

August 21, 2020

Graham Sustainability Institute
Carbon Neutrality Acceleration Program
2020 Faculty Research Grants
Frequently Asked Questions

Proposal process

Is the letter of intent (LOI) mandatory? Is it binding?

A letter of intent is required. LOIs will not be used as a screening tool. Rather, they will be used by Graham staff to prepare for the proposal review process. LOIs are not binding, and changes are permitted in the proposal.

Will I hear from Graham staff after submitting an LOI?

Staff may initiate discussions with applicants based on information provided in an LOI; however, you do not need to be invited to submit a proposal.

How do I submit an LOI or proposal?

All materials should be submitted through the Graham website. Access the application page by clicking the “Begin your application” button on www.graham.umich.edu/carbonneutrality/apply. Detailed directions are included in the RFP and on the website. Note that after saving an LOI, you will receive a confirmation email with a unique URL that will allow you to return to your application to make edits and to upload a full proposal. If you do not receive a confirmation email, you should resave your application or contact us directly at graham-cnap@umich.edu.

Can a person other than the PI submit the LOI/proposal on behalf of the PI?

The person that logs into our system and creates the application is considered the “applicant” and they may do so on behalf of the primary investigator (PI). (The applicant may be an assistant, another team member, etc.) The PI must be listed as a team member and identified as the PI in the online application form. Note that the login credentials used to create an application and submit an LOI must be used to return to that application and submit the full proposal.

If aspects of our project have changed since the initial LOI (e.g. title, additional team members), should we upload an updated LOI during proposal submission?

We don't need an updated LOI, but when you log in and access your application page, please do update all the fields in that online form and then upload your proposal PDF. You'll be able to access and edit the application page up until the deadline. If you have made a significant change in your scope or topic, please reach out to Maggie Allan (maallan@umich.edu or graham-cnap@umich.edu) to alert us to the change.

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Eligibility

Can faculty from UM-Dearborn and UM-Flint apply for these opportunities?

Faculty and researchers from the Flint, Dearborn, and Ann Arbor campuses who are eligible to serve as a [U-M Principal Investigator](#) are eligible to serve as a PI on C-NAP Grants.

Can postdocs be co-investigators?

Yes. The proposal application form (PAF) is required in part to ensure unit review and support. Please note that all proposed projects must be led by a U-M researcher or faculty member who is eligible to serve as a [U-M Principal Investigator](#). Co-investigators (Co-Is) and partners from other institutions and organizations may be included on the project team.

Can I submit a proposal as a single PI without collaborators?

Yes, however one of the aims of this funding opportunity is fostering novel interdisciplinary and multisector collaborations among U-M faculty and stakeholders. Preference will be given to interdisciplinary projects with investigators from distinct disciplines and from multiple U-M academic and/or research units.

May the funds be used to supplement ongoing projects?

No. This support may be used as either seed funding to develop and pilot new ideas or to take existing research (not currently funded) to the next level. This funding may not be used as additional support for an ongoing project.

Is there a disadvantage to serving as a PI and Co-I on multiple applications?

No. Please note, however, that a faculty member or researcher can be listed as a PI on only one proposal. She or he or may be listed as a PI on one proposal and a Co-I on another proposal or a Co-I on up to two proposals.

Project focus

Are there preferences or limits regarding the geography or scale of a project? Are outcomes specific to Michigan or the Midwest prioritized?

No. Projects can be U.S.-based or international. Projects can focus on any geographic scale, level of governance, or sector. We do see an opportunity for research focused on the Great Lakes region, given that it has received less research attention than the coasts and there is significant potential to engage external, non-academic partners, but it is neither a requirement nor something prioritized in the evaluation.

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Should projects be specific to accelerating carbon neutrality for UM, or is this opportunity much more broad?

It is more broad. Projects may focus on accelerating the University of Michigan's transition to carbon neutrality, but it is not required.

Do certain topics or themes receive preference?

No preference is given to projects on a particular topic or theme. However, we are most interested in projects that explore and advance scalable strategies with the potential to radically accelerate low-carbon transitions (as compared to projects with the potential to incremental net emissions reductions) and make significant contributions to scholarship. This is addressed explicitly in the proposal evaluation criteria.

Can we focus on education about carbon neutrality?

Probably. We encourage you to reach out to us to discuss project specifics if you have concerns about eligibility.

As with all topics, it is important to keep in mind the goals of the funding opportunity (advancing research impact and real-world emissions reductions) and to ensure your proposal is clear about the proposed outcomes and how those would translate into impact. Note also, while incremental reductions in net emissions are important, we are most interested in projects that explore and advance scalable strategies with the potential to radically accelerate low-carbon transitions. Providing a sense of the potential scale of impact would strengthen a proposal.

Could you say a few words about what kinds of roles might be envisioned for arts / humanities faculty, given principal goals of the program?

We do not have specific expectations or requirements for what this might look like, and we are excited to see what ideas are proposed. Possibilities include, but are not limited to, involvement in projects that integrate arts / humanities with other disciplines or that include significant public engagement.

More generally, CNAP recognizes that solutions to climate change are not confined to the sciences and engineering. Humanities and arts can bring cultural, historical, ethical dimensions to the issue, for example, and they hold potential to help spur social and cultural change.

Objective 1 proposals explore "new ideas." Is novelty determined by the research idea and/or the experience of the investigator(s)?

The research idea. For Objective 1, we are seeking proposals that explore new lines of inquiry. Both researchers who have never focused on carbon neutrality in their work and researchers who have years of experience in related fields are eligible to submit an Objective 1 proposal. Researchers who have worked on carbon neutrality related topics in the past should make it clear how this proposed work is distinct from their other

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research. If the proposed scope of work builds on existing research, Objective 2 is likely more appropriate.

