

FY26 Request for Catalyst Grant Proposals

OVERVIEW

The [Graham Sustainability Institute](#) invites faculty from the University of Michigan’s (U-M) Ann Arbor, Dearborn, and Flint campuses to propose research projects that address **critical sustainability¹ challenges through collaborative, interdisciplinary, and partner-engaged approaches**. Grants may be used to:

- Develop new collaborative research ideas,
- Produce solution-oriented knowledge, and/or
- Apply knowledge for societal impact.

Applications are welcome from **all disciplines**, including the natural, social, engineering, design, and health sciences, as well as the arts, humanities, and professions. Proposals may address **any sustainability topic**. They must take a collaborative and engaged approach that integrates knowledge and perspectives from multiple disciplines and sectors. Projects must be distinct from prior or ongoing collaborative research.

FUNDING AND TIMELINE

Award Amount: Up to \$15,000 per project

Project Duration: Up to 12 months, with an anticipated start date of January 1, 2026

Number of Awards: Up to 7 awards

- **Funding details:** Graham will fund up to 5 projects. Thanks to generous philanthropic support from Lewis G. Sandy, M.D. and Susan Hassmiller, R.N., Ph.D., FAAN, the U-M [Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation](#) (IHPI) is providing **dedicated funding for up to 2 additional health services research sustainability projects focused on the intersection of climate and health**. For a project to be eligible for IHPI funding, at least one PI must be [a member](#) of IHPI. Climate-health proposals may also be considered for Graham’s general funding, so there is no limit to the total number of climate-health-related awards.

KEY DATES

Wednesday, October 15, 2025 (11:59 PM ET)	Mandatory letter of intent due
Monday, November 17, 2025 (Noon - 12:00 PM ET)	Proposals due
December 2025	Funding notifications
January 1, 2026	Anticipated project start date

Find all supporting documents and online application access on the catalyst grant webpage:
<https://graham.umich.edu/catalyst/grants>.

¹ Sustainability is a field of problem-driven, interdisciplinary scholarship and practice that seeks to protect the planet and enhance the well-being of present and future generations. The field is defined by the problems it addresses rather than the disciplines it employs. Catalyst grant projects incorporate environmental, economic, and sociocultural dimensions (though these need not be equally emphasized), and draw from diverse academic disciplines and practical experience in business, government, and civil society.

QUICK LINKS

- [Eligible Objectives](#)
- [Collaboration and Engagement](#)
- [Eligibility & Team Composition](#)
- [Letter Of Intent \(LOI\) Requirements](#)
- [Proposal Requirements](#)
- [Review Criteria and Process](#)
- [Requirements for Catalyst Grant Recipients](#)

ELIGIBLE OBJECTIVES

Proposals must address one or more of the following objectives, representing different phases of research and impact:

Objective 1: Develop new collaborative research ideas - These projects support partnership-building, collaborative framing of problems, and joint development of research questions and approaches. They aim to shape a research project that addresses an agreed-upon issue with multiple disciplines and societal partners. Projects with this as a sole objective must develop a clear and actionable plan for future research efforts and external funding. Projects requesting the full \$15,000 should include another objective(s) in addition to this one.

Objective 2: Produce solution-oriented knowledge - These projects build on collaboratively framed problems to generate new insights or knowledge that addresses sustainability challenges and would not be possible without the combined efforts of diverse researchers and partners.

Objective 3: Apply knowledge for societal impact - These projects collaboratively translate research accomplishments into real-world applications. Projects must develop at least one translational output (e.g., tool, creative work, process, guidance document) that makes knowledge accessible and actionable to enable real-world outcomes.

COLLABORATION AND ENGAGEMENT

All proposals must meaningfully engage partners² outside of academia who bring real-world experience and perspectives to the research project and are positioned to inform, apply, and/or act upon the knowledge generated to advance sustainability outcomes.

The objective and type of work proposed should dictate the approach to engagement, including its depth and breadth. Some projects may engage a single partner, while others may involve

² We use the term “partners” to refer to individuals or groups outside of academia who help shape the project and are involved in project activities. There should be a clear connection between the project’s focus and the partner’s role or needs. Partners may come from public, private, and non-governmental organizations and/or affected communities. We recognize that the most appropriate term for the individual(s) the project engages—e.g., partner, collaborator, interested party, community member, contributor, audience—will depend on the specific context, the disciplinary approaches involved, and the nature of the relationship. For arts-based and other projects engaging a broad audience, there should also be a specific, non-university-based “partner” individual or organization involved.

multiple partners representing different groups, or a primary partner alongside a broader coalition or audience.

