



Catalyst Grant 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 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?

All applicants are required to schedule a brief, follow-up conversation with program staff. Scheduling details will be shared with applicants immediately after the LOI deadline passes. However, you do not need to be invited to submit a proposal.

How do I submit an LOI or proposal?

LOIs and proposals must be submitted through the Graham Institute online system.

As described in the RFP, submit an LOI online via the application link on the catalyst grant webpage (the blue "Apply" button). After uploading your LOI, you will receive an email confirming successful submission of the LOI and providing a **unique URL for your application – save this link.**

Submit the proposal using the unique URL, which will prompt you to log in and then direct you to your application in the Graham system. Scroll down towards the end of the page to the proposal upload field, upload your complete proposal as a single PDF file, and click on the "save" button. Please note that in order to submit the proposal, the login credentials must be the same as those used to submit the LOI.

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-driven collaborative sustainability research and assessment activities that span multiple disciplines. While projects should also 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 researchers or faculty members** 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 researchers or faculty members 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 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 researcher or faculty member 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 researchers or faculty members** 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?

Faculty 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 researcher or faculty member who is eligible to serve as a U-M Principal Investigator (PI), and there must be at least 2 U-M researchers or faculty members among the investigators. The 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 she or he may be listed as a PI on one proposal and a Co-I on another or a Co-I on 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.

Project focus

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

No. Projects can be U.S.-based or international. Project 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 external partner(s) engaged in the effort.

Do certain topics or themes receive preference?

No. 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.

Project objectives & activities

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

Given the solutions orientation and 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 for implementation projects?

In general, catalyst grants are not intended for implementation projects. Projects may include a proof of concept or pilot, however, it should be clear how the focus of the work supports broader decision-making or action.

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.

End-Users

What do you mean by “end users”?

End users are individuals or organizations outside of academia who are involved directly with the topic of interest and in a position to apply the information or tools being produced or evaluated through a catalyst grant project in a way that connects science to real-world decisions and actions. End 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 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 external partners 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 end user?

For Objective 2 proposals (translation of existing research for real-world application), the proposal must clearly identify the end user(s) and their interest in the work.

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

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

Yes, all proposals must include at least one letter of support from an end 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 end users?

Resumes are required if an end 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 end 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 end user requirement?

In most cases, no. Given that the work should be oriented toward real-world solutions with outputs that support decision-making or action, end users are likely to be outside academia. End 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 end user, feel free to contact Graham staff directly.

Note also that this does not preclude end 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, score, and comment on a proposal along each criterion individually.

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

The evaluation criteria include the feasibility of the budget for the work proposed. 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

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 end 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-driven collaborative sustainability research and assessment activities.

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 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 final written report that describes the overall results and progress relating to the objectives and specific measures of success presented in the original proposal” and “share additional project outputs (e.g., articles, guides, graphics, factsheets) 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. Given the goals of the funding opportunity, it is expected that the primary outputs of the projects will address end 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.