months.

**Eligibility:** Cities, counties, tribal public entities, special districts (e.g., watershed, transit, park, school), and regional government agencies or collaboratives anywhere in Minnesota are eligible. *Municipalities and counties within the jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Council are also eligible for matching funds from the Council for selected projects that implement elements of a locally adopted 2040 comprehensive plan.*

**Program Cost:** RCP partners support the partnership through **dedicated staff time** and a **local financial contribution**. For the 2024–2025 academic year, the cost is **\$7,000 per project** for partnerships involving 1–4 projects, **\$6,000 per project** for partnerships involving 5 or more projects, and **\$3,000 per project** for projects that qualify for Met Council matching funds.

**Deadline for Proposals:** Proposals are accepted at any time. However, to ensure eligibility for assistance during the time periods indicated below, proposals must be received by the following dates:

- **April 30** for work to begin **fall 2024 academic term** (September to December)
- **August 15** for work to begin **spring 2025 academic term** (January to May)

Proposals must be submitted as a single PDF file to [rcp@umn.edu](mailto:rcp@umn.edu).

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## OVERVIEW OF RCP

The Resilient Communities Project (RCP) facilitates **collaborative partnerships** between the University of Minnesota and local government agencies in Minnesota that engage students and faculty from across the university to work on *locally identified projects that advance community sustainability, equity, and resilience*. University faculty, graduate and professional students, and staff address the partner's **research and technical assistance needs** through course-based or independent student projects, providing easy and efficient access to research and expertise available anywhere within the University of Minnesota system.



Previous RCP partnerships and projects have addressed a host of local issues:

- |                              |                                  |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ▪ housing                    | ▪ public participation           |
| ▪ economic development       | ▪ social services                |
| ▪ public health and wellness | ▪ natural resource management ** |
| ▪ parks and recreation       | ▪ historic preservation          |
| ▪ climate change **          | ▪ transportation                 |
| ▪ education                  | ▪ public safety                  |

*\*\* indicates areas of particular interest for Metropolitan Council matching funds*

RCP works closely with our partners to match projects with students and faculty from **departments and disciplines relevant to your project needs**. Assistance is available at **all project stages** (analysis, planning, design, implementation, and evaluation) and across **all departments in your agency** (administration, human resources, planning, police and fire, public health, public works, engineering, communications, parks and recreation, finance, environmental management, and more).

## HOW AN RCP PARTNERSHIP WORKS

The partnership begins with a series of orientation and planning meetings to learn about your community, discuss your needs and goals for the partnership, and define a clear scope of work for each project. Then University of Minnesota students, faculty, and staff will actively collaborate with you on the projects during fall and spring (and occasionally summer) academic terms, depending on your project timeline and course availability. Project deliverables are provided at the end of each term.

### **Partner Commitment**

A key element of a successful RCP partnership is **commitment and involvement** from staff at our partner agencies. **For each project submitted**, partners will be expected to identify a **project lead**—an individual staff member who will be the primary point of contact for U of MN students, faculty, and staff working on that project. Project leads are responsible for

- attending an initial RCP orientation session;
- participating in project scoping meetings;
- preparing and providing background materials related to the project;
- pitching projects to students and faculty during class meeting times on University of Minnesota campuses or via video conference;
- leading site visits in the community;
- initiating and coordinating the participation of residents, community organizations, or other stakeholders in the project;
- attending regular project meetings in person or via video conference;

- participating in periodic reviews of student work throughout the semester;
- coordinating and attending final project presentations on the U of MN campuses and/or in the community; and
- participating in an interview about the project at the end of the partnership, to be used as part of an RCP podcast or to inform a feature article or blog post on RCP's website.

Based on previous participant feedback, **project leads should anticipate spending an average of 3–5 hours per week on each project they are responsible for during each semester the project is active.**

### ***RCP and University Commitment***

RCP staff with knowledge of the range of academic departments and resources at the University and with expertise in community resilience, project management, and communications will provide **ongoing support to ensure high-quality outcomes that meet your agency's needs.** This includes recruiting and coordinating university resources (students, faculty, staff, and courses), facilitating project scoping, identifying and coordinating delivery of data and background information for student projects, maintaining a Basecamp project management system, coordinating communications and media outreach about the partnership, planning and staffing campus and community events, promoting partnership activities through social and earned media, reimbursing project-related travel and material costs to support student and faculty participation in the program, and troubleshooting projects as needed.

