Emerging Opportunities Program
Catalyst and Transformation Grants
Frequently Asked Questions

Proposal process

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

Yes, letters of intent are required for both catalyst and transformation grants. They will not be used as a screening tool. Rather, they will be used by Graham staff to prepare for the proposal review process. Letters of intent are not binding, and changes to the scope, team, focus, etc. are permitted in the proposal.

Will I hear from Emerging Opportunities 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?

LOIs and proposals should be submitted using the online form. A hyperlink is provided in the request for proposal (RFP) and available via the "apply" button on the catalyst and transformation grant webpages. Upon submitting an LOI, you will receive an email with a link to your application. Use the same link when you are ready to upload your proposal. Funded teams will use the same online system to submit reports. If you have a problem using the online form, email grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu.

Eligibility

Can post-docs be co-investigators?

Graham will defer the unit's policy regarding post-doc eligibility. 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 (PI); co-investigators (Co-Is) and partners from other institutions and organizations may be included on the project team. The definition of a U-M PI can be found at: http://orsp.umich.edu/principal-investigator-pi.

Can I apply for multiple grants simultaneously?

If an investigator is currently supported through a funding opportunity they may not be listed as an investigator (PI or Co-I) on new proposals for that funding opportunity until the first project has finished. For example, a catalyst grant recipient is not eligible to apply for another catalyst grant until after the first grant is completed. A transformation grant recipient would, however, be eligible to apply for a catalyst grant while the transformation grant is ongoing.

Is work that was previously funded through another grant from the Graham Sustainability Institute (including the Climate Center or Water Center) eligible for a catalyst or transformation grant?

Yes, so long as it extends or builds upon the work and takes it to the next stage following the program characteristics in the RFPs.

May the funds be used to supplement ongoing projects?
> Yes, however, the proposal should make it clear how the work to be conducted with catalyst or transformation grant support is distinct from the other activities and how it follows the program characteristics in the RFPs.

Project focus

The RFPs do not define sustainability. How do I know if my proposed work is sustainability-related?
> The Graham Institute [defines sustainability broadly](#):
>
> "Sustainability encompasses solutions-driven scholarship and practice that seeks to safeguard our planet's life-support systems and enhance well-being for present and future generations.
> The field is defined by the problems it addresses rather than the disciplines it employs. It draws from multiple disciplines of the natural, social, engineering, design, and health sciences; from the professions and humanities; and from practical field experience in business, government, and civil society."
>
> Recognizing that there are many definitions of sustainability, for the purposes of Emerging Opportunities grants, sustainability should include environmental, economic, and social dimensions. For a given project those dimensions need not be equal, but they should all be present. Proposals should clearly articulate the relationship of the proposed work to sustainability.

Many projects on the Emerging Opportunities website or mentioned during the information session have a local focus and/or take place in an international setting. Are those requirements?
> No. Projects can focus on any geographic scale, levels of governance, or sectors. It is expected that the scope and framing of the project will depend on the particular issue, the external partner(s) engaged in the effort, and the actionable question being addressed.

Project activities

Is fieldwork or primary data collection an eligible activity for catalyst grants or transformation grants?
> The objective of the Emerging Opportunities program is to bring together the diverse expertise and inclusive engagement needed at key decision points to advance sustainability. Projects should have sufficient information to enable an effective synthesis and analysis or to frame an emerging issue. However, limited data collection is allowed provided it fills an important gap in addressing the actionable question guiding the project.

Can the funding be used for implementation projects?
> In general, catalyst and transformation grants are not intended for implementation projects. Projects may include a proof of concept, however, the focus of work (particularly for transformation grants) is to support work which can be used as a basis for decision-making/implementation.

External partner

What do you mean by an "external partner"?
> An external partner includes individual(s) or organization(s) outside the university who are 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, and furthering project objectives.

While both catalyst and transformation grants require an external partner, it is anticipated that the role of the partner will vary between the two types of projects. For catalyst grants, an external partner would be interested in the proposed work. They also may have information or data to share. In comparison, external partners for transformation grant projects should be planning to use and apply the project results, and they should have opportunities to influence the scope, implementation, and outputs of the project to ensure the results are relevant and usable. Transformation grant extern partners may be members of the project team itself.

Might researchers from other academic institutions satisfy the "external partner" requirement?
Probably not. Given the framing of the work around an actionable question that connects science to real-world decisions, external partners are likely to be outside academia. External partners should be decision-makers or practitioners in a position to directly utilize project outputs - implementing strategies, influencing decision-making, scaling results, and furthering project objectives.

