



## Catalyst Grants Frequently Asked Questions

This document will be updated as additional questions are received. Note that it is a supplement to the information provided in the request for proposals (RFP). Be sure to review the RFP carefully.

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### Letter of intent & proposal process

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

**Letters of intent are required.** LOIs will be used to guide the recruitment of appropriate reviewers and will not be used in the proposal evaluation process. LOIs are not binding, and changes to the scope, team, focus, etc., are permitted in the proposal. **Applicants are encouraged to submit an LOI even if their project idea or team is not yet fully developed.**

*Will I hear from Graham staff after submitting an LOI?*

We will let you know how many LOIs we received. Additionally, we may initiate discussions with applicants based on information provided in the LOI—particularly if there are any concerns regarding alignment with the goals and minimum requirements of the funding opportunity. However, you do not need to be invited to submit a proposal. Applicants are encouraged to reach out to program staff with any questions or concerns about fit with the funding opportunity.

*How do I submit an LOI or proposal?*

LOIs and proposals must be submitted through the Graham Institute online application system available through the [catalyst grant webpage](#). Details are included in the RFP and on the webpage. If you have a problem using the online system, email [grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu](mailto:grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu).

### Eligibility

Note that this section is not complete. Refer to the RFP for additional eligibility information.

*Can student team members be used to fulfill the unit and disciplinary breadth requirements?*

No. A primary goal for these grants is to support faculty in pursuing collaborative, interdisciplinary, and partner-engaged sustainability research activities. While projects may provide opportunities for student involvement and engagement across disciplines, and this may include membership on the project team, the requirement for representation of at least two disciplines and at least two academic or research units must be fulfilled by investigators (PI or Co-I) with U-M faculty or research-active lecturer appointments.

*Can collaborators from other academic institutions be used to fulfill the disciplinary breadth requirement?*

No. The disciplinary requirements must be fulfilled by investigators (PI or Co-I) with U-M faculty or research-active lecturer appointments. However, this requirement is not intended to limit additional collaboration.

*Can post-docs be co-investigators?*

Yes. Please note that all proposed projects must be led by a U-M employee who is eligible to serve as a U-M Principal Investigator (PI). The definition of a U-M PI can be found at: <http://orsp.umich.edu/principal-investigator-pi>.

*Can doctoral students be co-investigators?*

Yes, however, as noted above, the requirement for representation of at least two disciplines and at least two academic or research units must be fulfilled by investigators (PI or Co-I) with U-M faculty or research-active lecturer appointments.

*May researchers or doctoral students from other academic institutions be Co-Is or Co-PIs?*

Researchers from other academic institutions may serve as Co-PIs, Co-Is, or additional team members. Doctoral students from other academic institutions may serve as Co-Is or additional team members. However, as noted above, the requirement for representation of at least two disciplines and at least two academic or research units must be fulfilled by investigators (PI or Co-I) with U-M faculty or research-active lecturer appointments, and projects must be led by a U-M employee eligible to serve as a U-M Principal Investigator (PI).

*Can I apply for multiple grants simultaneously?*

An applicant can be listed as a PI on only one proposal for each RFP. However, they may be listed as a PI on one proposal and a Co-I on another or a Co-I on up to two proposals. A PI already supported by a Catalyst Grant may not be listed as an investigator (PI or Co-I) on new catalyst grant proposals until the first project has finished.

*May the funds be used to supplement ongoing projects?*

Yes, however, the proposal should make it clear what the catalyst grant would enable, how that work is distinct from other activities, and how it is aligned with the RFP. To assist reviewers in assessing the feasibility of the work, be sure to indicate whether resources have been secured for other aspects of the work that would not be covered by the catalyst grant but are critical to the success of the catalyst work. To assist in assessing impact, be clear about what additional work and outcomes would be enabled by the catalyst funding that would not be possible otherwise.

*Is there a limit to the number of catalyst grants an individual can receive?*

An individual may be awarded no more than two catalyst grants as a PI.

*Are Graham Sustainability Institute employees eligible?*

A U-M faculty member with a formal affiliation with the Graham Institute is eligible to serve as a Co-I on a proposal, but is not eligible to serve as PI and is not eligible to receive financial support from the grant.

## **Project focus**

*Are there preferences or limits regarding the geography or scale of a project?*

No. Projects can be U.S. based or international. Projects can focus on any geographic scale, level of governance, or sector. It is expected that the scope and framing of the project will depend on the sustainability challenge the project proposes to address and the intended user(s) engaged in the effort.

