Information for Prospective Restoration Project Community Partners

The University of Washington Restoration Ecology Network (UW-REN) is a tri-campus (Bothell – Seattle – Tacoma) organization that fosters interdisciplinary collaboration and education at the UW in restoring ecological function to damaged landscapes. UW-REN was formed in 1999 and has a track record of innovative success in restoration education and partnerships with the surrounding community. The UW-REN capstone program is the recipient of 3 regional, national, and international awards in fostering hands-on application of science-based approaches to ecological restoration in cooperation with local communities.

This UW-REN capstone program provides an opportunity for organizations outside of UW (a “community partner: CP”) to have restoration projects designed and implemented by teams of 4 to 6 upper-level (junior, senior, graduate) students. Student teams, with faculty and teaching assistant oversight, work with a CP to design and implement a restoration that meets the goals and approval of the CP within the ecological constraints of the site, the project resources available (funds, materials), and the educational requirements of the capstone courses. The project takes place over an 8-month period (October to early June). In the fall the student team becomes familiar with the site through a formal site analysis process and works to provide the CP with a conceptual proposal of what they expect can be accomplished to meet the needs of the site and CP. The winter is focused on the development of a detailed design plan and its implementation in the field (often lasting into the early spring). The project concludes in late spring with the development of a clear and reasonable plan for maintenance and monitoring of the project after the involvement of the student team is terminated (in early June). While one of the goals of this capstone is to successfully implement a restoration for the CP, it is critical to recognize that this is foremost an academic exercise with a central goal of student education. The details of the timeline and deliverables (proposal, work plan, as-built report, maintenance and monitoring manual) are available upon request.

This document is meant to highlight project features critical to a successful partnership and important aspects of the relationship between the CP and the student restoration team. In considering if this program is a good fit for your situation you should think about the consideration described below. If it does seem like a good fit, you can submit a Request-for-Proposal (RFP) as described on the webpage and schedule a site visit by capstone faculty.

I. Project Attributes

The following points address attributes of projects that are important for a successful project in the UW-REN capstone program.

1. Project size
   
   The project must be small in scope (< 1 acre) or be able to be done in multi-year phases (with student teams in subsequent years tackling other sections of a larger site). Much of this also depends upon the complexity of the project involved and the availability of resources (human
and machine). If human resources (volunteer or paid) and mechanized means (if needed) are available then larger projects can be considered. Past student teams have been successful in creating overall designs for larger sites while actually only implementing a small section themselves. Generally, our projects range from 0.3 to 0.5 acres and we emphasize high quality work on a smaller area. For a large site, the remainder of the implementation can be accomplished by the CP or subsequent capstone teams in future years. If the project involves extensive weed management issues, complex plantings, etc., this will decrease the size of project our students could tackle.

2. Project installation timing

Because of the sequencing of the academic year, our projects are usually installed (e.g., vegetation planted) in the period from late winter to spring (February to late April). We have found that this works fine for most projects, especially wetland areas and sites where maintenance is possible. In some circumstances this planting timing can be less optimal than fall, but we are constrained by the sequencing of the academic year and course elements. This may increase the necessity of the CP or associates for significant maintenance involvement through the subsequent summer. Thus, the maintenance and monitoring plan developed by the student team will likely include a critical component of immediate maintenance. The student team will work with the CP to identify and develop likely means for this to be accomplished (by the CP or associates; the student team will not be involved following the end of the academic year – usually the second week of June).

3. Site Preparation Needs

Projects must be tenable relative to the needs for site preparation. Some situations with exotic weeds require a year or more of treatment prior to planting. This often does not work for immediate inclusion as a project for our students. Capstone faculty can advise potential CPs in this regard during a site review visit scheduled after a RFP is submitted. Should it be determined that more extensive site preparation is necessary for a successful project, capstone faculty can advise CPs and place the project under consideration in a subsequent year.

4. Project resources

The UW-REN program does not have internal resources to accomplish these projects. Our student teams have small budgets (usually around $500 – $600) to support some of the project. We expect that the CP will provide most of the material needed for the project. Student teams have often been creative and successful in working with CPs to secure plants and materials in situations where CPs do not have sufficient resources to accomplish a project as per the student team’s design. However, the extent to which student teams may be able to accomplish that is limited by the short time frames and educational objectives. Thus, preference will be given to projects where the CP has a reasonable resource base to obtain plants and other necessary material for the project.
5. Probability for long-term success

UW-REN gives strong preference to projects that have the greatest probability for long-term success. Projects with a high probability of long-term failure because of conditions like upstream or adjacent populations of noxious weeds are not favored. Projects with no obvious mechanisms for long-term maintenance (e.g., CP, community group, school group, etc. available for maintenance) that our students can develop are not favored. Some students have set up programs with nearby community groups or schools, so long term maintenance does not necessarily have to be done by the CP, but there must be some prospects out there we can discern.

6. Educational Objectives

As a fundamentally educational endeavor, it is absolutely critical that the student team be given the leeway to develop a reasonable design that works within the CP’s needs and ecological constraints of the site. This project is not simply an installation based upon a preconceived CP plan, though in the past some student teams have developed specific plans within the umbrella of a general site management plan. The CP and faculty play critical oversight roles in making sure that the student team’s plan meets CP and ecological objectives. However, the CP must be willing to let the design be done by the student group (with guidance and feedback from instructors and the CP). Both the CP and the student team must be willing to maintain a dialogue of respect and consideration toward proposed ideas and concerns.

Projects that involve the installation of an existing design or maintenance of a previous installation are not appropriate for the UW-REN capstone.

II. Community Partner Responsibilities

The following points address aspects of CP responsibilities for participation in the UW-REN capstone program.

1. Project review & oversight

The capstone experience was designed so that student teams would be working for a CP in an interactive fashion. This means that the CP CANNOT expect to be a passive participant in the process. CPs are required to provide timely feedback to the student team at critical junctures in the development and installation of the project. In December, January, and February student teams will be developing a proposal and detailed work plan in response to the CP’s Request-for-Proposal (RFP). This will be reviewed by peers, instructors and the CP. It is done electronically on a web discussion board. There is a limited window for review - the CP must be willing to adhere to this schedule (usually they have 3-4 days to review it and comment). Sometimes multiple iterations of documents need to be reviewed if CP requests changes. In essence, the CP must be willing to be engaged in the process and communicate in a timely fashion.
It is also important that the CP be able to identify a central contact person to work with the student group who has the authority to review and approve their work at each step along the way. One central contact person and a consistency in communication have been important elements in successful projects.

The CP must also be willing to come to an initial student team meeting at UW Seattle in October and the final symposium in early June (if at all possible in their schedule - or send some other representative) and be willing to meet with the student group occasionally in the field during preparation and installation (Jan - May). The CP must also meet with the team in late May or early June for the students to train them in the maintenance and monitoring plan.

2. CP resources

Though we prefer projects where resources are already available to support projects, some projects will be considered if CPs are willing to actively be engaged with the student team in procuring such resources. This may include reviewing and endorsing funding proposals written by the team.