All proposals must:

- **Identify at least one primary partner**, articulating their needs or interests in the project. Identifying a primary partner helps clarify the specific issue(s) the project will address and how the work will enable impactful outcomes or advance the project's theory of change.
- **Demonstrate how the partner(s) shaped the proposal and will influence implementation.** Detail partners' contributions to project design and a clear process for ongoing input that will inform project decisions and ensure reciprocal, non-extractive relationships.
- **Include at least one letter of support from a partner** demonstrating their interest and anticipated involvement.
- **Allocate adequate time and resources to support engagement** and reflect this in the budget and timeline. Funded teams are expected to provide all participants with the resources and support to participate fully, ensure that everyone involved benefits from the work, and anticipate and minimize potential harms.

ELIGIBILITY & TEAM COMPOSITION

PI Requirements: Projects must be led by a U-M employee (Ann Arbor, Dearborn, or Flint campus) eligible to serve as a U-M Principal Investigator (PI).³

Team Requirements: Teams must include at least two investigators with U-M faculty or research-active lecturer appointments. Those investigators must represent at least two U-M academic units⁴ or research units⁵ AND at least two distinct disciplinary fields. The unit and disciplinary requirements are separate, and both must be met. For climate and health-focused research projects to be considered for funding by the [Institute for Healthcare Policy & Innovation](#), at least one of the faculty PIs must [be a member](#) of IHPI.

Faculty appointments include research professor, research scientist, tenure track, and clinical track appointments. Academic units are typically schools or colleges (not departments or campuses); research units are those within the Provost's Office or Office of Research. For faculty with multiple appointments, the unit responsible for at least 50% of salary counts toward the unit requirement. Within LSA, different Divisions (Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences) may fulfill the two-unit minimum.

Additional Team Members: Multiple investigators from the same unit or discipline are allowed, if the minimum requirements are met. Teams may also include individuals from other organizations or institutions outside U-M.

Limits: A PI with an active catalyst grant may not apply as PI or co-investigator (Co-I) until their current project is complete. No PI may receive more than two Catalyst Grants in total.

³ The definition of a U-M PI can be found at: <http://orsp.umich.edu/principal-investigator-pi>.

⁴ For academic units, refer to the [U-M Faculty Handbook 3.I Academic Units](#)

⁵ For research units, see lists from the [Office of the Provost](#) and [Office of the Vice President for Research](#)

LETTER OF INTENT (LOI) REQUIREMENTS

Due: Wednesday, October 15, 2025, 11:59 PM ET

An LOI is required for all applicants. Applicants are encouraged to submit an LOI even if their project idea or team is not yet fully developed. LOIs are brief, non-binding, and will not be formally evaluated; they establish basic eligibility, assist with review planning, and allow staff to reach out for clarification if needed. Project details may be revised at the proposal stage (no invitation required).

Please submit your LOI as a single PDF that includes:

1. Draft project title
2. Project team – List names, contact information, position titles, and U-M academic unit or organization for the PI and all Co-Is.
3. Objective(s) – Indicate which eligible objective(s) your project will address
4. Climate-health focus - Indicate Yes/No if your project focuses on the intersection of climate and health
5. Brief project summary (1 page maximum, non-technical) – Outline your idea, primary partner(s), key activities or methods, main outputs, and anticipated outcomes.
6. Relationship to existing efforts – In two to three sentences, describe how this project represents new work or builds meaningfully on existing efforts.

To submit your LOI, click on the application link on the catalyst grant webpage (<https://graham.umich.edu/catalyst/grants>), log in with your U-M credentials, and follow the directions. You will receive a single confirmation email when you have successfully saved your LOI for the first time. **Save this email; it will include a link you may use to return to your LOI and make edits until the deadline, which is also the same link you will use to submit your proposal.**

PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Due: Monday, November 17, 2025 at 12:00 PM (Noon) ET

Submit proposals as a single PDF file using 12-point Times New Roman font, single-spacing, and one-inch margins. Proposals must include a title page, a project narrative (maximum 5 pages), and appendices as described below.