*Do certain topics or themes receive preference?*

No preference is given to projects on a particular topic or theme; proposals are reviewed on their individual merit according to the review criteria.

*Are you only funding projects like the ones you've funded previously?*

No. You may review previously funded projects, but you should not be limited by them.

*Can catalyst grants be used to provide continuing funds for a project?*

No. Catalyst grants are intended to catalyze new streams of work, not provide ongoing funding for specific focus areas.

### **Project objectives & activities**

*Is fieldwork or primary data collection an eligible activity for catalyst grants?*

Data collection is appropriate provided it aligns with an eligible project objective and is feasible within the 12-month project period.

*Can the funding be used to support the development of case studies?*

While we recognize the importance of alternative, informal, and lifelong learning efforts, this funding opportunity is not intended to support the development of case studies and other teaching materials. This does not preclude teams from developing cases as a supplement to other activities and outputs.

*Can the funding be used to support development and fundraising activities for a project partner?*

A catalyst grant can be used to help better position the team to pursue research funding, but it cannot be used solely for partner organizations to fundraise for implementation efforts.

*Can the funding be used to support on-campus sustainability initiatives?*

No. Catalyst grants should be used primarily to advance engaged, multidisciplinary faculty research, not to support campus sustainability projects. We could, however, see where pilot work on campus is intended to meet the needs of or inform a non-academic project partner. **To avoid confusion, we strongly encourage you to reach out to us to discuss this before submitting a proposal.** Proposals that do not have a project partner as defined in the RFP will not advance to review.

*Can the funding be used to support sustainability implementation efforts with or for a project partner?*

*Projects may include a pilot or proof of concept, but it should be clear how the work supports broader decision-making or action. Catalyst grants are not intended for implementation alone. **We encourage you to reach out to us directly to discuss this in detail before preparing a proposal.***

### **Project Partners**

*What do you mean by "project partners"?*

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.

Researchers from other academic organizations are unlikely to meet these criteria. More likely, they would be collaborators.

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

*Can members of the general public or an audience be a partner for Catalyst Grants?*

No. While projects can engage the public or different audiences, fulfilling the partner requirement involves more. Catalyst grant proposals must include at least one letter of support from a specific

individual or organization, demonstrating their interest and anticipated involvement in the project. This letter should confirm the partner's role in proposal development, their planned engagement during the project, and how they intend to inform and/or apply the project's results. It can be challenging to do that with members of the general public.

When projects engage the general public, an audience or another broad group, there should also be a specific, non-university-based "partner" individual or organization involved. Often, teams find an organization that represents or is involved with those individuals to be a partner.

*Would "users" of a tool be considered partners? We are proposing to build a...tool. As part of this, we will evaluate the tool with real users through controlled experiments and field deployments.*

Probably not. See above response about the general public. When projects engage users, we don't consider those individuals to be partners. The team would still need an additional, specific partner.

*Can we apply for a catalyst grant if we have not yet identified a specific partner?*

No. Proposals must identify at least one specific primary partner, articulate their needs or interests in the project and describe how the partner will inform, apply and/or act upon the knowledge the project generates. Partner(s) should shape the proposal and influence implementation. This should be corroborated by at least one letter of support.

Objective 1 proposals (development of new collaborative research ideas) can be used to support partnership building, collaborative framing of problems, and joint development of research questions and approaches, but there must still be at least one identified partner at the outset with a demonstrated interest in the project.

*Do partners need to provide an official letter of support?*

**Yes, all proposals must include at least one letter of support from a partner.** Letters 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.

*What type of resume is needed for partners?*

Resumes are required if a partner is a formal member of the project team (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project). 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.

*Might researchers from other academic institutions satisfy the partner requirement?*

Not likely, but possibly. Partners are 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. As a result, researchers from other academic institutions typically would be considered collaborators. **However, we recognize that individuals often have multiple roles, including some inside and outside of academia. If you have questions about a partner, please contact program staff directly to discuss this further.** Note also that this does not preclude partners from being members of the project team or participating in science co-production.

*Can I work with more than one partner during a Catalyst Grant?*

Yes. Proposals involving multiple partners should explain how the collaborative approach will manage those relationships and address the potential diversity of needs among those individuals or groups. Teams with multiple partners may find it helpful to identify a primary partner within that group and then craft the engagement approach accordingly to ensure all the RFP requirements are met.

