

# Strategic Plan

2023 - 2027



## **Our Mission**

Water@UW-Madison serves the faculty, staff and students with water interests on the UW-Madison campus by nurturing a vibrant and connected community that works to solve contemporary water-related challenges.

## **Our Vision**

Our vision is to grow an engaged, connected and diverse water community on the UW-Madison campus that works collaboratively to conduct community-driven and policy-relevant water research that serves the needs of the state, its people, and the environment.

## **Process Notes**

This Strategic Plan reflects the voices and commitments of our community. Water@UW-Madison would like to thank all of those who contributed their time and energy to this effort. We are grateful to our affiliates, graduate students, and external partners whose insightful discussions helped define our vision. We look forward to the future, confident that Water@UW-Madison will continue to make a lasting contribution to solving contemporary water-related challenges. Funding for this effort was generously provided by the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Graduate Research and Education as well as the Office of the University of Wisconsin - Madison Provost.

Water@UW-Madison's strategic planning effort began in February of 2023 under the guidance of the Office of Strategic Consulting. Thirty-four individuals participated, including Water@UW affiliates and representatives from the River Alliance, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District, the UW Geological Survey, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. We held three interactive workshops and facilitated asynchronous work to conduct a comprehensive organizational scan, craft a shared vision for Water@UW-Madison's future, enumerate key barriers and identify strategic directions for our organization.

Water@UW-Madison began work on an implementation plan in fall of 2023. Working with a mentorship team at Discovery2Product, Water@UW-Madison conducted a set of customer discovery interviews to learn more about the needs and concerns of its affiliate community. Water@UW-Madison staff conducted 14 interviews using open-ended questions about workload, challenges, and resources while soliciting stories about collaboration and partnership. The interview effort helped solidify Water@UW-Madison's value proposition statement and gave us the information we needed to chart a course for implementation.

From the list of actions offered by participants during the strategic planning workshop, we selected those that were highly responsive to the needs of the Water@UW-Madison affiliate community. The parallel efforts to collaboratively outline a strategic vision and interview the affiliate community culminated in the strategic plan and recommended actions presented in this document. We are proud to present an organizational vision guided by three strategic directions, with an action plan to guide our organization's work and propel our work to build and support water research, education, and outreach at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## Water@UW-Madison's 5-Year Vision

As a result of our actions over the next 5 years, what do we want to see in place for Water@UW-Madison? We developed the following 8 desired outcomes by synthesizing input from a diverse group of stakeholders.



**INSPIRING VISION, CLEAR PURPOSE,  
COMPELLING COMMUNICATION**

**INNOVATIVE AND COLLABORATIVE  
CROSS-DISCIPLINARY WATER WORK**



**COMMUNITY-DRIVEN, POLICY-  
RELEVANT WATER RESEARCH**

**EMPOWERED, ENGAGED AND DIVERSE  
COMMUNITY OF WATER RESEARCHERS**



**SUPPORTIVE AND INCLUSIVE CLIMATE  
AND CULTURE**

**SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS IN GRADUATE &  
UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP**



