

Points of Contact:

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CATEGORIES OF QUESTIONS

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Purpose of the RFP

How does this strategy enhance broader environmental research? This call appears to limit participation of the breadth of disciplinary expertise across the University of Minnesota system by focusing on only three goals.

The [lonE Strategic Plan](#) states that identifying select issues and focusing efforts on them as a coordinated community is a productive and unifying strategy that can yield tangible outcomes and attract financial support. The first round of lonE Impact Goals – sustainable land use, a carbon-neutral energy transition, and safe drinking water – are the three issues that lonE will focus on achieving over 3-5 years beginning in 2019. Following this period of time, a new set of goals will be chosen, and efforts will be directed toward achieving related outcomes. By orienting toward goals, we reposition lonE as an innovator, an organization that champions new ideas and inspires teams to pursue them.

Achieving these goals requires input from many disciplines far beyond the “topic” area. Because these goals address key societal challenges that cannot be easily solved by any one discipline, we hope this RFP will generate creative approaches to achieving these sustainability objectives from a wide breadth of areas of expertise.

Why Minnesota?

The University of Minnesota, the academic home of the Institute on the Environment, is a land-grant university in a state with a range of challenges that are representative of those seen around the globe. Though we recognize that a significant amount of research performed at the University of Minnesota is not directly connected to the state in which the institution is located, lonE views scholarship as “in Minnesota, for the world.” For this reason, Minnesota is the location in which a project’s engaged work will take place, and research could either take place in Minnesota and be useful in a wider geography or be developed elsewhere and applied to Minnesota. In the spirit of lonE’s ‘motto,’ a project’s potential global impacts will also be considered.

The RFP frequently references the word “impact.” What does that mean?

“Impact” in some sense is a word like “sustainable” in that everyone uses it, but no one agrees on exactly what it means. In this case, we are using “impact” in the vernacular of a Theory of Change. [This article](#) in the Stanford Social Innovation Review has a good short description of outputs, outcomes, and impact. The example below of a soup kitchen comes from that article.

- Outputs: These are the activities done by the nonprofit. The meals served by a soup kitchen are outputs.
- Outcomes: These are the observed effects of the outputs on the beneficiaries of the nonprofit. The degree to which the meals served by the soup kitchen reduce hunger in the population served by the soup kitchen are outcomes.
- Impact: This is the degree to which the outcomes observed by a nonprofit are attributable to its activities. The impact of the soup kitchen is the degree to which a reduction of hunger in the population it serves is attributable to its efforts.

What’s a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change explains how an activity is understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impact. In the case of this particular RFP, an impact could be the implementation of a government policy at the state or local level that creates a change in the respective community’s use of a particular resource. The Theory of Change would demonstrate the rationale for the belief that the policy would result in a change in the community’s use of the resource. IonE has its own Theory of Change that might be helpful to consider; it is described in the [IonE Strategic Plan](#) on page 2.

Why \$50,000?

The objective of this RFP is to provide a project with initial funds that can be leveraged to seek additional sources of funding. As previously stated, funding for creating community partnerships can be difficult to find. However, a small amount of funding can go a long way in creating these partnerships. Past IonE grants, Provost's Grand Challenge RFPs, and other UMN funding programs have shown that a larger number of small grants increases participation, provides greater return and ultimately leads to larger grant opportunities for more participants. We believe that \$50,000 has the capacity to begin a community relationship and/or accomplish a significant milestone within an existing partnership.

How will the Impact Goals process integrate research and creative work in the arts and humanities?

Engaged scholarship and work with community partners have a clear place in the arts and humanities. Proposals are encouraged from across the spectrum of UMN faculty and disciplines.

Where do the funds for this RFP come from?

The funds for this RFP come from IonE's core operating budget, from the University of Minnesota, from the McKnight Foundation in the case of topics relating to energy and carbon neutrality, and from anonymous donors to IonE's Impact Goal program. The same operating budget funds IonE's ongoing Mini Grants program as well as its Discovery Grants.

I don't think engaged scholarship or having a community partner will advance my own research. Why is this RFP limited to that?

We fully recognize that not everyone is interested in engaged scholarship. IonE has a limited amount of funding to distribute and our strategic plan calls for impact-focused work. We feel that an RFP that encourages more UMN faculty to do impact-focused research with community partners is the best way to advance that strategic plan. We also recognize that engaged scholarship can be harder to fund via the traditional funding mechanisms and hope to alleviate some of that difficulty by offering this RFP.

RSDP & Community Partners

Why do I need a community partner?

