



The Wisconsin Idea Partnership

Building a Better UW System

The 2011-13 budget proposed by Governor Scott Walker includes major cuts in funding for all UW System institutions, but provides increased management flexibilities to help only UW-Madison manage those fiscal challenges. The budget separates UW-Madison from other UW System institutions as a stand-alone public authority.

The UW Board of Regents and 13 UW Chancellors have endorsed the Wisconsin Idea Partnership (WIP) as an alternative that provides essential flexibilities to all 26 UW campuses and UW-Extension, while preserving a unified UW System that includes UW-Madison. The Wisconsin Idea Partnership creates a stronger, collaborative UW System that is better prepared to tackle the challenges of the 21st century. Deep budget cuts will affect all UW campuses, all of which need new tools to preserve access, affordability, and educational quality.

The Wisconsin Idea Partnership offers specific new operational flexibilities for all UW System institutions:

Budgeting: Currently, UW campuses are not allowed to move funds from one account to another. State funds are provided in “silos,” and campuses do not have the flexibility to prioritize available funds to address emerging needs. Under WIP, all UW campuses would receive a “block grant” of state funds, with the ability to use those resources for any appropriate university purposes. For example, savings from one area of the budget (utilities, fringe benefits, etc.) could be used to fund core academic operations – something not allowed under current law.

Tuition: Currently, Wisconsin Statutes grant tuition authority to the UW System Board of Regents, but the same laws restrict use of these funds. Tuition rates for Wisconsin undergraduate students are largely pre-determined by the Governor and the Legislature in the budget-setting process. Under WIP, the UW Board of Regents would have authority to set tuition levels for each UW campus, so that all institutions have the ability to meet the needs of students and enhance educational quality by funding efforts to improve student services, boost retention rates, or increase graduation rates.

Human Resources: Currently, titles, pay ranges, pay plans, benefit plans, and other human resources decisions are made by the State and are applied uniformly across all agencies, including the UW System. Under WIP, UW campuses would be recognized for operating in a unique marketplace that competes for specialized talent. WIP provisions would let UW campuses use existing resources to address competitive compensation challenges and provide new authority to approve compensation levels for faculty and academic staff, and the ability to reward performance.

Capital Projects: Currently, capital projects are largely the responsibility of the Department of Administration Division of State Facilities and the State Building Commission. Under WIP, the UW would be allowed to manage building projects in ways that maximize efficiency by (1) adopting practices that more closely mirror the private sector; (2) modernizing project delivery methods; (3) reducing time to completion; (4) acknowledging the role of non-State funds in UW buildings; and (5) increasing statutory thresholds.

Financial Management: Currently, all university funds are deposited into the State Treasury and the UW System does not retain all interest earnings on university resources. Under WIP, more financial control would be extended to UW institutions, allowing them to oversee revenue and interest earnings, retain interest, and remove certain limitations on gift and trust funds. Program revenue funds would be deposited in the local-government pooled investment fund administered by the state Investment Board, but accrued interest would go to UW institutions.

Purchasing: Currently, all UW System institutions must adhere to strict laws and regulations that govern the procurement of goods and services. Under WIP, the UW System would be able to generate savings by participating in higher-education purchasing consortia, would be allowed to exercise control over travel expenditures, and would be able to enter into contracts for materials and services that effectively and efficiently meet the needs of higher education.