## **Student opportunities**

*Can the Catalyst Grant supplement an existing student master's capstone team?*

**A primary goal for these grants is to support faculty in pursuing partner-engaged sustainability research activities that span multiple disciplines, and these grants should not be viewed as a source of student project funding.** We strongly encourage you to reach out to us to discuss this prior to submitting a proposal.

*Can Catalyst Grant findings inform curriculum design for my course?*

While projects may incorporate catalyst grant activities and/or findings into courses, catalyst grants should be used primarily to advance collaborative, interdisciplinary faculty research, not to support curriculum development.

## **Review criteria & decisions**

*How are the review criteria applied? Are the review criteria weighted equally?*

The review criteria and prompts presented in the RFP are exactly what reviewers will use to rate the proposals. The review criteria are equally weighted.

*How does the review process take into account the scope of the proposed work and the amount of funding requested?*

The evaluation criteria include feasibility, in terms of both the timeline and budget. While proposals may cover parts of larger initiatives, it should be clear which components of the larger initiative the requested funding would support, and those components must align with the intent of the catalyst grant RFP.

*What proportion of proposals are funded?*

The following table summarizes the award rates from previous cycles.

<b>Request for Proposals</b>	<b>Proposals submitted</b>	<b>Awards</b>
FY17 Fall Catalyst	11	3
FY17 Winter Catalyst	6	3
FY18 Fall Catalyst	6	3
FY18 Winter Catalyst	6	2
FY19 Fall Catalyst	10	4
FY19 Winter Catalyst	8	4
FY20 Winter Catalyst	11	4
FY21 Winter Catalyst	8	3
FY22 Fall Catalyst	7	5
FY23 Winter Catalyst	6	5
FY24 Fall and Winter Catalyst	10	7
FY25 Winter Catalyst	8	5

*What feedback will I receive on my proposal?*

Decision letters include a brief summary of reviewer feedback.

*If my proposal is not funded, may I resubmit?*

Yes. Note that the specific details in the RFP vary among cycles, as do reviewers. If resubmitting, make sure your proposal meets the requirements of the current call. Additionally, applicants are strongly encouraged to include in the appendix a short description of how the proposed work has responded to previous reviewer feedback.

## **Funding & grant period**

*Can funding be used for project partners outside of U-M?*

Yes, but proposals must be submitted by U-M PIs with subawards as appropriate.

*Can funding be used to support post-docs?*

Yes.

*Can funding be used to support students?*

Funding can be used to support students working on the project; however, these grants should not be used primarily as a source of student funding.

*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?*

Catalyst grants do not require a match.

*Is summer salary for faculty an allowable expense?*

Yes. Summer salary is allowable.

*What won't you fund for catalyst grants? Are travel, student salaries, and honoraria eligible expenses?*

Catalyst grants will not cover equipment costs or indirects. Eligible expenses include, but are not limited to, travel, personnel, and honoraria.

*Are no-cost extensions allowed?*

Typically, yes. Details will be provided in the award letter. Catalyst grant 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. 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.

### **Requirements for grant recipients**

*Catalyst grants require recipients to “submit a brief final written report that describes the overall results and progress relating to the objectives, outputs, and outcomes presented in the original proposal” and “share project outputs (e.g., articles, guides, tools, factsheets, other user-driven products) 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. The Graham Institute maintains all final reports privately for program accounting purposes solely. If there are conflicts or concerns with publication timelines, the posting of outputs, impacts, and/or outcomes from 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 midpoint reports entail? What about final project reports?*

Check-ins are verbal and consist of an informal meeting or phone call. The midpoint reports are short written summaries (typically 1-2 pages) that follow templates provided by Graham staff.

Graham staff will also provide a template for final reports (typically 4-5 pages) that describe the overall results and progress relating to the objectives and specific measures of success presented in the original proposal. However, given the goals of the funding opportunity, it is expected that the

primary outputs of the projects should address intended user needs and support decision-making and action. These outputs may include, but are not limited to, recommendations, tools, guidance, analyses, white papers, etc.. These should be shared with Graham, as appropriate. The details of the final reporting will be discussed during the project check-ins.

### **Additional Information**

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

Yes! We are happy to discuss potential projects. If you have questions or concerns, we encourage you to contact [grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu](mailto:grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu).