

UW-Madison: Named an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University

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MADISON – The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities has designated the University of Wisconsin–Madison as an Innovation and Economic Prosperity University. The APLU awarded UW–Madison this designation based on the university’s significant, sustainable and campus-wide commitment to economic engagement, including its past and future focus on innovation and entrepreneurship, technology transfer, talent and workforce development and public service and community engagement.

“The Innovation and Economic Prosperity designation reflects the profound ways in which UW–Madison helps drive our region’s development, vitality and economic future,” notes UW–Madison chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin. “It’s a testament to our critical role as an industry and community connector and an invitation for us to do even more to stimulate innovation and collaboration.”

The APLU, an organization dedicated to advancing the work of public universities, established the IEP program to help higher education institutions strengthen their strategy and practices in economic and community development and to highlight designated institutions’ commitment to regional economic engagement.

“Economic development is a major pillar of universities’ work,” said APLU President Mark Becker. “From talent development to pathbreaking research to entrepreneurship and beyond, institutions have a central role to play in economic development. We’re pleased to recognize UW–Madison for its commitment to engaging its community around these issues to advance regional economic development.”

Steve Ackerman, UW–Madison’s vice chancellor for research and graduate

education (VCRGE), and Charles Hoslet, vice chancellor for university relations, served as primary sponsors of the application.

“Our goal in pursuing the IEP designation, simply stated, was to improve outcomes for the university and its stakeholders,” says Ackerman. “Deepening and strengthening industry engagement across campus is part of the Wisconsin Idea and will benefit students, faculty, companies and communities across the region. It will also increase opportunities for further federal and private funding of our research and graduate education missions, which is critical for UW-Madison’s competitive future.”

Project leaders interviewed more than 150 stakeholders from a diverse range of backgrounds and levels of experience, about 40% of whom were from outside the university. Internal stakeholders included faculty, staff, leadership and students; those external to UW-Madison included businesses, local and state government and community leaders. Interviews, held in 2021, focused on UW-Madison’s strengths and areas for improvement, with an emphasis on industry engagement.

Areas identified for continued growth include promotion and clarification of intellectual property policy, high-impact public-private economic development possibilities and research opportunities with high potential for future expansion. Pillars of the resulting plan include updating systems and protocols to ease access to the university and maximizing workforce development and societal impact through community engagement and outreach. Already, the university has secured additional contract flexibility from the Board of Regents and is actively pursuing a variety of new regional public-private partnerships.

“UW-Madison has been a catalyst for the extraordinary since its founding,” says Chris Kozina, UW-Madison assistant vice chancellor for industry engagement and a co-lead in the IEP application process. “While our world-class education and research are oriented toward solving real-world problems, it’s critical to examine, understand, adapt and adjust to maximize our stakeholder impact.”

Bob Gratzl, assistant director of contracts for Research and Sponsored Programs within the VCGRE’s office, and Stephanie Furlong, special projects manager in the office of University Relations, also served as IEP co-leads.

In 2020, UW-Madison’s then-chancellor Rebecca Blank led the pursuit of this designation, in part to assess UW-Madison’s economic and community development

impact on talent, innovation and place. The university's overall economic impact to the state, according to a 2021 analysis, adds up to more than \$30 billion per year. Additional areas in which UW-Madison has made significant economic and community development impact include:

UW-Madison's relationship with the local community through programs like the UW South Madison Partnership, the Morgridge Center for Public Service and the Odyssey Project;

its work to improve access to higher education for state students through programs such as Bucky's Tuition Promise; and

its cultivation of a collaborative environment for innovation through the Wisconsin Institute of Discovery, Discovery to Product, the School of Computer, Data and Information Sciences and many other cooperative efforts.

UW-Madison is one of nine universities to earn the APLU honor in 2022. The 80 institutions that have earned the IEP recognition to date include the University of Illinois, Indiana University, the University of Michigan, the Ohio State University, and Penn State University.

For more about this designation and UW-Madison's next steps, visit <https://go.wisc.edu/aplu>.