



## **Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin State Legislative Funding Request for Proposals #4**

Funding: New Innovative Grant Projects or Ongoing/Renewal of Programs (Programmatic funding) focusing on Student Learning Opportunities, Academic Program Development, Collaborative Research and Career Pathways

**RFP Release: February 3, 2025**

**Proposal Submission Deadline: April 1, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.**

**Notifications: No later than June 30, 2025.**

**Funding Distribution Begins: July 1, 2025**

### ***Introduction***

The Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin is a statewide initiative of the 13 Universities of Wisconsin. We are a collaborative network that leverages the strengths of each university to address water challenges and train Wisconsin's future water workforce. The Wisconsin State Legislature has awarded the Freshwater Collaborative \$5 million per biennial budget to support freshwater initiatives at the Universities of Wisconsin. These initiatives must align with the Freshwater Collaborative's goals and legislative priorities. The Freshwater Collaborative has a total of \$2 million available per year (\$4 million per biennium) to support this round of proposals, contingent on continuing available legislative funds. Funds will be distributed internally using Fund 113.

**This RFP will consider two types of funding: Innovative Grant Funding and Programmatic Funding.**

- *Innovative Grant Funding* will be awarded for 1-2 years. Qualifying grants include collaborative research projects that involve undergraduate and/or K-12 students, and pilot funds to test innovative new programs.
- *Programmatic Funding* will provide longer-term funding (up to six years; funds roll over each biennium) to support programs that have previously received funds from the Freshwater Collaborative. The goal is to provide stability and growth of programs that have shown demonstrable outcomes and growth. This may include but is not limited to collaborative courses, K-12 outreach and recruitment programs, undergraduate research programs, etc. Submissions for Programmatic Funding must be pre-approved by the Freshwater Collaborative based on conversations with the Steering Committee members and administrators at your university. Only those programs identified as part of the Collaborative's and your university's strategic efforts around freshwater programs will be considered. If you feel your program qualifies, reach out to your Steering Committee member and/or the Freshwater Collaborative Executive Director before submitting.

### ***Program Purpose and Rationale***

The Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin must demonstrate ongoing viability, economic importance, sustainability, and contribution toward developing a vibrant freshwater workforce to the state legislature. The legislature requires evidence for a positive return on investment prior to committing additional funds to the Freshwater Collaborative.

The purpose of the July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2027, State Legislative Funding Request for Proposals is to prioritize cross-campus projects that engage and recruit undergraduate students through hands-on courses, research, field and lab experiences, and internships. Proposals can be for Innovative Grant Funding of projects that will expand undergraduate research or pilot new ideas or for Programmatic Funding to enhance existing Freshwater Collaborative programs at campuses.

### ***State Legislative Directives and Freshwater Collaborative Priorities***

- Devise new water-centric training programs focused on undergraduates.
- Provide scholarships and student support to retain and attract new talent and more students.
- Enhance workforce development programming.
- Foster collaborative research and initiatives among the 13 UW universities, the private sector, community, and state institutions that address the 10 Grand Water Challenges, with a specific focus on Agricultural Water Management and Water Quality Safety and Emerging Contaminants.

The [10 Grand Water Challenges for Wisconsin](#) are:

- Agricultural Water Management (legislative focus)
- Water Quality Safety and Emerging Contaminants (legislative focus)
- Industrial Water Engineering and Technology
- Great Lakes Management and Restoration
- Water Infrastructure: Collection, Distribution, Treatment
- Water Business and Finance
- Watershed Management and Restoration
- Water Security, Protection and Resilience
- Healthy Recreational and Transportation Water Use
- Aquaculture/Aquaponics/Water Food Systems

### ***Strategic Priorities***

From the list of state legislative directives/priorities, the Freshwater Collaborative has compiled the following list of how the Freshwater Collaborative will accomplish the directives and create a pipeline to jobs. See Appendix for detailed definitions.

- Community Engagement
- Student Recruitment
- Student Retention/Learning
- Collaborative Research
- Collaborative Curriculum
- Industry Partnerships
- Internship Placement
- Career Placement
- Broadening Perspectives in the Water Sector
- Growing and Strengthening the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin

### ***Funding Levels and Program Terms***

Innovative Grant Funding proposals have up to a two-year term and Programmatic Funding proposals have up to a six-year term. Principal Investigators (PIs) will be required to submit annual progress reports to demonstrate impact on the state legislative directives. The Freshwater Collaborative reserves the right to revoke or discontinue funds if demonstrable progress is not shown. Programmatic Funding will automatically roll into the next biennial budget contingent on continuity of legislative funds.

