

## **Proposal for City-County Service Duplication Analysis (\$17,500)**

### **Prepared by**

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### **Introduction**

A recent UW-Extension report revealed that the city of La Crosse's cost of living exceeded neighboring municipalities in La Crosse County, with a major discrepancy found in terms of taxes paid. What drives the tax burden differential across La Crosse County municipalities? A cursory review of municipal and county budgets/services suggests that the City of La Crosse and La Crosse County may be duplicating services. That is, city of La Crosse taxpayers may be partially financing County services offered to neighboring municipalities; many of these services the City of La Crosse already provides on its own, which drives up County property tax bills for city of La Crosse taxpayers. Potential areas of duplication include law enforcement, library services, sanitation, parks and recreation services, transportation/transit, and planning/economic development. Another aspect is the potential for underassessment by outlying La Crosse County municipalities.

### **Proposed Outcomes**

A comprehensive analysis of municipal and county services/budgets will help determine whether any duplication of services actually exists. This project proposes to publish research findings in a formal report submitted to the City of La Crosse Mayor's Office and Common Council. The report will highlight: (1) the monetary impact of service duplication (if any) on city of La Crosse property taxpayers, and (2) offer policy alternatives for reducing any measurable impact on city taxpayers.

The research team will also be available to present findings in-person when invited or necessary, including any municipal or county meetings.

### **Methods**

This project will utilize multiple research methods. First, the research team will conduct in-person and/or telephone interviews with municipal and county officials (both elected officials and department heads/staff) to gather initial data about services provided in the various jurisdictions.

Next, the research team will conduct an analysis of local and county budgets to help shed light on the specifics of service provision within the area, including an analysis of any service-delivery agreements between municipal and county governments. Municipal and county departmental budgets (both revenues and expenditures) will be analyzed to determine what services are provided. Most likely it will be necessary to conduct follow-up interviews if budget narratives are found to be lacking.

A survey of some existing municipal-county service agreements will also be provided; this requires reaching out to various professional organizations, including the WI Counties Association and League of WI Municipalities. Lastly, policy alternatives will be presented to address potential solutions/remedies, based on existing best practices identified in academic and practitioner studies and reports.

**Budget**

<b>Amount</b>	<b>Category</b>
\$4,900	Researcher, Principal
\$2,000	Researcher II
\$5,600	Research Assistant
\$2,000	Research Assistant II
\$2,000	Peer-Review (Public Policy Forum)
\$500	Travel
\$500	Printing
<b>\$17,500</b>	<b>Total</b>

**Budget Justification**

This proposal includes a budget request of \$17,500, which includes salary/wages, travel, and printing costs. The majority of funding is planned for salaries/wages for researchers and research assistants. The principal investigator, a UW-L Political Science/Public Administration faculty representative, would receive \$4,500 for the responsibility of coordinating research activities, authoring the final report, and presenting research findings at the appropriate forums. Another faculty member would assist these efforts.

Two research assistants would provide support to the researchers in collecting budget data, scheduling, and conducting interviews of local officials. Research assistants would be paid at \$10.00/hour. One research assistant would be funded for 28 weeks, and another would be available for 10 weeks (during the summer months); both positions would be funded at 20 hours per week.

Two thousand dollars is also included for a “peer-review” by a public policy research organization, which may also be able to consult on project objectives/strategies. The Public Policy Forum, which has conducted several analyses of municipal/regional service agreements, has been identified as a potential consultant.

The proposal includes \$500 each for travel reimbursement to-from interviews with local officials, as well as printing costs associated with releasing the report.

Lastly, this project may come in under budget. In that case, all unspent funds from within each line-item listed above will be returned to the City.