



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.

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.

Will I hear from Graham staff after submitting an LOI?

Program staff 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. Details are included in the RFP and on the [catalyst grant webpage](#). If you have a problem using the online system, email grahaminstitute-emopps@umich.edu.

Eligibility

Refer to the RFP for additional eligibility information.

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

A primary goal for these grants is to support faculty in pursuing intended user-driven sustainability research activities that span multiple disciplines. While projects should 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 **U-M faculty** listed as investigators (PI or Co-I) on the proposal.

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

No. The requirement for representation of at least two disciplines must be fulfilled by U-M faculty listed as investigators (PI or Co-I) on the proposal. However, this requirement is not intended to limit additional collaboration.

Can post-docs be co-investigators?

Yes. The Graham 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 employee 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 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 **U-M faculty** listed as investigators (PI or Co-I) on the proposal.

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. Note that proposed projects must be led by a U-M employee eligible to serve as a U-M Principal Investigator (PI), and there must be at least 2 U-M faculty members among the investigators. The Graham proposal application form (PAF) is required in part to ensure unit review and support. 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?

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.

In addition, an applicant can only be listed as a PI on one proposal for each RFP, but 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.

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 this 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 and 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.

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?

Given the timelines of the grants, typically projects will already have or will be able to access quickly sufficient information for an effective analysis or synthesis. Limited data collection is appropriate provided it aligns with an eligible project objective.

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.

Intended Users

What do you mean by “intended users”?

Intended users are partners outside academia positioned to apply project outputs in real-world decision-making and practice. Intended user(s) inform proposals and have meaningful and iterative opportunities to shape the project to ensure its relevance. Intended users can be from one or several sectors (government, industry, non-governmental, community, etc.). They should be in a position to utilize project outputs—in decision-making, implementing strategies, scaling results, and furthering project objectives—and their input should be integrated meaningfully into the project.

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

Note that this does not preclude intended users 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 intended user?

Proposals must identify at least one specific intended user of the project outputs, explain how their input helped to shape the proposal, and indicate how the work is designed to incorporate their insights and meet their needs. This should be corroborated by letters of support in the Appendix.

Objective 1 proposals (development of new, user-driven, collaborative research ideas) can be used to identify and develop new partnerships with intended users and other partners or stakeholders, but there still must be at least one identified intended user at the outset with a demonstrated interest in the project. For these projects, it would be expected that the proposed work would include activities aimed at identifying users, understanding their needs, and/or developing partnerships.

Do intended users need to provide an official letter of support?

Yes, all proposals must include at least one letter of support from an intended user. Letters should describe how they have been engaged in the development of the proposal, how they see themselves involved in the project if funded, and how they anticipate using the project outputs.

Letters of support should also be provided by team members included in the project but not funded in the budget, as well as individuals, groups, and/or institutions that have agreed to provide data/access to data or other resources necessary for the project not otherwise accounted for in the budget.

What type of resume is needed for intended users?

Resumes are required if an intended user is a formal member of the project team (anyone receiving project resources or contributing significant resources to the project). In those instances, if the intended user 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 intended user requirement?

No, not likely. Given that the work should be oriented toward real-world solutions with outputs that support decision-making or action, intended users should be outside academia. Intended users 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. At the same time, we recognize that an individual could have multiple roles. If you have questions about a potential intended user, feel free to contact Graham staff directly.

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

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.

Must the student opportunities be paid?

Student opportunities may be paid (through the catalyst grant or other funding sources) or unpaid. Examples include, but are not limited to, research assistantships, experiential learning, practical training, etc.

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. Reviewers will review and score a proposal for each criterion and provide comments for each criteria category.

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.

Request for Proposals	Proposals submitted	Awards
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

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 reviewers vary among cycles. If resubmitting, applicants are strongly encouraged to include in the appendix a short description of the ways in which the proposed work has responded to previous reviewer feedback.

Funding & grant period

Can funding be used for intended users and/or other external 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. While projects should provide opportunities for U-M students, it is important to emphasize that a primary goal of these grants is to support faculty in pursuing user-driven, interdisciplinary sustainability research.

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 summary salary for faculty an allowable expense?

Yes. Summary salary is allowable. The signed Graham PAF is required in part to ensure unit review and support.

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. 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. Rather, the Graham Institute makes final reports and other project outputs publicly available through its website and 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 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.