Each project will be matched with up to two (2) U of MN courses, student teams, or independent student researchers. If additional matches or other types of assistance (e.g., placing an intern with your agency) are desired, this may incur additional costs, pending your agency's pre-approval.

Outcomes from each University course, student team, or individual student that participates in a project will be documented in a **final presentation and report** (or other agreed-upon deliverable) at the conclusion of the project. All work products will be licensed through a Creative Commons agreement so your agency can reproduce, distribute, or adapt the work for non-commercial purposes.

For projects that receive Metropolitan Council matching funds, the Council commits to providing technical assistance and feedback to participating communities throughout the project duration, including assisting participating communities in using Council data, tools, and resources, and in translating the project outcomes, framework, and lessons learned to a larger audience within the region.

### ***Financial Cost of the Program***

RCP receives some funding and in-kind support from the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA), but we depend on a **local financial contribution** from our partners to support program staffing and operations. The cost is currently **\$7,000 per project** for partnerships that include from **1 to 4 projects**, or **\$6,000 per project** for partnerships that include **5 or more projects**. For projects that are selected for Metropolitan Council matching funds, the cost is **\$3,000 per eligible project**.



Partners may choose to fund their local contribution through a collaboration with other groups, such as county and state agencies, watershed districts, private developers, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and chambers of commerce. Regardless of where funds are obtained, **the partner agency is responsible for acting as the sole fiscal agent for the partnership, and for making payment to RCP** for all projects that are successfully matched.

## **BENEFITS OF AN RCP PARTNERSHIP**

Previous project leads and community partners have identified many benefits they realized from a partnership with the Resilient Communities Project, including

- a high rate of return on investment, with hundreds of hours of concentrated student work on high-priority projects—*it would be 2-3 more costly* to engage students as interns or research assistants for the equivalent number of hours
- access to an interdisciplinary group of faculty and students with knowledge of innovative and cutting-edge research and practice on sustainability, equity, and resilience
- data analysis, case studies, concept plans, and policy recommendations that can energize staff, spark community and staff discussions, and get “stuck” projects moving again
- expanded breadth of conversations around projects, issues, and solutions—students can explore and innovate in directions unavailable to staff or consultants due to constrained project budgets or political resistance
- new opportunities for community residents and stakeholders to become involved in locally driven conversations
- a network of students and faculty serving as informal ambassadors for your agency and community—sharing their experiences through conference presentations, community meetings, job interviews, and informal conversations
- opportunities to foster next-generation local government professionals by mentoring and collaborating with highly motivated and engaged students

### **What Past Partners Have to Say**

*"Very appreciative of the amount of effort that went into this engagement effort and the students' willingness to make personal and professional relationships, and represent the City in a positive manner that will have a long-lasting impression on our community."*

*"The student's work definitely helped get this long-standing desire to look at this issue "unstuck" and I was so impressed with the student's knowledge and insight into this topic that I hired him to complete the study this summer."*

*"The whole experience was very positive. All parties representing the U of M were very professional, thoughtful, and brought some excellent insight to the project that I may have overlooked."*

*"There is positive energy that comes with working with students on projects. Having multiple disciplines look at these topics was really invaluable."*

*"This type of collaborative project is exceptionally useful to both students and the project coordinators. . . I would do it again without hesitation."*

*"The visual approach to communicating research, data collection, and recommendations [from RCP] was exactly what we were looking for. We too often default to professional jargon that doesn't translate well to our residents and business owners. We believe it will set a new standard for how we develop policy and communication documents."*

## HOW TO APPLY

### Submitting Your Proposal

Proposals must be **submitted by email as a single PDF file** sent to [rcp@umn.edu](mailto:rcp@umn.edu).

RCP staff are available to help with development of your proposal **at any stage**—from introducing the RCP program and model to staff, elected officials, and other stakeholders to helping brainstorm ideas for projects or preparing a proposal for submission. Please contact us at [rcp@umn.edu](mailto:rcp@umn.edu) for assistance or with questions!

