

UW-Madison: Tech innovation teams in Dane County secure spots in national competition to raise incomes

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Two teams from the University of Wisconsin–Madison are advancing to the final round of a national competition for up to \$1 million in funding to help boost the middle class in Dane County.

The teams – Connect Rx and Opportunity Calculator – will take their proposals to raise the net income of 10,000 Dane County families by 10 percent to the finals of the Alliance for the American Dream competition. The Alliance is sponsored by Schmidt Futures, a philanthropic initiative founded by Eric and Wendy Schmidt. [DreamUp WI](#), a partnership between the UW–Madison and the community, aims to meet the Alliance’s challenge to increase shared prosperity and stabilize and expand the middle class.

Connect Rx is building a universal digital screener for economic and social needs that coordinates, tracks, and responds to the self-identified needs of vulnerable families in Dane County by connecting families to a network of services using electronic health records and automated referral and follow-up systems.

“The Dane County Health Council and the Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness are thrilled to advance to the final round of the Alliance for the American Dream Challenge and to present our multisector collaborative effort, Connect Rx,” said Hayley Chesnik, senior director of strategic collaborations at United Way of Dane County and a Connect Rx team member. “During this time of unprecedented crisis, we remain steadfast in our vision for a more equitable Wisconsin and our

commitment to systems change. We strongly believe Connect Rx offers a successful model of partnership that will reduce alarming racial disparities and help expand the middle class in Dane County.”

Opportunity Calculator puts individuals at the center of their career advancement through a mobile platform that can forecast net income changes associated with employment opportunities, assess impacts on earnings, public benefits and employer benefits options, and provide customized referrals and real-time connection to employers, workforce training providers, and community resources. Partners include the Employment and Training Association, City of Madison, Workforce Development Board South Central WI, United Way of Dane County, Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and the Urban League of Greater Madison.

“The Opportunity Calculator will fill a tremendous void for our clients, our community, and any job seeker who is struggling to advance into the middle class and looking for the information and navigation tools to ignite their career advancement plan,” said Ruben L. Anthony, Jr., president & CEO of the Urban League.

“I am so proud of the innovative work our community-led teams have done to develop initiatives that tackle some of the biggest problems Dane County faces in strengthening the middle class and reducing racial disparities in income,” said Chancellor Rebecca Blank. “With support from UW-Madison’s DreamUp team and potential funding from Schmidt Futures, the lessons learned from these groundbreaking projects could influence service delivery and policy decision making across the United States.”

“Leaders from across Madison have stepped up again, responding to and prevailing in the DreamUp challenge to reduce racial disparity and increase income in this community,” said Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway. “I see so much promise in these two projects, which will increase health and opportunity in our community, and in the partnerships and commitment that built them. An investment from Schmidt Futures’ Alliance will serve as a catalyst for creative solutions that can bring lasting change to Madison.”

UW-Madison, Arizona State University, the Ohio State University, and the University of Utah each sent three teams to the Alliance’s virtual pitch competition on June 8. Connect Rx and Opportunity Calculator advanced to the finals along with three other teams. In September, each finalist will pitch to Schmidt Futures for a chance

to win up to \$1 million in funding.

Clock'd, a Madison-based startup that uses app-based technology to connect workers to just-in-time open shifts at bars and restaurants, also competed at this level and did not advance.

“For the second year in a row, our community sent three teams to Schmidt Futures to pitch their innovative proposals for increasing shared prosperity and combatting racial and ethnic economic inequalities,” said Professor Lonnie Berger, Vilas Distinguished Achievement Professor and the project director for DreamUp. “These proposals offer realistic pathways for families to increase their disposable incomes, improve their well-being, and access better career and life opportunities. We could not be prouder of our community and UW partners.”

About Schmidt Futures: *Schmidt Future is a philanthropic initiative, founded by Eric and Wendy Schmidt, that finds exceptional people and helps them do more for others together. We knit talent into networks, bet on the most promising ideas through diverse forms of competition and support, and equip people to scale through partners and modern tools.*