The Freshwater Collaborative will require an updated Programmatic Funding proposal to be submitted during the fifth year of the six-year cycle.

In addition, it is imperative that the Freshwater Collaborative demonstrate that its state funding is being leveraged to increase the funding universities receive from other funding sources, such as federal grants, private investment and/or definitive University commitment. Grant recipients should be prepared to report on how they leveraged or matched funds from either the Freshwater Collaborative or outside sources (i.e., federal grants, industry, etc.). For example, the results from a Freshwater Collaborative-funded research grant helped a faculty member receive a large NSF grant, or a donor makes a gift to your university because of a project or course that was funded by the Freshwater Collaborative. University commitment can be demonstrated by in-kind support, covering the costs for analytical instrumentation and expenses, research funding, release time, or other mechanisms. Consult with the sponsored programs office for your administrative unit for the options available at your institution.

### ***Project Eligibility***

While all proposals will be considered, preference will be given to proposals that clearly enhance the vision, visibility, economic importance, and sustainability of the Freshwater Collaborative. Preference will be given to collaborative, multicampus projects that engage undergraduate students in hands-on courses, research, field and lab experiences, and internships that address Wisconsin's Grand Water Challenges. Preference also will be given to projects that expand student enrollment at the Universities of Wisconsin. A list of previously funded projects can be found here: <https://freshwater.wisconsin.edu/research/funded-projects/>

**Proposals must complement your university's comprehensive water programming and initiatives and fit into the overall mission of the campus and the Freshwater Collaborative.** Grantees are encouraged to discuss proposal ideas with their campus' Steering Committee member in advance of submission. **All proposals must align with Freshwater Collaborative's core values of honesty, integrity, respect, innovation, equity, and personal accountability.**

This RFP encourages projects that focus on different aspects of freshwater in Wisconsin. Ideal proposals will address the following elements:

**1. *Collaboration Among Universities of Wisconsin campuses***

The Freshwater Collaborative seeks to fund purposeful collaborations with impact, including interdisciplinary collaborations, collaborations among students and faculty/staff, collaborations with external partners, and collaborations among campuses. Preference will be given to multi-campus projects that engage researchers, students, and others from multiple disciplines and sectors.

**2. *New Student Opportunities***

The Freshwater Collaborative seeks to respond to workforce demand and emerging career opportunities in water-related fields. Preference will be given to proposals designed to increase new student enrollment at Universities of Wisconsin campuses and train students for Wisconsin's water workforce.

**3. *Experiential Learning***

The Freshwater Collaborative seeks to support hands-on courses or experiences that will grow a student's network across Wisconsin and provide workforce training with a focus on learning goals associated with the 10 Grand Water Challenges. Ideally, student experiences will contain at least three of the following:

- Field experience

- Lab experience
- Computer experience (possibly for data analysis, design work, etc.)
- Connections to career and networking opportunities
- Testing towards a credential
- Growing awareness of water career opportunities
- Incorporates high-impact practices
- Internships
- Undergraduate research and conference presentations

### **Award Types**

Awards will support student engagement and learning programs. Proposals can address more than one award type. Award types are:

1. **Student Learning Opportunities.** Experiential learning opportunities for high school or undergraduate students. Examples include:
  - a. Spring break or winterim trip related to freshwater
  - b. Student field and/or lab work
  - c. Freshwater camp to recruit prospective students
  - d. Collaborative projects with community and industry partners focused on advancing freshwater initiatives with students
  - e. Supplies, materials, and safety/protective equipment for student field/lab work
2. **Academic Program Development:** Supports ongoing funding of collaborative courses and academic programming that have already received funding from the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin. No new courses will be allowed. The funding requests can include:
  - a. Student support for housing and food during summer/winterim courses
  - b. Student stipends, scholarships, or costs to cover differential tuition between campuses
  - c. Equipment and materials to run hands-on courses
  - d. Travel expenses related to coursework
  - e. Faculty/staff buyout for summer/winterim courses
  - f. Administrative support of Freshwater Collaborative programs
3. **Collaborative Research:** This can be research that is collaborative and/or has the potential for future cross-functional collaboration (must be discussed in proposal) with other institutional departments on campus or with other academic or external partners. These grants can include student stipends or salary and student and faculty adviser travel for students. to present at conferences. Examples of research include:
  - a. Interdisciplinary water research
  - b. Cross-campus water research
  - c. Engaging students in data collection and research
  - d. Community engaged water research
4. **Career Pathways:** Examples include:
  - a. Growing internship programming at multiple campuses
  - b. Job placement opportunities
  - c. Industry, policy, and non-profit partnerships that provide networking and mentorship