**PROJECT-BASED RESEARCH FUNDING**

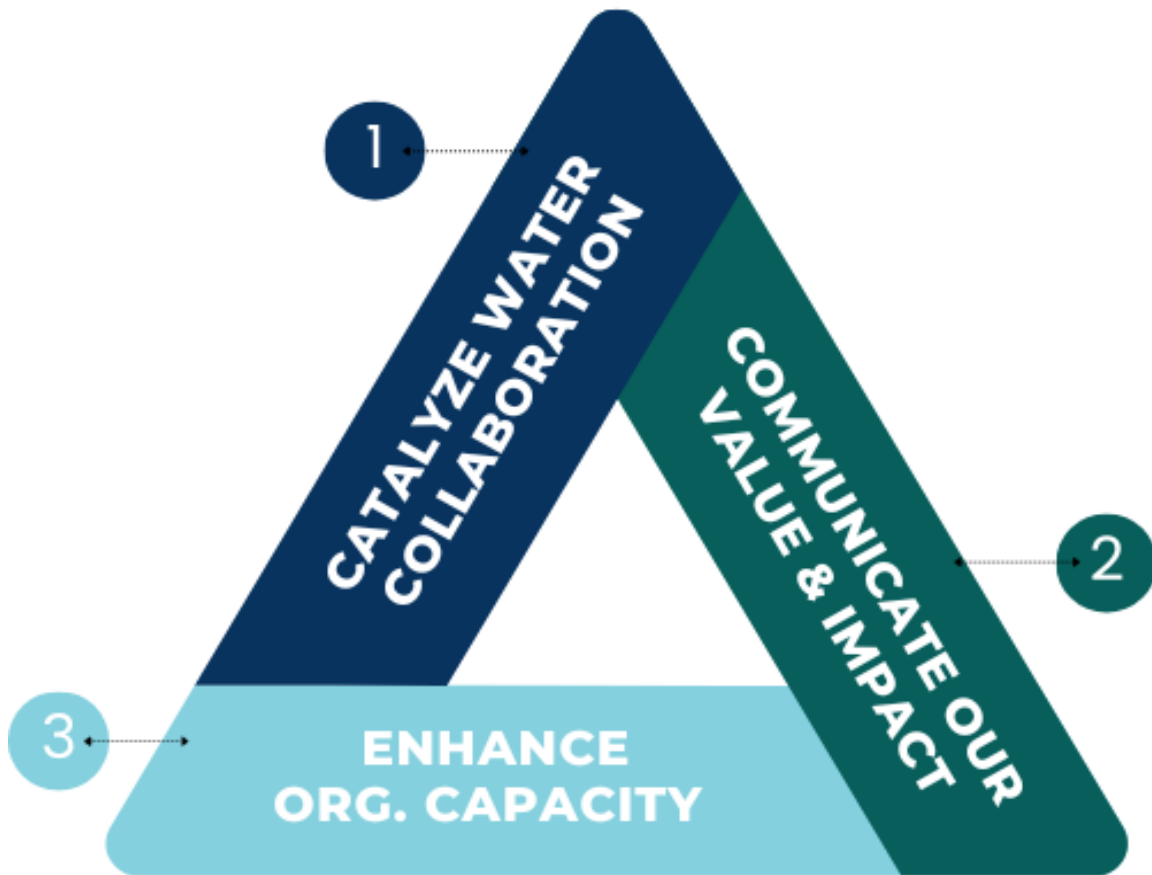
**A FINANCIALLY STABLE, SUSTAINABLE  
ORGANIZATION**



## 5-year Objectives

We aim to nurture a diverse water research community that works collaboratively to generate new knowledge and actionable science on the UW-Madison campus. In light of our shared vision and desired outcomes, Water@UW-Madison decided to focus on three main objectives to guide our group's strategies and actions for the next five years.

The heart and soul of our organization's work is captured by our primary objective - catalyzing water collaborations. Using strategies to advance programming, events and communication, we hope to create vibrant, open, and accepting atmosphere rich with opportunities for connection, exchange and collaboration. Our second objective is to communicate our value and impact, both of our organization as well as the affiliates, students, and partners we support. Finally, Water@UW-Madison seeks a sustainable future. By attending to our organization's structure and needs, we hope to build a strong, financially stable organization that can continue to support cross-disciplinary water scholarship for years to come.



## Strategies

## Plan Objectives

|   | Catalyze Water Collaboration | Communicate Value & Impact | Enhance Org. Capacity |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
| S1. Communicate opportunities that advance the work of our affiliates and students, including funding, employment, training and collaborative research.                                       |                              |                            |                       |
| S2. Coordinate events and programs that provide opportunities for networking and knowledge exchange for our affiliates and partners.  |                              |                            |                       |
| S3. Build shared research priorities with a wide range of external agency, community and industry partners.   |                              |                            |                       |
| S4. Recruit, train, support and diversify the next generation of water thinkers.  |                              |                            |                       |
| S5. Facilitate coordination of interdisciplinary teams that pursue collaborative funding opportunities, conduct interdisciplinary research, synthesize knowledge, and create new information. |                              |                            |                       |
| S6. Communicate and promote the current work and accomplishments of diverse Water@UW-Madison affiliates and students.   |                              |                            |                       |
| S7. Communicate about the Water@UW-Madison organization and its impact to campus and community leaders.   |                              |                            |                       |
| S8. Publish, implement and update the Water@UW-Madison Strategic Plan.  |                              |                            |                       |
| S9. Secure continued support for Water@UW-Madison's core programming.   |                              |                            |                       |
| S10. Ensure organizational structure and processes are documented, communicated, implemented, and continuously improved.  |                              |                            |                       |
| S11. Build capacity to enhance diversity and representation across Water@UW-Madison's programming, leadership and affiliates.   |                              |                            |                       |

## Implementation

The following action plans will advance our strategies over the next two years. These should be revisited and revised annually during work planning efforts.

### Objective #1

#### Catalyzing Water Collaborations

Water is centrally important to life on Earth, which calls us to think carefully about how we might rise to meet the growing threats to water quality, quantity, and access. Changeable and cycling, research to understand the use and protection of water almost insists one integrate knowledge and techniques from multiple disciplines.

