



MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING

School of Planning, Design and Construction

CALL FOR PROJECTS | SPRING 2027 PLANNING PRACTICUM

TO: Community Partners and Interested Parties

FROM: Dr. Jesus J. Lara, 1855 Professor, Urban and Regional Planning

SUBJECT: Practicum Opportunity for Spring Semester 2027 (January-April)

Practicum Overview

The Michigan State University Urban and Regional Planning (URP) Program invites municipalities, public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and community-based organizations to propose projects for the Spring 2027 Planning Practicum. This capstone course brings graduating undergraduate and graduate students together in consultant-style teams to address real planning needs for community partners.

The Practicum is **student-led and faculty-guided**. Teams work with a designated community partner through a structured semester process that moves from project scoping and analysis to community engagement, concept development, precedent research, implementation strategies, and final recommendations. Partners receive a professional planning report and presentation materials intended to support future decision-making, grant applications, policy development, design, or implementation.

What We Learned from the 2026 Practicum

The 2026 Practicum included three distinct community-based projects in East Lansing, Grand Rapids, and Flint. That experience reinforced the importance of projects with a clearly defined planning problem, a manageable geographic and substantive scope, early access to data and local contacts, meaningful opportunities for fieldwork and community engagement, and an actively involved client. The 2027 selection process therefore places greater emphasis on project readiness, partner participation, implementation potential, and fit with the Spring 2027 Practicum schedule.

Types of Projects We Are Seeking

- Neighborhood, corridor, district, downtown, or small-area planning
- Land use, redevelopment, zoning, housing, and community development
- Mobility, transit access, pedestrian and bicycle planning, and public realm improvements
- Placemaking, streetscape, public space, and urban design
- Climate resilience, environmental justice, sustainability, and infrastructure assessment
- Community engagement, demographic and socioeconomic analysis, GIS mapping, and spatial analysis
- Implementation strategies, prioritization frameworks, policy recommendations, and action plans

What Makes a Strong Practicum Project

- Addresses a real and current community planning need with a clear public or community benefit.
- Can be substantially completed within one semester and does not depend on major decisions or data that will remain unavailable until late in the term.
- Has a defined study area, target population, policy question, or planning issue that can be refined with the student team at the start of the semester.
- Provides sufficient opportunities for students to use qualitative, quantitative, spatial, design, and engagement methods.

- Has an identified community partner who can meet regularly with the team, provide data and background materials, connect students with stakeholders, and review draft work.
- Can support fieldwork and stakeholder engagement when those activities are appropriate to the project.
- Has a realistic path toward use or implementation after the semester ends.

Learning Objectives

As an accredited planning program, the Practicum must support learning objectives established by the Planning Accreditation Board (PAB). Proposed projects should allow students to demonstrate competency in the following areas:

Planning Process and Engagement

- Planning process and community and stakeholder engagement
- Plan creation and implementation
- Methods of design and intervention to understand and influence the future

Analytical Skills and Tools

- Research and critical analysis
- Quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, analysis, and forecasting
- Geospatial analysis, mapping, and data visualization

Professional and Communication Skills

- Teamwork and collaboration with professionals and community partners
- Professional leadership in a planning context
- Written, oral, and graphic communication

How the Practicum Works

Projects follow a structured sequence so that teams build evidence before developing recommendations. The exact scope and products are tailored to each project, but partners should expect work in the following phases:

Phase	Typical Focus
1. Project Scoping & Qualitative Analysis	Existing conditions, stakeholder context, field observation, document review
2. Quantitative & Spatial Analysis	Demographics, socioeconomic conditions, GIS, mapping, trends, and relevant indicators
3. Community & Stakeholder Engagement	Interviews, surveys, meetings, workshops, or other appropriate engagement methods
4. Concept & Strategic Framework	Goals, planning concepts, alternatives, priorities, and emerging recommendations
5. Precedent Studies	Comparable projects, policies, programs, and transferable lessons
6. Programming & Implementation	Actions, phasing, responsible parties, funding opportunities, and implementation tools
7. Final Integration & Presentation	Professional report, graphics, presentation, and final recommendations

Community Partner Responsibilities

- Designate one primary contact with sufficient knowledge of the project and authority to coordinate with the student team.
- Participate in an initial scoping meeting and work with the team to finalize a realistic scope, key questions, and deliverables.
- Provide existing plans, GIS/data, reports, studies, contacts, and other background materials as early as possible.
- Help connect students with relevant departments, agencies, neighborhood groups, community organizations, and other stakeholders.
- Attend periodic check-ins and provide consolidated, timely feedback on draft work.
- Assist with logistics for site visits or community engagement when needed.
- Attend the final presentation on **Friday, April 30, 2027, 9:30 AM-12:00 PM ET**, or designate an appropriate representative.