As described in the RFP, the “impact” in “Impact Goals” implies tangible activities and results, which means that community partners are critical to achieving these goals. The definition of “community partners” for this RFP is very broad to allow much flexibility in this choice.

I’ve never done scholarship with a community partner before, can I apply?

Yes, absolutely. If you don’t have a community partner in mind, you can reach out to IonE or RSDP using the contacts provided above, and either group may be able to make a contact for you. We cannot promise that we can make these connections in time for use in this particular RFP, but these connections could be useful for future opportunities.

How do I know if my proposed collaborator qualifies as a community partner for this RFP?

Our definition of “community partner” will be broad for the purposes of this RFP. Examples may include non-profits, government organizations at any level, businesses, community groups or tribal nations. The community partner should have intimate knowledge of the issue at hand and be able to perform actions that create some impact on it. The partner cannot be a stand-alone individual unless that individual is affiliated with some group and represents that group for purposes of implementation and ability to scale. Please contact IonE with questions.

What constitutes suitable community partner work?

This covers a broad swath. An ideal partner is deeply engaged with the topic at hand. They could be an NGO working with the community directly or representing a particular community. Work could include advocacy (including arts or media advocacy), creating an actual intervention of some sort (a renewable energy installation, for example), providing qualitative or quantitative data, policy decisions or actions, or prescriptive documents.

What if I don't have a community partner? Can I submit a proposal saying I will find one during the proposal?

You cannot be funded by this RFP process without at least one community partner identified in the proposal. If you already have one, you are welcome to state that you hope to find more during the period of performance, but at least one must be listed. If you don't have a community partner, there are several options:

- You can reach out to IonE or RSDP. Either organization may be able to direct you to others interested in your topic, but it cannot be promised that these connections will be made in time for use in this particular RFP.
- Instead of submitting a proposal this year, focus efforts on developing a relationship with a community partner that will be suitable for next year's RFP.

What kind of expenses are eligible for my community partner?

Salary, travel, events expenses and supplies and material expenses are allowed. If funding is used for equipment that requires maintenance, there will have to be agreements put in place to demonstrate how the maintenance will be kept up by the community partners.

Does the community partner need to be based in Minnesota?

The community partner should have some sort of presence here, as the focus of the proposed work should be directly connected to people or issues in Minnesota. A national or international NGO with an office in Minnesota, like The Nature Conservancy, would be acceptable.

Could you say more about the RSDP/IonE partnership and why it is relevant to the IonE Impact Goals?

The IonE Impact Goals are about making tangible progress toward important sustainability challenges. That means collaborating with organizations and community partners who are working directly on some aspect of these challenges. While IonE itself has long-standing collaborations with community partners, there are other University units that complement this engagement capacity. University of Minnesota Extension has long successfully fulfilled its mission of engaging with Minnesota communities to translate research knowledge into practice. Our close collaboration with Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP), which is part of Extension, further enables the mission of both RSDP and IonE by encouraging

and enabling more sustainability-focused research to translate into practice and impact in Minnesota. A stronger collaboration to leverage these respective strengths should increase the University's ability to have an impact on these sustainability challenges across Minnesota.

Why is the partnership relevant to this RFP?

Each organization is funding teams and projects that are focused on the IonE Impact Goals; it's nearly certain, therefore, that there will be community projects proposed that could use an academic partner, and vice versa. A matchmaking of people and ideas between IonE and RSDP will be a long term process kicked off by these RFPs. As a part of this partnership, there will be increased opportunities throughout the year for members of the respective networks to interact with each other with an eye toward future funding opportunities.

What is the connection between the review of research proposals submitted to this RFP and review of the proposed projects submitted to Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships?

The proposals are being reviewed separately with distinct review panels and criteria. The common bond is a focus on the Impact Goals – entirely, in the case of the IonE RFP, and partially, in the case of RSDP proposals.

Do I have to work with RSDP or one of their partners?

No. You are free to work with any community partner you choose.

Can the community partner that is on my proposal also apply to the RSDP RFP?

No, not for the same work. They could apply to the RSDP process for other work.

Can community partners be on more than one proposal?

Yes. There is no limit.

Can you provide some examples of engaged scholarship?

