The year 2020 has brought forth incredible challenges. The emergence of COVID-19 caused sweeping and likely lasting changes throughout the world in how we work, teach, learn, and interact. Our country’s long history of racial discrimination reached a new tipping point, forcing us to acknowledge its damage and seek meaningful rectification. And across the globe, indicators of a changing climate—glacial melt, wildfires, extreme weather—accelerated at a frightening pace.

While each of these challenges has wide-ranging consequences for humanity, the negative impacts in all cases are disproportionately borne by people of color and the economically disadvantaged. These challenges remind us that sustainability is not possible without social justice, and they serve as a resounding call to action for the Graham Sustainability Institute.

Now is the time to seek innovative, collaborative, and equitable pathways to greater sustainability, such as through climate action and water protection. To that end, we offer you our new strategic plan, which will guide Graham over the next several years. The plan was developed in collaboration with colleagues and advisors across and beyond the university. We are grateful to all who have contributed to its creation.

As our new vision statement asserts, we imagine a just and sustainable world where policy and practice are powered by science, collaboration, and creativity. Graham has been growing into that vision for some time, blending the university’s broad expertise across disciplines with the applied decision-making and practical expertise of partners and policymakers.

Moving forward, our mission is to mobilize the expertise and passion of scholars, partners, and decision makers to work together and bring world-class research to real-world sustainability challenges. As we look to the future, we are well positioned to build on the strengths of U-M’s top-tier research enterprise, using our collaborative engagement expertise to unlock the potential for even greater impact.

You’ll also find a fresh articulation of our shared values: We are collaborative, purpose-driven, inclusive, science-based, and impactful. If you have worked with Graham, we hope you recognize these values reflected in your experience.

Lastly, we’ve identified key priorities, along with a set of decision filters designed to help us navigate emerging opportunities with consistency, transparency, and prudence. Climate change, water resources, leadership development, policy integration, and ‘broader impacts’—where Graham’s unique expertise can be leveraged as an impact-multiplier—are the institute’s focus areas in the coming years. We will address these priorities with a grounding in inclusiveness and a reinvigorated commitment to serving underresourced communities.

With this strategic plan, we renew our commitment to co-creating goals and actions with others across the University of Michigan, throughout our communities, in our region and nation, and across the globe. We invite you to partner with us so that we may together solve sustainability challenges great and small, and lay the groundwork for a better future.

Jennifer Haverkamp
Graham Family Director
The overarching objective of this plan is to draw on the Institute’s deep collaborative engagement expertise to unlock the potential of the university and its partners to amplify impact on real-world sustainability challenges.

One of our passions is climate change. Recognizing that addressing climate change is a global imperative, the Institute is mobilizing collaborators across sectors and disciplines to advance carbon neutrality, renewable energy, and other strategies to address this challenge.

Given our home in the Great Lakes region, we are also fiercely committed to safeguarding water resources. Our Water Center engages a wide range of stakeholders to address critical and emerging regional and national water and water-dependent resource challenges.

Last, but certainly not least, we are devoted to supporting our partners’ sustainability goals, from faculty researching the air-quality impacts of fossil fuels to urban communities’ access to affordable potable water, to philanthropic partners seeking to advance a circular economy that eliminates waste and keeps materials in use longer.

The following strategic priorities will guide the work of the Institute for the next three years and beyond. They include areas where we intend to grow and new areas we are eager to explore. They are intentionally broad, flexible, and directional. We continue our commitment to co-creating goals and actions in collaboration with university and external partners, and present this plan as a living document that will evolve.

- **CLIMATE CHANGE**
  Advance the discovery of science-based strategies to combat climate change and its impacts by growing critical partnerships, programming, and financial support for engaged research.

- **WATER RESOURCES**
  Engage all stakeholders, but particularly historically underrepresented and underresourced communities, in policy- and management-relevant processes that contribute to restoring, enhancing, and sustaining the water and water-dependent resources that benefit them.

- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**
  Foster the next generation of sustainability leaders from across the university, providing them with opportunities to tackle real-world challenges in collaboration with external partners.