More likely, researchers from other academic institutions would be considered collaborators.

Note also that this does not preclude external partners from being members of the project team or participating in science co-production.

Can we apply for a catalyst grant if we have not yet identified a specific external partner?
Yes, but the proposal should still identify specific potential partners and describe their anticipated interest in the proposed work. In these cases, it would be expected that the proposed work would include activities aimed at identifying an external partner or partners, defining decision maker needs, and/or developing partnerships.

What type of resume is needed for external partners?
Resumes for external partners are required for Transformation grant proposals where the external partner is a formal member of the project team. In those instances, if the partner on the team is not from a sector that uses a standard 2-page resume, a profile highlighting their relevant background and expertise would suffice.

Student opportunities

Does involvement of students outside of the University of Michigan (e.g., K-12 students, students from other universities) satisfy the proposal review criterion regarding opportunities for students?
The student opportunity review criterion is in reference to University of Michigan students (undergraduate through doctoral). Proposed projects involving students from outside the University of Michigan are not ineligible for funding, but should consider ways to involve University of Michigan students.

Review criteria

How does the review process take into account the scope of the proposed work and the amount of funding requested?
The evaluation criteria include the feasibility of the budget for the work proposed. While proposals may covers parts of larger initiatives, requested funding must align with project characteristics and proposal requirements.

Are the review criteria weighted equally?
    Reviewers will review and score a proposal along each criterion individually.

Funding & grant period

Can funding be used for external partners?
    Yes, but proposals must be submitted by U-M PIs with subawards as appropriate.

Can funding be used to support post-docs?
    Yes.

Are administrative costs allowed?
    Yes, but only if they are directly connected to the work of the project.

Do projects require a match or co-funding?
    No.

What won't you fund for catalyst grants? Are travel, student salaries, and honoraria eligible expenses?
    Catalyst grants will not cover equipment costs. Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to, travel, student salaries, and honoraria.

Are no-cost extensions allowed?
    Typically, yes. Details will be provided in the award letter. The project check-ins and interim reporting are opportunities to discuss the potential need for an extension.

Is there flexibility in the start date or duration of the grants?
    Generally, yes. The start date can occur after the anticipated start dates listed in the RFP provided the project starts within the same fiscal year as the funding opportunity. Also, projects can be completed faster than the duration listed in the RFP, and no-cost extensions are typically allowed. Proposals should clearly state the anticipated start date and duration of the project.

Requirements for grant recipients

The catalyst and transformation grants require recipients to "submit a final written report that describes the overall results and progress relating to the objectives and specific measures of success presented in the original proposal" and "share additional project outputs (e.g., articles, guides, graphics, factsheets) with the Graham Institute." What are the requirements regarding open access data sharing for supported projects? What if there are concerns about releasing final reports in advance of publications?
    With regard to open access data sharing, the Graham Institute does not collect or manage data. Rather, the Graham Institute makes final reports and other project outputs publicly available through its online database. If there are conflicts or concerns with publication timelines, the posting of project reports or outputs can be delayed following an approved timeline established by project PIs and Graham staff. Teams should discuss this with Graham staff during check-ins or interim reporting.

Help me understand the reporting requirements. What do check-ins and mid-point or semiannual reports entail? What about final project reports?
    Check-ins are verbal and consist of an informal meeting or phone call. The mid-point and semiannual reports required for catalyst and transformation grants, respectively, are short written summaries—typically 1-2 pages—that follow templates to be provided by Graham staff. Final reports will generally comprise the project outputs described in the proposal and be developed in discussion with Graham staff.

Resources

Do you have best practice guides regarding project management, collaboration, and other issues?
The Emerging Opportunities resources webpage (http://graham.umich.edu/emopps/resources) provides links to online resources on a variety of topics including: collaboration and engagement, evaluation, data management, and publication. You may also contact Emerging Opportunities staff to discuss specific needs or concerns. Additional resources are currently in development, and we welcome suggestions about what would be useful.

I have a project idea, but I'm not sure whether to pursue a catalyst or transformation grant. Any suggestions?
One thing to consider is the extent to which the relationship with the external partner(s) is developed. Given the greater degree of external partner engagement expected of transformation grants, if the partnership isn't ready, you may want to consider pursuing a catalyst grant first.

Can I speak with Emerging Opportunities staff in advance about whether my proposed project would be a good fit for these grants 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 John Callewaert, Emerging Opportunities Program Director, at jcallew@umich.edu or 734-615-3752.