Title page (1 page maximum)

Organize your title page using the following headings:

1. Project title
2. Principal investigator (primary contact) – List name, title/position, U-M unit, telephone, mailing, and email addresses
3. Co-investigator(s) – List name, title/position, U-M unit or institution, telephone, and email address
4. Additional team members, if applicable (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project) – List name, institution, telephone, email address, and nature of the contribution

5. Project start and end dates – Projects should begin January 1, 2026 and end no later than December 31, 2026.
6. Budget request - Requested dollar amount up to \$15,000. Budgets are expected to be lower for projects with solely Objective 1.
7. Objective(s) – Indicate which [eligible objective\(s\)](#) your project will address
8. Climate and health focus - Indicate Yes/No if your project focuses on the intersection of climate and health
9. Non-technical summary – Provide a 250-word summary suitable for a non-technical audience. Include the project’s objectives, project partners, planned outputs, and anticipated outcomes.

Project narrative (5 pages maximum)

Organize your narrative using the following underlined headings. Suggested page lengths for sections are offered. Adapt the internal structure as needed to best present your work.

1. Project rationale (~1.25 pages)
 - Concisely state the research activity being proposed (2-3 sentences) and be explicit about which [objective\(s\)](#) you seek to achieve.
 - Briefly describe the sustainability challenge the project aims to address. Be sure to demonstrate how it aligns with the RFP’s definition of sustainability, and, if applicable, be explicit about the climate-health focus. Clearly state the need for the activities being proposed and describe what the project will accomplish.
 - Identify the project partner(s) and their connection to the proposal topic. Describe how their involvement helped shape the proposal and how partners are positioned to inform, apply and/or act upon the knowledge the project generates. This should be corroborated by letters of support in the Appendix.
 - State whether the project builds on existing work or initiates new efforts. If building on existing work, explain how the proposed work is distinct. If the catalyst grant is a portion of a larger effort, very briefly describe that effort. *Focus the rest of the proposal on the specific activities, outputs, and outcomes the catalyst grant would enable.*
2. Project approach (~2 pages) - The approach should describe integrated technical and collaborative processes that will achieve the objective(s), provide opportunities for meaningful partner engagement, and support effective team coordination. Be sure to include the following:
 - The specific activities, methods, and/or techniques that will be used to achieve the project’s objectives
 - The intentional steps that will integrate the multiple, distinct disciplines.
 - The collaborative process that will ensure iterative engagement and contribute to building reciprocal relationships with partners.
 - Specify the mechanisms (e.g., workshops, feedback sessions, meetings, creative co-production) and timeline for partner input/feedback to actively influence project decisions and outputs.

- o Demonstrate how partners will benefit from involvement in the project and an understanding of the support they may need to participate in the project as intended.
 - o **TIP:** Given the extra time often required for engagement and collaboration, proposals should scale the work appropriately and build in timeline buffers so that the project can be completed within 12 months.
 - How required data sources will be accessed, if applicable
3. Outputs and outcomes (~0.75 page) – List and briefly describe your planned outputs and anticipated outcomes, clearly distinguishing between the two. Explain how outputs will help you achieve your anticipated outcomes. Focus on near-term outcomes, rather than long-term impacts. Objective 3 projects must develop at least one translational product.
 - **TIP:** Outputs are the specific products or services produced by the project. Outcomes are the near-term changes expected as a result of the outputs. For further details and examples, refer to the guidance on the catalyst grant website
 4. Project team roles (~0.5 page) – Describe each team member’s roles and responsibilities (i.e., the activities/outputs to which they will contribute), and how disciplinary insights will be integrated. Avoid repeating content from CVs—focus on function, not credentials. A table format may be used to enhance clarity.