- Funded by UMN Grand Challenges: Water and Equity: Co-developing Research and Engaged Approaches to Transforming Environments (CREATE). Co-PIs: Kate Derickson, Geography; Susan Galatowitsch, Fisheries, Wildlife & Conservation Biology; Sarah Hobbie, Ecology, Evolution, & Behavior; Bonnie Keeler, Humphrey School of Public Affairs; Stephen Polasky, Applied Economics; and Fred Rose, Institute on the Environment/Humphrey School of Public Affairs.
- Funded by UMN Grand Challenges: Wild Rice in Minnesota and the Great Lakes Region: A Flagship for Environmental Preservation and Indigenous Resource Sovereignty. Co-PIs: G.H. Crystal Ng, Earth Sciences; Mark Bellcourt, CFANS Office of Diversity and Inclusion; Mae Davenport, Forest Resources; Daniel Larkin, Fisheries, Wildlife, & Conservation Biology; Cara Santelli, Earth Sciences; and Michael Dockry, U.S. Forest Service.
- Funded by NIH: Padres Informados/Jóvenes Preparados. Principal Investigator, Michele Allen, MD, MS. Community Co-Investigator, Veronica Svetaz, MD, MPH. Collaborating Agencies, Centro, West Side Community Health Services, Neighborhood House, Aquí Para Ti Clinic for Latino Youth, South Saint Paul School District, Centro Campesino, and University of Minnesota Extension. Padres Informados/Jóvenes Preparados is a Community Based Participatory Research study, which aims to prevent Latino youth tobacco and substance use by strengthening parent-youth relationships.

Are there sources to help me understand how engaged scholarship fits with tenure track demands?

The UMN Office of Public Engagement is running a workshop in late January 2020 entitled 2020 Engaged Scholar Promotion and Tenure Workshops to help community-engaged scholars with practical strategies for making their best case in the promotion and tenure process.

The University has a history of going into a community, doing an intervention or study, and then leaving, sometimes without regard for the community culture or aftermath. How best can we avoid this when awarded small grants?

The relationship between the community partner and the university — how it developed, the ongoing plan for the partnership, how it will be maintained — are all factors that will be considered in the proposal evaluation. The University cannot stop doing community-focused work; however, its researchers need to ensure that they follow best practices. This is a major reason IonE is partnering with RSDP. As part of Extension, RSDP has a presence in many Minnesotan communities, and its primary function is to work with community-university collaborations and partnerships.

Proposal Application & Submission Process

Are faculty and researchers from all University of Minnesota campuses (not just the Twin Cities campus) eligible to apply for Impact Goal grants?

Yes.

Can we have another university or college on the team?

Yes. However, they do not qualify as the community partner on the proposal.

My colleagues and I are interested in more than one of the Impact Goals.

Is it important to focus on only one?

The goals are naturally intertwined at different levels, and interdisciplinary/cross-boundary work is at the core of IonE's mission. Proposals must address at least one Impact Goal but are welcome to address more than one.

How will the Impact Goals process make room for faculty scholarship and creative work that cuts across all three goals?

We seek and strongly encourage proposals that approach the Goals in innovative ways, including approaches that may not consider the Goals as separate and distinct concerns. One example of such an approach could involve researching behavioral change as it relates to climate adaptation, as this is crucial in moving towards a carbon-free economy and may involve behaviors related to any and all of the Impact Goals. However, cross-cutting research does not negate the need for a community partner.

My research is directed outside of Minnesota. Can I apply?

IonE Impact Goals are intended to model approaches that could have global significance but that will be tested and deployed in Minnesota, the state in which our land-grant university is located. Therefore, the community partner with which your academic group partners must be located in Minnesota, and the impact being investigated should have a Minnesota component. Your previous research may have investigated impact on geographical regions outside of Minnesota, and this RFP provides an opportunity to apply that research within the state. We recognize, however, that in some cases this geographical shift is simply not possible, and that some work might not be suitable for this particular RFP.

My work doesn't really have a geographical component, can I apply?

It's possible that your work is "geography independent." For example, the development of a new material is not necessarily dependent on a location. Though funding could not be secured from this RFP solely for the purpose of material development, if the research set out to discover how the new material may apply to a Minnesota-based, Impact Goal-related issue, the project would be RFP-eligible.

May an individual participate in and/or submit more than one proposal?

Yes. There are no limitations on the number of collaborative proposals in which an individual may participate.

Must co-PIs be tenure track faculty?

The PI, or at least one Co-PI, must be a UMN (system-wide) tenure track faculty or faculty-like Professional and Academic (P&A) employee. The purpose of the Impact Goals RFP is to enhance the engaged scholarship capacity of the University in achieving the outcomes outlined for each goal. Therefore scholars, whether or not tenure track faculty, who hold continuing positions and who are committed to this objective are eligible to be co-PIs. Likewise, community members are encouraged to be active members of the team and can also be listed as co-PIs.