*Applicants are **strongly encouraged** to reach out to RCP during preparation of their proposal to discuss proposed projects and ensure they are within the capacity of RCP and appropriate for student work.*



### Deadline for Proposals

**Proposals are accepted at any time**, but to ensure eligibility for assistance during the time periods indicated below, proposals must be received by the following dates:

- **April 30** for work to begin fall academic term (September to December 2024)
- **August 15** for work to begin spring academic term (January to May 2025)

### Required Proposal Components

1. **Partner Information:** Provide (a) the name of your agency and/or community, (b) a brief description of your agency and community, (c) current population and number of households in the geographic area your agency serves or represents, (d) annual budget, and (e) the approximate total number of staff your agency employs.
2. **Proposed Project(s):** Provide individual descriptions of from **one to fifteen (1–15) projects**. Projects should address high-priority issues for your agency and the community it serves, and involve **research questions or technical assistance needs** appropriate for graduate-level student work. Projects should demonstrably advance community sustainability, equity, or resilience. For suggestions on how to choose projects, we encourage you to visit the “Selecting Projects for an RCP Partnership” web page at [rcp.umn.edu/apply-rcp/selecting-projects-rcp-partnership](http://rcp.umn.edu/apply-rcp/selecting-projects-rcp-partnership).

**For EACH project**, provide the following information:

- a. **Project title.** Should be descriptive of the project but can also be creative.
- b. **Project lead.** Identify one staff person in your agency who will serve as the primary contact for the project, as well as their job title, department, e-mail address, and phone number. This individual must be able to commit an average of 3–5 hours per week to the project each academic semester that the project is active throughout the partnership.
- c. **A 1–2 paragraph description of the project.** What is the **context** for the project? Why is this project a **priority** at this time? What are your agency’s **ultimate goals or objectives** related to the project or the larger issues the project addresses? How will student work be **used by your agency or the broader community** to further these goals/objectives?
- d. **3–5 specific issues, questions, ideas, or problems for consideration that you want students to address.** What are the key things that would help to advance local efforts on this project or on the issues this project touches?



- e. **Project impact.** Who specifically will benefit from this project and how? How will this project serve to **advance sustainability, equity, and/or resilience** in your community?
  - f. **Community partners or stakeholders** (external to your agency) that will be invited to participate in the project. This might include but is not limited to other government agencies, nonprofit or community organizations, resident or neighborhood groups, or local businesses. **Describe specifically how these individuals or organizations will be involved, what they will do, and how their participation will benefit the project.** *NOTE: It is NOT necessary to include partners or stakeholders for every project proposed.*
  - g. **Statement confirming consistency and conformance with authorized and adopted plans.** *For projects seeking matching funds from the Metropolitan Council,* the proposal should include a short statement confirming that the project conforms to and is consistent with the community's adopted 2040 comprehensive plan, and the plans and policies of the Council.
3. **Demonstration of Support:** Include letter(s) or formal resolution(s) supporting your agency's application to and participation in the Resilient Communities Project from **one or more** of the following: city/county manager or administrator, mayor, elected governing body (city council, county board, etc.), relevant department heads. If appropriate, you may also wish to include demonstrations of support from partner/stakeholder organizations or agencies, and/or external funding entities, though these are not required.

## PROPOSAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

RCP will evaluate your proposal based on the following criteria:

1. **Top-Level Support and Administrative Capacity:** Senior staff show a commitment to participate in the RCP program and to direct staff time and resources to the partnership.
2. **Clear Project Focus:** Projects are well formulated, issues or questions for investigation are defined, and there is a clear project goal.
3. **Project Relevance and Impact:** Clear description of how results will be used, what the impact will be, and how the project builds on or advances the partner's or the broader community's overall sustainability, equity, or resilience efforts.
4. **Community Engagement:** Where appropriate, projects include a commitment to meaningfully engage through the partnership those residents and other stakeholders directly affected by the issue, as a means of integrating local knowledge and concerns.
5. **External Partnerships:** Where appropriate, projects involve collaboration with other local entities (e.g. neighboring cities, counties, watershed districts, transportation districts, school districts, business or professional organizations, educational institutions) to help formulate projects, share partnership costs, and broaden support for any policies, programs, or other initiatives that result from working with the University.
6. **Likelihood of Match with University Courses:** Projects must be within the capability of University of Minnesota graduate/professional students, and should involve appropriate research or technical assistance needs, not menial tasks or low-level administrative work. *NOTE: While RCP works diligently to match projects, we cannot guarantee matches for all projects. If we are unable to match your project, you pay nothing.*