Project Selection and Key Dates

Date	Milestone
December 1, 2026	Project proposal deadline
December 9, 2026	Preliminary project selections announced (<i>subject to final enrollment and team capacity</i>).
January 19, 2027	MSU Spring semester begins
January 25, 2027	Partner/team scoping and project launch
March 6-14, 2027	MSU Spring Break
April 30, 2027	Practicum final presentations, 9:30 AM-12:00 PM ET

Selection criteria. Projects will be evaluated for educational value, project readiness, manageable scope, opportunities for analysis and engagement, partner capacity, implementation potential, geographic/logistical feasibility, and overall fit with the Practicum portfolio. We also seek a balanced set of projects that exposes students to different communities and planning issues.

Because the number and size of project teams depend on final course enrollment, preliminary selection does not constitute a final guarantee of acceptance. Final confirmation will occur once enrollment and team capacity are known.

Community Partner Contribution and Practicum Support

Selected Practicum projects require a minimum community partner contribution of \$3,500. This contribution supports the Practicum course as a whole, including project-related travel, printing, community engagement, presentations, software, and other course delivery needs. The contribution is not a fee for consulting services and is not billed according to individual project expenses.

How to Apply

Complete the attached Planning Practicum Project Request Form and submit it by email to jjlara@msu.edu no later than **December 1, 2026**. You may attach up to two additional pages describing the project, its goals, study area, anticipated outcomes, available data, and desired deliverables.

Previous Practicum projects: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/spdc/research-outreach/Urban-Regional-Planning-Practicum/>

MSU URBAN & REGIONAL PLANNING PRACTICUM PROJECT REQUEST FORM | SPRING 2027

Submit to: jjlara@msu.edu by December 1, 2026

1. Organization and Primary Contact

Organization name:

Primary contact and title:

Mailing address:

Phone:

Email:

Organization website:

2. Project Overview

Project title:

Briefly describe the planning challenge or opportunity the Practicum team would address:

What are the primary goals or questions the project should address?

What geographic area, community, population, corridor, district, or site is the focus?

How do you expect to use the final Practicum work after the semester?

3. Anticipated Deliverables

Check all deliverables that would be useful to your organization. Requested deliverables will inform project scoping but are not guaranteed; final deliverables will be established with the student team based on project scope, available data, and the semester timeline.

☐ Existing conditions / community profile

- ☐ GIS maps and spatial analysis
- ☐ Community or stakeholder engagement findings
- ☐ Urban design / placemaking concepts
- ☐ Land use, housing, mobility, or policy recommendations
- ☐ Prioritization or decision-support framework
- ☐ Implementation strategy / action plan
- ☐ Funding or grant opportunity scan
- ☐ Final illustrated report and presentation
- ☐ Other:

4. Project Readiness and Timeline

- ☐ The project can be substantially completed within the Spring 2027 semester.
- ☐ The organization can provide core background materials and data by the start of the semester.
- ☐ The organization can help arrange stakeholder/community access when engagement is needed.
- ☐ The project has a defined planning need, even if the final scope still requires refinement.

Current project phase:

- ☐ Defining the project
- ☐ Inventory and analysis
- ☐ Plan/design development
- ☐ Implementation / prioritization
- ☐ Other:

5. Scale and Location

- ☐ Parcel / site
- ☐ Neighborhood
- ☐ Corridor / district
- ☐ Town / city
- ☐ County / multi-jurisdictional area
- ☐ Other:

Project location / study area:

6. Data, Access, and Community Engagement

Please identify what your organization can provide or facilitate:

- ☐ Existing plans, studies, reports, or policy documents
- ☐ GIS data or other project-specific datasets
- ☐ Access to staff or technical experts
- ☐ Introductions to community organizations, residents, businesses, or other stakeholders
- ☐ Meeting space or assistance organizing engagement activities
- ☐ Site access / field visit coordination
- ☐ Other:

Known data, access, or engagement limitations:

7. Partner Participation

Please confirm that your organization can:

- ☐ Designate a primary project contact for the semester
- ☐ Participate in project scoping during late January
- ☐ Meet periodically with the student team
- ☐ Provide timely, consolidated feedback on draft work
- ☐ Attend or send a representative to the final presentation on April 30, 2027

8. Community Partner Contribution and Practicum Support

Selected Practicum projects require a minimum community partner contribution of \$3,500. This contribution supports the Practicum course as a whole, including project-related travel, printing, community engagement, presentations, software, and other course delivery needs. The contribution is not a fee for consulting services and is not billed according to individual project expenses.

- ☐ Less than \$3,500: Amount available \$ _____
- ☐ \$3,500
- ☐ \$4,000
- ☐ \$4,500
- ☐ \$5,000 or more : \$ _____
- ☐ We would like to be considered for possible REI matching support.

9. Additional Information

Please identify any deadlines, political or organizational considerations, planned public meetings, grants, capital projects, or other factors that may affect the Practicum schedule:

Contact Information

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Practicum website: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/spdc/research-outreach/Urban-Regional-Planning-Practicum/>