In almost all but the most focused applications, water research can benefit from the work of creative, interdisciplinary research teams, but water research networks are often broad and diverse. The affiliates of Water@UW-Madison span over 40 departments and centers. Water@UW-Madison, through programs, events, and communication, aims to encourage collaborative knowledge production and exchange. We hope to build a diverse, productive, highly connected community that works across disciplines to answer the big and pressing questions of our time.

The first, and perhaps most prominent of our strategic directions is to **catalyze water collaborations**. We aim to accomplish this goal working both within the UW-Madison research community and between our community and external partners in community, government, and industry. The following actions will help advance this objective over the next 5 years. Each is aligned with one or more strategies from the table on page 6, with the primary strategy in bold (e.g. **S11**)

| Actions   | Timeline                       | Responsible                   | Accountable                  |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Publish Weekly Newsletters that communicate events, talks and conferences, as well as hiring, funding, internship and graduate study opportunities ( <b>S1</b> ) | Thursday during academic year. | Project Assistant             | Research Program Coordinator |
| 2. Maintain a list of contacts for affiliated faculty and staff ( <b>S1</b> , S7)   | Ongoing                        | Research Program Coordinator  | Project Assistant            |
| 3. Update newsletter to have a more contemporary look/feel ( <b>S1</b> )  | Summer 24                      | Project Assistant             | Research Program Coordinator |
| 4. Organize and convene Fall Art & Science Poster Session ( <b>S2</b> , S6)   | Annually in November           | Research Program Coordinator, | Executive committee          |

|   |   | Project Assistant                                 |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Actions   | Timeline                                  | Responsible                                       | Accountable   |
| 5. Organize and convene Spring Symposium ( <b>S2</b> , S6)  | Annually in May                           | Research Program Coordinator<br>Project Assistant | Executive Committee                                     |
| 6. Envision and convene partner meetings and events that build trust and strengthen relationships ( <b>S3</b> )   | Once annually                             | Co-chairs   | Research Program Coordinator                            |
| 7. Recruit and coordinate interdisciplinary teams that pursue collaborative funding opportunities, conduct interdisciplinary research, synthesize knowledge, and create new information ( <b>S3</b> ) | Spring 25                                 | Research Program Coordinator,<br>Co-chairs        | Executive committee,<br>External collaborative partners |
| 8. Design, recruit, implement and continuously improve a summer undergraduate research program to recruit, train and retain talented students in advanced water study ( <b>S4</b> )                   | Annually                                  | Research Program Coordinator                      | UW-Madison Graduate School                              |
| 9. Launch and serve in advisory role to an independent but parallel Water@UW-Madison Graduate Student Organization ( <b>S4</b> )  | Spring 24                                 | Research Program Coordinator                      | Executive committee                                     |
| 10. Organize and direct the Flow Project to encourage collaboration and knowledge production between artists and scientists ( <b>S5</b> , S2)   | Annually                                  | Water@UW-Madison project assistant                | Research Program Coordinator                            |
| 11. Directly fund and manage a grant-making program to grant \$10K awards to launch new community-based research projects or add a community-based aspect to an existing project ( <b>S5</b> )        | Annually in Feb. and March, 2024 and 2025 | Research Program Coordinator                      | Hayley Madden   |

## Objective #2

### Communicating our value & impact

Water@UW-Madison strives to create a recognizable brand for water research at UW-Madison, cementing its reputation as a center for global and regional innovation. We strive to represent our community while amplifying their reach and impact. We strive to communicate about our affiliates and their accomplishments, research projects, and tools in a way that attracts attention, builds legitimacy, and bolsters the reputation of UW-Madison, one of the top 10 research universities in the country.

Water@UW-Madison is largely a volunteer-run organization that thrives when our community members take an active role in our planning initiatives, setting our direction, and making decisions to serve the interest of our broader research community. Water@UW now supports one half-time staff position, which provides an opportunity to develop a new marketing strategy to better communicate the value and impact of our organization. These communication efforts are intended to grow membership, ensure our programming is effective and relevant, and generate support for our continued operation. The following actions will help advance this objective over the next 5 years. Each is aligned with one or more strategies from the table on page six, with the primary strategy in bold (e.g. **S11**)

| Actions   | Timeline          | Responsible                  | Accountable                  |
|---|-------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 12. Use existing academic analytics data to report on the productivity, collaborative network topology, and research focal areas of Water@UW-Madison affiliates ( <b>S6</b> , S7) | Spring 24         | Research Program Coordinator | Executive Committee          |
| 13. Activate social media marketing using LinkedIn and Instagram ( <b>S6</b> , S7)  | Fall 23           | Research Program Coordinator | Co-chairs                    |
| 14. Promote UW-Madison as the water research powerhouse that it is ( <b>S6</b> , S7).   | Fall 24           | Research Program Coordinator | Co-chairs                    |
| 15. Develop metrics to assess research, outreach, engagement and training at UW-Madison ( <b>S7</b> )   | Fall 25           | Research Program Coordinator | Executive Committee          |
| 16. Annually report to the community, funders and leadership on event reach, impact, and action ( <b>S7</b> )   | Annually in April | Co-chairs                    | Research Program Coordinator |
| 17. Prepare concise impact summary outlining service, audience, benefits and costs to support funding requests ( <b>S7</b> )  | Spring 24         | Co-chairs                    | Research Program Coordinator |



|  |           |                              |                     |
|--|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| 18. Develop marketing strategy for Water@UW-Madison to be a recognizable brand for water research at UW-Madison ( <b>S7</b> , S6). | Spring 25 | Research Program Coordinator | Executive Committee |
|--|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------|

### Objective #3

#### Enhancing Organizational Capacity:

During development of this strategic plan, current members noted the reliance of Water@UW-Madison on volunteer labor from Executive Committee members, which often places limits on the amount of work Water@UW-Madison is able to accomplish for our community. Similarly, given the volunteer nature of the work, there is currently little documentation about member roles, responsibilities, and benefits to date. Enhancing the organizational capacity of Water@UW-Madison will allow us to more reliably serve members of the water community on campus, will help Water@UW-Madison build relationships with other external organizations, and will help to maintain consistency in direction through leadership changes and other events.

To meet this priority, we will assess several avenues for enhancing organizational capacity. Some of these actions may result from improving the efficiency of the organization, such as developing onboarding materials and other relevant resources for our executive committee. Other avenues may require more sustained effort, such as obtaining a sustainable, long-term funding stream for Water@UW-Madison personnel and activities and considering how this extra funding could most effectively be deployed - in terms of additional staff hiring or other activities.

Actions that can help us to meet the overarching goal of Enhancing Water@UW's organizational capacity are included below. The following actions will help advance this objective over the next 5 years. Each is aligned with one or more strategies from the table on page six, with the primary strategy in bold (e.g. **S11**)

| Actions  | Year      | Responsible | Accountable                  |
|--|-----------|-------------|------------------------------|
| 19. Explore funding Models ( <b>S9</b> ) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Communicate with Nelson Institute, Sustainability Hub, and other organizations to understand existing models for sustainable organizational funding.</li> <li>● Explore development and donation program</li> <li>● Explore paid membership model</li> </ul> | 2023      | Co-chairs   | Executive Committee          |
| 20. Seek support from Deans, Provost and Chancellor to provide base funding for Water@UW-Madison activities ( <b>S9</b> )  | Spring 24 | Co-chairs   | Research Program Coordinator |

|  |                |  |                                   |
|--|----------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 21. Determine whether water@UW can receive overhead return as a method to obtain long-term finances ( <b>S9</b> )  | Fall 23        | Research Program Coordinator<br>Co-chairs<br>Former chairs | Executive Committee               |
| 22. Convene, task and lead meetings of the Executive Committee, soliciting their input on direction and implementation of Water@UW-Madison's work ( <b>S10</b> )                                   | Ongoing        | Research Program Coordinator                               | Co-chairs                         |
| 23. Hold meetings with the Program coordinator, Co-chairs and project assistant to set the direction and design and implement the work of Water@UW-Madison ( <b>S10</b> )                          | Ongoing        | Research Program Coordinator,<br>Co-chairs,                | Project Assistant                 |
| 24. Update and revise Water@UW-Madison's onboarding documents for new chairs, executive committee members, and project assistants ( <b>S10</b> )   | Summer 24      | Research Program Coordinator                               | Co-chairs,<br>Executive committee |
| 25. Revise organizational charter ( <b>S10</b> )   | Fall 24        | Research Program Coordinator<br>Co-chairs                  | Executive Committee               |
| 26. Review and update the strategic plan in three years ( <b>S10</b> )   | Spring 2027    | Research Program Coordinator                               | Executive Committee               |
| 27. Review and update the action plan annually ( <b>S10</b> )  | Fall each year | Executive Committee  | Research Program Coordinator      |
| 28. Draft a plan to increase diversity, equity and inclusion ( <b>S11</b> )  | Summer 25      | Research Program Coordinator                               | Executive Committee               |
| 29. Determine areas of greatest need for additional Water@UW staffing to build additional capacity ( <b>S11</b> )  | Fall 24        | Co-chairs  | Research Program Coordinator      |
| 30. Investigate large, multi-investigator grant targets that could support diverse, interdisciplinary projects at UW-Madison and explore UW-Madison's ability to act as facilitator ( <b>S11</b> ) | Fall 24        | Co-chairs  | Research Program Coordinator      |