### ***Proposal Submission Requirements***

For proposals that involve multiple universities, the lead PI is responsible for coordinating and submitting ONE joint proposal on behalf of all project partners, with secondary PIs listed for all other universities involved. The lead PI will serve as the primary contact for the Freshwater Collaborative for questions and reporting/evaluation. Secondary PIs will be responsible for managing funds allocated to their respective campuses. Each of the collaborating institution's contributions/involvement must be clearly described in the Project Narrative.

Proposals must be submitted following your institution's policy for proposal submissions. In the case of comprehensive universities, this means working with your institution's Office of Sponsored Programs.

Application, including downloadable forms, are available at: <https://freshwater.wisconsin.edu/rfp-4/>

#### **The proposal must include the following items for each proposed project:**

- **Project Narrative:** Describes how the proposal supports your university's long-term vision of engagement in the Freshwater Collaborative and statewide collaborations in water. Should describe how this proposal connects to other currently funded and/or proposed Freshwater Collaborative-funded projects at your institution or across the state. You will be asked to provide project goals, timeline, and impact information. Innovative Grant Funding timeline can be up to two years. Programmatic Funding timeline can be up to six years.
- **Budget:** Identify the anticipated expenses and provide a timeline for using funds. List any grants, matching funds from the campus, planned external award requests, or other financial sources. Faculty course-buyouts and summer salary are allowable costs. Indirect costs are not allowable. Allowable personnel are limited-term employees, adjunct instructors, graduate assistants, and hourly students. Fringe benefits should be budgeted at institutional rates. **A budget for each institution must be included with the joint proposal submitted by the lead PI** (e.g., if three universities are participating in the program or course, the single joint proposal must include a budget for each university). You will upload budgets to your online submission form.
- **Endorsement Page:** Obtain the signatures of the applicant and collaborators, applicant's supervisor or department chair, steering committee members, and the provosts and/or authorizing officials. These signatures demonstrate campus support and buy-in for the proposed project. All collaborating universities must submit an endorsement page for each proposal they are a part of. Steering Committee representatives must sign off on all proposals prior to submission to ensure that the Freshwater Collaborative representative at each university is aware of all proposal submissions. *To ensure accurate financial and academic methods proposed are feasible, we ask that your sponsored programs/financial/academic representative who would support/oversee the administrative management of this project review and sign your proposal.*
  - **Endorsement Page for UW-Madison:** Applicant must use the WISPER electronic routing application to secure department and dean/director/division-level authorizations. Division- authorized WISPER records should be routed to WISPER user BOYCE, MELISSA ANN in department 349600. Please set the "submission method" field in the WISPER record to "internal routing only." The record does not need to be routed through the Research and Sponsored Programs office.
  - **Endorsement Page for UW-Milwaukee:** Applicants do not need to complete a WISPER record. Work to secure appropriate department and dean/director/division-level authorizations.
- **Other supporting documents** may include letters of support, brochures, or program information. These are optional but may strengthen the proposal submission.

***Proposal Review and Selection Process***

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee of at least five external and internal reviewers with academic experience and legislative understanding who will make funding recommendations to the Freshwater Collaborative Executive Director. The review committee may request additional information, clarifications, and/or edits before making a determination on proposals. The Executive Director will make final decisions on the awards. **We strongly encourage all applicants to review the scorecard below, which the review committee will use to evaluate the proposals.**

The scorecard for review is as follows:

<b>PROPOSAL OVERVIEW</b>	<b>(10)</b>
If programmatic, describes how builds upon previous demonstrated success; if new, describes why this program is needed.	5
Clearly states goal, target audience, and desired outcome and how the proposal will meet stated needs.	5
<b>MISSION</b>	<b>(20)</b>
Details how work meets Freshwater Collaborative strategic priorities.	10
Demonstrates collaboration as defined by the Freshwater Collaborative RFP.	10
<b>IMPACT, STRATEGY &amp; COLLABORATION</b>	<b>(40)</b>
Describes intended impact at campus, community, and state level and demonstrates how this impact will be made.	10
Provides evidence that there are campus resources supporting the project and aligns with overall strategy of institution. Describes how PIs will leverage funds to secure additional external funding	5
Describes how this project will increase engagement with community and industry partners to enhance workforce development. Provided details about expected contributions and involvement of collaborating UW institutions, industry/nonprofit partners and community members.	10
Demonstrates stakeholder buy-in in the initiative. This includes letters of support, an established relationship, and/or ethical and sufficient incentives.	5
Addresses 10 Grand Water Challenges. Priority given to those that focus on Agricultural Water Management and Water Quality Safety and Emerging Contaminants.	10
<b>STUDENT ENGAGEMENT</b>	<b>(30)</b>
Provides details about the scope and depth of student experiences and number of students	15