Are there eligibility requirements for research project team members?

Other team members (non-PIs) have no restrictions and may be students, post-docs, research or administrative staff from any UMN campus. Community member(s) should also be members of the team (either funded or non-funded by this proposal). Research members may also be from another university or academic organization, but they do not count as the required community member.

When will the funding be available if my proposal is selected?

Funding decisions are expected to be final by June 1, 2020. Funding would be available July 1, 2020, the beginning of Fiscal Year 2021.

What is the timing of when the money must be used?

The funding must be used within 24 months of the date of the award. Awards are planned to be made July 1, 2020; therefore, funding must be used by July 1, 2022.

Can I ask IonE to convene meetings or do communications for my proposal?

No. Teams receiving funding from this RFP will receive a certain amount of support from IonE [see "Support for Award-Winning Teams" section below], but if your project will require specific meetings or communications, costs and logistical requirements should be included in the proposal.

Is March 6 a firm deadline for the proposals?

Yes. We will move forward quickly with the review process in order to achieve our timeline of award announcements in June 2020.



Will there be support for faculty salaries?

The Impact Goal grants are intended to enhance the capacity of the University to address specific goals as defined by the IonE community. Accordingly, the expectation is that most of the funds granted will be used for research support and to enhance capacity where needed, rather than as salary for faculty members or for those in other research positions. However, if some portion of the funding is required for faculty salary for the success of the proposed research, and if that requirement is well justified in the proposal, it will be permitted. Please note that we encourage including postdocs, graduate and undergraduate students in research teams, and funding for these positions should be incorporated into project budgets.

May proposals be focused centrally on curriculum development?

We recognize that educational material and delivery may be important for the community partner and for the implementation of many community actions. Thus, curriculum development may be a part of the proposal, but should not be the only product. If there will be a curriculum developed, the proposal should clearly demonstrate the way in which that curriculum will lead to overcoming knowledge barriers and to meeting Impact Goal outcomes. We recognize that leadership development is also key to impact; however, for this RFP, leadership development should be an outcome of research-related activity.

Award Selection Process

Who will review the proposals and make final selections?

Proposals will be reviewed against the criteria defined in the RFP by a panel of scholars drawn from disciplines inside and beyond the University that relate to each of the three IonE Impact Goals, as well as scholars and experts in engaged scholarship. We cannot guarantee deep subject matter experts for each possible topic that may be proposed for this first round of proposals; however, if appropriate, we will engage additional reviewers (both internal and external to the University) for the final presentation of each proposal selected as a finalist.

The Institute on the Environment Associate Directors and Impact Goal Leads will discuss the panel reviews with the IonE Faculty Leadership Council and make funding recommendations. Dr. Jessica Hellmann, director of IonE, will make the final funding decision and announcement.

If my project is selected as a finalist, what comes next?

All of the initial proposals will be reviewed as discussed. This review process will select a set of finalist proposal teams. These finalist teams will then be invited to make a proposal presentation to a panel for the final award decision. It is expected that this presentation will occur 3-4 weeks after the finalist announcement. Because of the focus of the RFP on community engagement and impact, a presentation and interaction with the proposal teams will be a better evaluation process than asking these teams to write a longer proposal, which is common in many multi-stage proposal processes.

What will be the format of the presentation?

Once specifics regarding these presentations are finalized, they will be shared with teams that will be asked to present. Finalists can expect to make an approximately 10 minute presentation, which will be followed by a Q&A. The community partner should be a part of the presentation, even if remotely (e.g. via Zoom).

What is the process for feedback on submitted proposals?

IonE will provide written comments to teams whose proposals are not selected for funding. Ideally, written comments will be helpful to those who wish to pursue the proposed work through other mechanisms.

Support for Award-Receiving Teams

What kinds of resources are available to help ensure that newly-formed and funded teams achieve their goals?

IonE will connect funded teams with partner units across the University system to provide additional support as needed. Joint RSDP/IonE meetings are planned.

University Libraries will offer dedicated, sustained research support to every Institute on the Environment Impact Goals team. Library representatives will convene with teams to determine the best working strategy and discuss the significant help they offer to community partners.

When and who should our team contact if we think some element of the project may have commercial potential?

The Office for Technology Commercialization helps University research move beyond the lab and into the marketplace. If you think any aspect of your project might be translatable to a new product or service (e.g., a validated questionnaire, data sets, research tools, etc.) please contact a Technology Portfolio Manager at the Office for Technology Commercialization to discuss your project as early in the research process as possible.