



STRATEGIC PLAN 2020



GRAHAM
SUSTAINABILITY INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

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



VISION

A just and sustainable world where policy and practice are powered by science, collaboration, and creativity

MISSION

Mobilize the expertise and passion of scholars, partners, and decision-makers to work together and bring world-class research to real-world sustainability challenges

VALUES

Collaborative | We build interdisciplinary and cross-sector partnerships in search of well-informed solutions. We are committed to sharing information, decision-making, and responsibility.

Purpose-Driven | We know that society, the environment, and the economy must thrive together. We pursue this ambitious goal with unwavering focus and determination.

Inclusive | We intentionally engage diverse and representative perspectives because they are essential for just and equitable outcomes, now and into the future.

Science-Based | Positioned within one of the world's great public research institutions, we ensure that rigorous analysis provides the foundation for our work.

Impactful | We foster solutions that are practical, measurable, and widely applicable today, while developing the sustainability leaders of tomorrow.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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.



- Through the Energy Futures Initiative, address key challenges of decarbonizing the electricity sector in the Great Lakes region and beyond, using U-M's own decarbonizing efforts to proof-test solutions at scale.
- Launch and build out the Carbon Neutrality Acceleration Program, including distributing funds and providing programmatic support for faculty research.
- Play a key role in bringing to scale and facilitating the transfer of practical and equitable solutions that emerge from the President's Commission on Carbon Neutrality.
- In partnership with other university units, significantly expand research support for, and U-M's excellence in, climate strategies.



- Address water resource challenges throughout the Great Lakes region by effectively integrating the diverse expertise, skills, and knowledge of stakeholders within and beyond the University of Michigan.
- Co-develop and advance solutions related to water resources, public water infrastructure, regional climate change, and the nation's estuaries.
- Deliver innovative and impactful collaborative research program management, so that our Water Center is a national leader in collaborative research knowledge and techniques.



- Focus the Dow Fellows Program on graduate teams that actively engage with climate change and circular economy projects, examining the interconnectedness of sustainability issues and resource use.
- Work to ensure the Graham Scholars Program develops undergraduate sustainability leaders reflecting the diversity of communities they will serve.
- Grow the Planet Blue Ambassador Program as a means of promoting sustainability to the entire university community and to connect with multiple aspects of campus sustainability efforts.
- Leverage all co-curricular education efforts to engage organizations and community partners in mutually beneficial and sustained partnerships supporting experiential learning.
- Strengthen connections with the sustainability alumni network, cultivating an intentional cycle of engagement, mentorship, and life-long learning.



- Facilitate partnerships between researchers and policymakers, encouraging broader academic and community engagement in the policymaking process.
- Strengthen Graham's in-house policy expertise through the establishment of a policy-focused visiting fellows program.
- Explore and adapt the best practices of other U-M boundary-spanning organizations and outside institutions.



- Partner with faculty on their research grants by leveraging the Institute's expertise in collaborative research to help shape research questions, convene partners, and facilitate projects.
- Leverage the lessons, techniques, and skills learned through our programs to amplify and demonstrate the impact of the collaborative research conducted by U-M researchers, faculty, and students.
- Expand our translational science communications efforts to broaden faculty awareness and their use of these services.
- Continually evaluate and apply best practices across all programs to maximize our efficiency and effectiveness.

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.

DECISION FILTERS

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.

graham.umich.edu

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)

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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)