participating. Provides details about the hands-on field and/or lab experiences students will participate in and how these opportunities will attract and retain students into water-related degree programs and careers.	
Provides opportunities that prepare students for water-related careers. This can include career development workshops, networking opportunities with employers, conference presentations, and scientific communication with communities and other groups of interest.	15
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>100</b>

Once the review process has been completed and the award is determined, the award letter will be emailed to PIs, Offices of Sponsored Programs/Research, and appropriate administrative staff. The award letter will include details on Fund 113 funds disbursement and data reporting.

***Program Contact***

Please direct all questions to [rfp-questions@uwm.edu](mailto:rfp-questions@uwm.edu).

## APPENDIX

### Progress Indicators

All awarded projects will be required to submit annual evaluation surveys. Data collected will address the following progress indicators:

- Description of major goals of the project, main activities, accomplishments during the reporting period
- Grand Water Challenge(s) addressed by project
- Number of students that participated in the project. This includes breakdown by UW institution and by K-12, undergraduate, and graduate students
- Impact on student learning and engagement with freshwater
- How the grant incorporated diverse perspectives, including under-represented groups and organizations
- Student recruitment methods and approximate number of students reached with project recruitment efforts
- Counties that directly benefited from the project
- Names of partnering UW entities, for-profit, non-profit, governmental organizations, K-12, private universities and colleges, and community organizations
- Description of how partners were involved in the project
- Description of return on investment for the state of Wisconsin
- Name of publicly published (include citation), presented findings, and plans for future presentations and/or publications
- Ways in which funds and/or research results were leveraged to secure additional funding from other sources
- Budgetary spending



**Definitions of Strategic Priorities**

In collaboration with UW Campuses, Universities of Wisconsin, Wisconsin State Legislature, and freshwater organizations and industry, the Freshwater Collaborative has established the following approaches for supporting the strategic priorities:

<b>Community Engagement</b>	Building relationships with communities and identifying how the Freshwater Collaborative and campuses can help meet community freshwater needs. This also needs to consider issues and challenges that impact community access to freshwater.
<b>Student Recruitment</b>	The Freshwater Collaborative is looking to recruit from all communities, including those currently underrepresented in the water sector with a local, regional, national, and international scale.
<b>Student Retention/Learning</b>	Freshwater Collaborative programming needs to engage students through hands-on water training that offers them real-world experience that prepares them for their future career prospects.
<b>Collaborative Research</b>	Freshwater Collaborative–supported research should tackle the 10 Grand Water Challenges and offers hands-on real-world problem solving and learning to students. The Freshwater Collaborative will focus these undergraduate research experiences on cross-campus collaborations to expand the possibilities for growth for each student.
<b>Collaborative Curriculum</b>	Courses should be offered at more than one campus, possibly at all 13. Funds can be used for planning and working through the logistics of sharing courses (i.e., financials, student credit hours, etc.). Funds can also be used for the costs of running the courses. The vision includes courses that utilize the expertise of faculty from across the state to enhance the existing freshwater learning experience and could become a part of future certificate programs.
<b>Industry Partnerships</b>	Linking the Freshwater Collaborative, its curricula, and its students to industry gives a pathway to fund and tackle the 10 Grand Water Challenges through research and development and in-the-field applications.
<b>Internship Placement</b>	Growing internship placements can happen in a multitude of ways, such as: growing current campus career services programming, increasing the number of external partners, or hosting a regional water and environment career fair.
<b>Career Placement</b>	Career placements can be made by growing internship and hands-on experiential learning opportunities for students that include field and lab work, career networking, research and conference

	presentations. In these ways, students will grow a marketable skillset with demonstrated competency enabling placement in a water career.
<b>Broadening Perspectives in the Water Sector</b>	Broadening Perspectives in the Water Sector needs to be incorporated into all things above.
<b>Growing &amp; Strengthening the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin</b>	All projects must address this as part of the application and must answer how the outcome of the proposal promotes the value of the Freshwater Collaborative and why it should receive the State's support.