Appendices

1. References
2. Timeline – Using the [timeline template](#) found on the catalyst grant webpage, indicate the anticipated start and end dates for the project. Identify significant tasks/activities, including partner engagement, and cite the outputs described in the narrative. **Reminder: ensure the timeline includes adequate buffers for engagement and collaboration, including time for incorporating input, to support completion within the 12-months.**
3. Budget & budget narrative
 - Use the [budget template](#) found on the catalyst grant webpage to provide an estimate of all project costs. Budgets may request up to \$15,000 in total funding. Budgets should be lower for projects pursuing only Objective 1. Equipment purchases and indirect costs are not allowed. Matching funds are not required.
 - Budget justification – Provide a narrative to justify expenses in all budget categories. Personnel costs should be broken out by team member and include an FTE.
 - Additional notes
 - o **Partner compensation** – While compensation approaches, rates, and amounts will vary by context and project, they should reflect the importance of partner contributions to the project, while considering and mitigating barriers to and upfront costs for participation that partners often face.
 - o **Sources of additional support & in-kind contributions, if applicable** – If the catalyst grant will not cover the full cost of the proposed activities, or if the catalyst grant funding will augment a larger effort, identify all other sources of funding—pending or awarded—that are critical to the success of

the catalyst work. Clearly indicate which catalyst-related costs the other funding will cover. Relatedly, applicants should note in-kind contributions that are critical to the project. For in-kind personnel time, include an FTE estimate and explanation for why the time is not being requested through the grant. This information helps reviewers assess feasibility. There is no cost-share requirement for catalyst projects.

4. Letters of support - Provide letters from individuals and/or partners confirming contributions to and support for the project. **All proposals must include at least one letter of support from a primary partner.** This letter should confirm the partner's role in proposal development, planned engagement during the project, and how they intend to inform and/or apply the resulting work.
5. CVs/resumes – Include two-page resumes for each team member named on the proposal.
6. Other supporting documents (optional) – Include up to three pages of supporting documents as appendices.

REVIEW CRITERIA AND PROCESS

Proposals will be evaluated by Graham staff for alignment with the funding opportunity and U-M faculty with relevant expertise. Final funding decisions will also consider supporting diverse grant recipients and new collaborations. Proposals will be evaluated based on the following five equally-weighted criteria.

1. Relevance and alignment
 - Does the proposal address a well-defined sustainability challenge and, if relevant, focus on a specific issue at the intersection of climate change and human health?
 - Is the project's approach consistent with one or more of the grant's eligible objectives (e.g., developing collaborative ideas, producing knowledge, applying knowledge for impact)?
2. Collaboration and partner engagement
 - Does the proposal identify at least one primary partner, clearly articulate their interests and ability to inform, apply and/or act upon the knowledge the project generates, and provide evidence of their commitment in a letter of support?
 - Is there an appropriate and iterative engagement process that meaningfully involves partners in both project development and implementation, includes opportunities for partner input and influence on project decisions, and reflects a commitment to reciprocal relationships?
3. Project approach
 - Is the project approach technically sound, appropriately detailed, and aligned with the stated objective(s) and able to achieve the proposed project outputs and outcomes?
 - Are relevant perspectives and disciplines adequately represented and thoughtfully integrated into the proposed work?
4. Feasibility

- Are the timeline and budget appropriate for the project's goals and 12-month period?
- Are sufficient time and resources allocated for meaningful partner engagement and incorporating feedback?
- Does the team have the necessary expertise and well-defined roles to complete the proposed work?

5. Potential impact

- Are the proposed processes and outputs likely to lead to the desired outcomes and contribute to addressing the identified sustainability challenge?

REQUIREMENTS FOR CATALYST GRANT RECIPIENTS

Catalyst grant recipients will:

- Participate in at least two verbal project check-ins with staff from Graham (and IHPI, if applicable)
- Submit at least one brief mid-project progress report (~1.5 pages) and a final written report summarizing results, outputs, and outcomes
- Notify program staff if a significant outcome of this grant award is realized at any time (e.g. grant submissions, acquisition of a grant, publication of a significant piece of work, an invention, a key creation or performance, etc.)
- Share all project outputs (e.g., publications, guides, tools) with Graham
- Participate in a Graham-sponsored meeting or event for U-M sustainability researchers
- If funded by IHPI, give a presentation for the IHPI Climate & Health Research Network upon completion of the work
- Respond to Graham surveys on project details and grant impacts
- Acknowledge Graham Sustainability Institute (and Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation, if relevant) support in all publications, presentations, and formal project communications, and share related information with Graham staff
- Assist with proposal review during future related grant cycles if requested

QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS RFP?

Reach out to Sarah Miller, Collaborative Research Specialist (milsar@umich.edu, 734-763-4035) or Maggie Allan, Collaborative Research Manager (maallan@umich.edu, 734-763-0749).

A **Frequently Asked Questions** document is available on the [Catalyst grant webpage](#).