

C i t y t o t r y a l t e r n a t i v e f u n d r a i s i n g a c t i v i t i e s

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Taking inspiration from websites like Kickstarter, City of Madison officials are proposing a new method of fundraising for certain projects that would solicit ideas, services and funding online from residents.

Madison Arts Program Administrator Karin Wolf said city government does not have the grants to take care of everything citizens want to do to improve their communities.

The city is considering new ways to fund the creation of “placemaking projects,” which are communal spaces where people can spend time and interact, city planner Rebecca Cannare said.

“[Placemaking] is an all-encompassing idea about making places more interesting to be in,” Cannare said.

Cannare said Mayor Paul Soglin is looking for different ways to fund placemaking activities, including using an online form for fundraising by the general public, known as crowdsourcing.

Crowdsourcing uses the Internet to collect contributions of ideas and services for city projects from Madison residents, according to a report compiled by Wolf. Crowdsourcing engages people with a personal interest in certain projects and allows them to bring their own suggestions forward, the report said.

Wolf said the goal of crowdsourcing is to listen to citizens’ ideas and empower them by giving them access to funding.

Cannare said potential placemaking projects may include something as simple as an interactive art installation, such as the chalkboards asking for students’ ideas on improving campus that have been put up near State Street. She added the project could also take the form of community events and festivals.

Madison is primarily interested in funding projects that are “lighter, quicker and cheaper,” than those in the past, Cannare said.

She said applying for grants for these projects can take months, allowing projects to lose momentum. Crowdsourcing could allow the projects to begin as soon as they have received adequate funding, she said.

Wolf added it is small contributions of everyday people that help get things done.

“You don’t know a lot of people with millions of dollars to give out, but you know a lot of people who have \$5 to give out,” Wolf said.

However, Wolf said she is concerned access to crowdsourcing methods for raising funds may not be available to everyone.

She said younger people already use platforms like Kickstarter to work on projects, but she wants older Madison residents to be able to participate in the discussion too. She said everybody should have access to tools to help community building.

“When you push technology, you’re increasing a gap,” Wolf said. “A lot of people in the community have wonderful ideas, but they don’t have the resources.”

Still, Wolf said the benefits of crowdsourcing outweigh the negatives. She said many people coming together is both empowering and democratic.

City Council will meet Oct. 29 to make a final decision about implementing the proposal. Wolf said she hopes the city will continue with the project.

“[With crowdsourcing,] I don’t have to be a millionaire to make a difference,” Wolf said.

Correction: City planner Rebecca Cannare was originally cited as Ald. Rebecca Cnare, District 3. We regret the mistake.