The term "carbon neutrality" can be interpreted narrowly to cover only carbon dioxide emissions or more broadly to include all greenhouse gases. Does this program consider the carbon dioxide equivalence of other greenhouse gases?

Yes. Carbon neutrality, or net zero carbon emissions, refers to achieving zero net anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions through a balancing of carbon emissions and carbon removal. The concept can be extended to include all anthropogenic greenhouse gases, which is referred to as climate neutrality or net-zero emissions. We use these terms interchangeably in the RFP, and we welcome proposals addressing non-carbon-dioxide, high impact emissions.

Proposal outcomes

Must all proposals aim to secure future, additional funding?

No. We recognize that funding patterns vary across disciplines and securing external funding will be of greater significance to certain fields than others. While we anticipate that many Objective 1 and Objective 2 proposals will include as an anticipated outcome a proposal for external funding, or a clear plan for pursuing external funding, it is not required. Please keep in mind that we are interested in funding projects with potential for significant research impact that elevates U-M's leadership in carbon neutrality research, and proposals should explain how the work will advance scholarship.

External Partners

What do you mean by an "external partner" when you state that teams are "encouraged to engage with external non-academic partners"?

An external partner is an individual or organization outside the university system directly involved with the topic of interest either as a practitioner or decision maker. External partners can be from one or several sectors (government, industry, non-governmental, community, etc.) based on the focus of the project. External partners should be in a position to directly utilize project outputs - implementing strategies, influencing decision-making, scaling results, furthering project objectives, etc.

While researchers from other academic institutions are not considered external partners for the purpose of this opportunity, they may be collaborators on a project team.

For projects that include engagement with external partners, do we need to provide an official letter of support/collaboration?

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Letters of support are not required, but they may be included as an additional document in the appendix. Regardless, you should demonstrate in your narrative your partner's interest in working on the project (e.g., discussions that informed the proposal, previous collaboration, clear articulation of their interest or needs, etc.) and their role in the work.

Can grant funds be used to support external partner participation?

Yes. External partners could be subcontractors on a proposal if they are conducting a specific part of the proposed work, or partners could receive honoraria or travel support to enable their participation.

Funding

Can funding be used to support post-docs?

Yes.

Do projects require a match or co-funding?

C-NAP grants do not require a match.

Is tuition an eligible expense?

Yes. We recognize that graduate students are critical to advancing research, particularly in certain disciplines. However, this RFP should not be looked at as a source of student funding. This grant is intended to catalyze faculty research, and proposers should keep in mind the overall goals of the funding opportunity--advancing UM's research leadership in this area and advancing real-world impact--and it should be clear in the proposal how using the funds in this way will contribute to those goals.

Are administrative costs allowed?

Yes, but only if they are directly connected to the work of the project.

Can funding be used to support non-UM academic partners?

Collaborators from other academic institutions are permitted on projects, but they cannot receive direct funding from the program. Funding can be used to support non-academic partners/collaborators on engagement-focused projects

Grant period

Are no-cost extensions allowed?

Typically, a single no-cost extension is allowed. Details will be provided in the award letter. C-NAP project check-ins and interim reporting are opportunities to discuss the potential need for an extension.

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Is there flexibility in the start date or duration of the grants?

Generally, yes. The start date can occur after the anticipated start date listed in the RFP (March 1, 2021) provided the project starts within the same fiscal year (FY21) as the funding opportunity. Also, projects can be completed faster than the two-year duration listed in the RFP. That said, projects should have timeframes that correspond relatively closely with the duration described in the RFP. Proposals should clearly state the anticipated start date and duration of the project.

What if my project timeline is impacted by COVID-19 restrictions?

As part of the full proposal, applicants are required to submit a “COVID-19 contingencies” appendix discussing potential adjustments to the project plan that may be required due to COVID-19 related impacts. This is not binding, but is intended to help teams think through, and reviewers and program staff understand, the ways in which your proposal is robust to or may be affected by COVID-19 related impacts. We recognize the uncertainty around this, and program staff will work with grantees to address issues as they arise.

Requirements for grant recipients

Help me understand the reporting requirements. What do check-ins and midpoint or reports entail? What about final project reports?

Check-ins are verbal and consist of an informal meeting or phone call. Semiannual reports are short written summaries—typically 1-2 pages—that follow templates to be provided by Graham staff. Final reports will describe the overall results and progress relating to the objectives and specific measures of success presented in the original proposal and will be developed in discussion with Graham staff.

Review & Selection Process

What feedback will I receive on my proposal?

Decision letters include a brief summary of reviewer feedback.

How will issues of diversity be taken into consideration during the review process?

Reviewers will be looking to see that the teams have the expertise needed to achieve the proposed scope of work and final funding decisions will be made based on the review panel’s ranking of program goals, which include diversity. A central program goal is to support research teams that bring together a broad range of perspectives, backgrounds, expertise and experience to foster high-impact projects.

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Resources

Can I speak with Graham/C-NAP staff in advance about whether my proposed project would be a good fit for this grant or for additional clarifications?

Yes. We can discuss potential projects individually via phone or in-person. If you have questions or concerns, we encourage you to contact Maggie Allan (maallan@umich.edu or graham-cnap@umich.edu)

I have a project idea, but I'm not sure whether to pursue a C-NAP grant . Any suggestions?

We encourage you to reach out directly to Maggie Allan (maallan@umich.edu or graham-canp@umich.edu)