

## **The W@M Collaborative mission**

Our **mission** is to work with communities that have been disproportionately affected by historic inequities in order to develop just, equitable, and sustainable approaches that address their water priorities.

Initially, we are working with **black, indigenous, or other communities of color (BIPOC) in Michigan** that experience indignities such as unsafe or unaffordable drinking water, flooding of low-lying neighborhoods, surface water quality degraded by legacy contaminants in sediments and soils, and generational discouragement or disengagement from water-based recreation and aesthetics. These burdens are direct offshoots of the region's industrial past and associated racist policies and practices. Current federal and state efforts to restore the health of Great Lakes waterways, and thereby revitalize neighboring communities, represent a very rare opportunity to shape the region's society and economy for the coming century. It is imperative the needs and voices of BIPOC communities be represented in these efforts.

We **define community** as groups with shared water interests at various levels from the neighborhood up to the local government, including public, and nongovernmental sectors. Initially, we are focused on partnering with black communities, indigenous communities, or other communities of color in Michigan.

## **The W@M Collaborative Process**

**Step 1:** A scoping meeting with W@M Collaborative co-chairs and Steering Committee members (~1 hour) to build a relationship and identify community priorities.

- Additional check-in confirming takeaways from scoping meeting
- Additional ad-hoc communications from W@M Collaborative team e.g., emails, doodle polls

**Step 2:** A formal meeting (~2-4 hours across 1 week) with university faculty who have interests and skillsets aligned with your community priorities.

After this initial relationship-building and priority identification, our goal is to formalize community and faculty partnerships. This could take several shapes e.g., a summer student intern working at an organization to scope a project, faculty incorporate community priorities into a series of U-M courses for the fall semester, or immediate action/engagement with a faculty partner(s) on a community priority. Further "level of involvement" will be facilitated by the Collaborative staff, but will ultimately be developed and agreed upon between the community and their faculty partner(s).

**Space/materials needed:** due to current University of Michigan guidelines, in-person meetings are not possible. Partners will need regular access to computers and virtual meeting platforms (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Team, Google Hangouts). We anticipate in-person collaboration once it is safely possible.

## **Example projects:**

A unit of city government wants to incorporate elements of justice and equity into their new climate adaptation plan, but they lack the tools and metrics to confidently incorporate them. A W@M Collaborative team creates a report that synthesizes current knowledge of how climate change differentially affects urban communities and the ways that adaptation actions can exacerbate or address existing inequalities in cities. Working with city employees, they create an easily accessible guide and supporting website that summarizes and shares the resources, data, frameworks, tools, and metrics available to cities for addressing justice considerations in their adaptation planning and implementation process.

A Detroit-based non-profit is looking for ways to amplify local history to the broader Michigan community. A W@M Collaborative team develops a set of U-M courses where students will work with communities to first help gather these stories and then place them in a broader historical narrative of the state. Using university press connections, along with local Detroit outlets, this collaboration will amplify these stories and make the rich history and current challenges facing Detroit communities more present, more palpable, and more real.

The federal Areas of Concern (AOC) program is striving to restore water-based, beneficial uses in the highly degraded Rouge River and Detroit River AOCs. Local program delivery is contingent on effective, representative Public Advisory Councils (PACs) for each AOC. Several UM SEAS (School for Environment and Sustainability) Masters Project Teams have worked with the Michigan Department of EGLE, AOC Program, and the local PACs, to examine: what attributes of PACs make them most effective; how PACs should prepare for long-term stewardship after AOC delisting; and how the state can support PACs that are a long way from delisting. These teams have provided a series of recommendations for improved PAC operation and effectiveness, and some are now being implemented with the help of a current SEAS MS Team.