Water@Michigan Collaborative

Water has shaped the geography and history of the Great Lakes region. The lakes, their connecting channels, and their tributary rivers nurture and sustain abundant natural resources, serve as recreational resources, and provide transportation and other economic services to adjacent communities. However, knowledge about and access to these resources and their services is unevenly distributed within and across communities.

Is your organization, government, or community group interested in learning about and taking action related to your water? Such as:

- Better understanding the history and culture of water in your community or region?
- Collecting stories about your community's relationship to its water resources?
- Improving or changing your community's access to waterfront recreation?
- Restoring natural areas, such as parks, nature preserves, in your community?
- Access to safe and affordable drinking water?
- Mitigating flooding?

The Water@Michigan Collaborative aims to bridge community knowledge, skills, and leadership with campus-based expertise and technical resources to identify and advance community water priorities.

About the Collaborative

Water@Michigan is a new collaborative effort from the University of Michigan that brings together faculty from across campus 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. We believe that knowing about and celebrating connections to water contributes to vibrant, healthy, and connected Michigan communities. And by taking stewardship of its water resources, a community ensures a sustainable and equitable future.

About the Collaborative Process

Interested community partners will have an initial scoping meeting with Collaborative staff to build a relationship and to dig deeper into community-identified water priorities. These initial communications will continue as needed.

Later, the W@M Collaborative will host a "Listening Session" with the community partner and university faculty who have interests and skillsets aligned with their priorities. The goal of the Listening Session is to create community-faculty partnerships to begin scoping further collaboration and fleshing out project ideas, with this partnership being facilitated by W@M Collaborative staff. This could take several forms e.g., a summer student intern working at an organization to scope a project, faculty incorporating 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.

Eligibility

This opportunity is open to all groups with shared water interests at various levels from the neighborhood up to local government, including public, and nongovernmental sectors. W@M is focused on partnering with black communities, indigenous communities, or other communities of color in southeast Michigan.

How to Apply

Use this brief form to register a project idea or email Ashley Stoltenberg at astolten@umich.edu.

Project Examples

A unit of city government wants to incorporate elements of justice and equity into their new climate adaptation plan. 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 accessible overview and website of existing research as well as evidence-based frameworks and tools cities can use to implement 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 partner with community residents to gather oral histories 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 government has an Areas of Concern (AOC) program that is working to restore degraded waterways. Each AOC, like the Rogue and Detroit Rivers, is represented by a Public Advisory Council (PAC). Several U-M Masters Student Teams are collaborating with the PACs and the Department of Energy, Great Lakes, and Environment (EGLE) to examine how to improve the operation and effectiveness of the program and the PAC's role. The students will make a series of recommendations to improve the program, including how the state can better support PACs.