- **POLICY INTEGRATION**
  Build the Institute’s capacity to integrate leading-edge academic research into policy-making to generate real-world decisions that are science-based and sustainable.

- **BROADER IMPACTS**
  Help faculty increase their impact by seeding new ideas, providing engagement expertise, and improving communication products to extend the reach of research findings and their real-world applications.
LEVERS OF CHANGE

In collaboration with a broad range of university and external partners, the Graham Sustainability Institute uses three key levers of change to work toward a more sustainable future. These levers align with the Institute’s vision and mission and the University of Michigan’s three-fold mission of research, education, and service.

Facilitating Engaged Research: We work to advance a wide range of research efforts that share a common commitment to partnering with communities and decision-makers. Together, we seek practical approaches and pioneering solutions to the sustainability issues that threaten our collective future.

Developing Sustainability Leaders: We strengthen and train the next generation of sustainability leaders through real-life, experiential learning opportunities. Our programs help build professional skills, model inclusion, and foster an interdisciplinary approach.

Informing Policy and Practice: We believe that research and education must move beyond the university’s academic environment and into the everyday world. We’re focused on making sure that policy and practice are grounded in the best available evidence of what really works.

These strategic decision filters are designed to help the Graham Sustainability Institute evaluate opportunities for growth and new initiatives. While the strategic priorities enumerated above provide Graham with key goals for the years ahead, change is inevitable and new opportunities will continue to emerge. Graham leadership will use the following decision filters to evaluate new opportunities:

• Fills a critical gap, or offers a new solution, that addresses a real-world need
• Consistent with Graham core values—collaborative, purpose-driven, inclusive, science-based, and impactful
• Leverages U-M expertise and contributes to scholarship
• Reflects external partners’ priorities
• Aligns with funder interest and capacity
• Compatible with U-M strategic initiatives
• Balances effort with potential impact
• Builds on Graham’s staff knowledge and expertise or is a strategic opportunity to grow our capacity in new directions

Please join us in creating a just and sustainable world where policy and practice are powered by science, collaboration, and creativity.
ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

The mission of the University of Michigan is to serve the people of Michigan and the world through preeminence in creating, communicating, preserving, and applying knowledge, art, and academic values, and in developing leaders and citizens who will challenge the present and enrich the future.

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DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

At the Graham Sustainability Institute, our dedication to academic excellence for the public good is inseparable from our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our mission of mobilizing the expertise and passion of scholars, partners, and decision-makers to work together and bring world-class research to real-world sustainability challenges includes ensuring that each member of our community thrives. We believe that diversity is key to empowerment, and to the advancement of sustainability knowledge, learning, and leadership.

A Non-discriminatory, Affirmative Action Employer.

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PHOTOS

Cover
Background image: Hoary Vervain in the Furstenberg Nature Area, Ann Arbor. (Photo credit: Jennifer Haverkamp)

Top image: With project support from the Graham Sustainability Institute, U-M faculty and students pose with partners in Puerto Rico unveiling a gasifier, one of many that will help bring energy independence to the island as it continues to rebuild after Hurricane Maria. (Photo credit: Scott Soderberg, Michigan Photography)

Middle image: Wind turbine. (Photo credit: Gonz DDL, Unsplash)

Bottom image: Dow Sustainability Fellows at Taboga Reserve, Costa Rica, working to build a net-zero biostation. (Photo credit: Dr. Jose Alfaro)

Interior images (pages 4, 5, 6): U-M Ann Arbor campus—aerial view. (Photo credit: Michigan Photography)

Back
Background image: Hoary Vervain in the Furstenberg Nature Area, Ann Arbor. (Photo credit: Jennifer Haverkamp)

Top image: Graham Sustainability Scholars participating in a field experience in Costa Rica. (Photo credit: Rhea Seth)

Middle image: North Manitou Island from Pyramid Point. (Photo credit: Andrew Horning)

Bottom image: Graham Sustainability Scholars participating in a field experience in Iceland. (Photo credit: Kara Steshetz and Crede Strauser)