

# INSTITUTE ON THE ENVIRONMENT

## Impact Goals Request for Proposals

Spring 2024

If you have questions that have not been addressed  
in this document or by the FAQ, please contact:

[ione-grants@umn.edu](mailto:ione-grants@umn.edu)

Got questions? Visit this [FAQ](#), which will be updated with answers to common questions until  
the proposal deadline.

# Introduction

As increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases and environmental degradation threaten people and ecosystems around the world, sustainability issues have never been more pressing. At the same time, signals are emerging of pathways to a liveable future, including growth in clean energy, greater consideration of natural capital in decision-making, and advocacy for socio-economic equity. To make progress on sustainability challenges – and their solutions – greater collaboration between universities, public and private sector organizations, and communities is required. IonE’s Impact Goal grants support proposals that work to achieve *measurable outcomes* by overcoming critical knowledge or learning barriers in research or developing new ways of communicating sustainability solutions.

The 2024 IonE Impact Goals Request for Proposals (RFP) will deploy up to \$2M to societally impactful projects in alignment with IonE’s strategic plan.

IonE’s Impact Goals initiative is designed to drive progress on sustainability challenges – especially in areas where solutions either have been slow to develop or are facing roadblocks. With this RFP, we introduce a dynamic and expanded new portfolio of 10 *investment areas or “domains.”* These are areas of critical importance in Minnesota and/or represent areas of high capacity or operational excellence within the UMN (see 2024-2027 strategic plan) and include:

- Adaptation
- Mitigation
- Biodiversity
- Clean Energy
- Water and Land
- Food Systems
- Planetary Health
- Environmental Justice
- Natural Capital
- Decision Support

The IonE Impact Goal grants support scholarly work that is societally impactful within one domain or the intersection of more than one of these domains. IonE Impact Goal grants seek proposals that have local-to-global significance: projects to test and deploy solutions in Minnesota – the home of our University’s public service mission – and cases outside of Minnesota that have a meaningful and direct connection back to Minnesota solution pathways. IonE Impact Goal grants additionally encourage proposals that use the University of Minnesota as a campus laboratory to address campus sustainability for these domains.

This granting program funds projects that seek to generate knowledge that develops or assesses specific sustainability solution pathways, including overcoming knowledge gaps in communications, engagement, or effective sustainability pedagogy at any educational level or for any type of audience. Projects can also result in course development, curricular innovation, or leadership development programming grounded in a scholarly approach that includes rigorous outcome evaluation. (See [previously funded projects](#) as well as [FAQs](#) for examples of acceptable education-focused projects.) Projects that are based outside of Minnesota need to clearly articulate the relevance and tangible importance of this work for Minnesota.

IonE Impact Goal grants fund high-impact team projects across the University of Minnesota system working in collaboration with non-university partners and community members that *clearly articulate how they’ll move the needle toward a future where people and planet prosper together*. Some of the core values of IonE – and central tenets of community-engaged research – are found in valuing different ways of knowing; recognizing there are many forms of expertise; and centering the voices, knowledge, and perspectives of those most affected by the challenges we’re seeking to overcome.

Thus, the new IonE strategic plan transitions to *project-level goal setting* – both the identification and barriers to progress that will be addressed by the grant proposal. *Specifically, all Impact Goal projects must clearly articulate the goal they are working toward and how their work makes tangible, specific, and measurable progress toward that goal*. By expressing investment areas as open-ended domains and not-singular, pre-defined outcomes, we are inviting our project teams – *those who are closest to the challenges at hand* – to be the ones who define the goal they are working toward and the barriers that stand in the way of achieving

that goal. In other words, each team and project must express and work toward *meaningful impact*.

## Request for Proposals (RFP) Overview

This Request for Proposals (RFP) is part of a multi-year initiative, during which IonE will competitively award grants and professionally support teams of faculty, staff, and non-University partners working on:

- Adaptation
- Mitigation
- Biodiversity
- Clean Energy
- Water and Land
- Food Systems
- Planetary Health
- Environmental Justice
- Natural Capital
- Decision Support

For projects that propose using the University of Minnesota campus, we encourage activities that enhance the University's sustainability efforts, including those measured by the [Times Higher Education Impact Ranking](#) and the [Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Sustainability, Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System](#).

A target of \$2,000,000 from IonE, MPACT25 MNtersections, and MnDRIVE Environment allocations will be awarded. We anticipate awarding a minimum of five medium-size projects (\$25–50K) and five large projects (\$100–200K) while allocating remaining funds to either medium or large projects that most closely align with priorities, funding sources, and potential impact. Final award decisions will be made to create a portfolio that balances project engagement across UMN campuses, IonE Impact Goal domains, and the diversity of non-UMN partners engaged.

These research funds support interdisciplinary teams conducting engaged scholarship<sup>1</sup> that contributes to new research and associated outcomes.

Projects should be conducted with University and community partners<sup>2</sup> and be connected to people or issues in Minnesota. The connection to Minnesota can be direct: conducting work in the state that could later be applied to a wider geography or applying scholarship developed elsewhere within Minnesota. The connection to Minnesota can also be longer-term: conducting work in the Midwest, other parts of the U.S., or other parts of the world where there is a clearly articulated and impactful connection back to Minnesota-focused sustainability barriers and solution pathways.

As a public institution, the University of Minnesota has an obligation to serve all Minnesotans, including systematically marginalized communities. If you need support in connecting to community partners, you can contact IonE or the Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP); see [FAQ](#) for more information.

## Competitive Call for Proposals

Medium proposals are usually \$25,000-\$50,000; large proposals will be funded between \$100,000-\$200,000. Awards are non-recurring and are to be expended within two years. The key milestones and deadlines are described below. *Additional questions are addressed in the [FAQ](#).*

## Important Deadlines

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<sup>1</sup> Engaged scholarship is the process of generating new knowledge by combining academic and community knowledge bases. The work involves establishing a respectful, power-sharing collaboration and mutual learning among academic and community partners.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this text, the term 'community partner' is used to refer to an organization not affiliated with the University of Minnesota. It could be a nonprofit; a community organization; a unit of local, district, or state government; a Tribal Government; or a similar type of organization. The community partner is considered a full project team member, who can contribute unique expertise and perspective to advance the goals of the proposal and/or has implementation responsibilities that catalyze the application, evaluation, or scaling of sustainability actions.

Webinar: January 29, 2024, 12-12:45 pm CT

If you have questions about the RFP, we will be hosting a webinar via Zoom on January 29, 2024, from 12-12:45 pm CT. To allow everyone to join before we start, we will begin 3 minutes after the top of the hour. During the webinar we will share the goals of the RFP, provide an overview of the proposal logistics, and leave the majority of time for Q&A. You can [register for the webinar via this link](#). It will also be recorded and posted to [lonE's YouTube channel](#).

Statement of Intent: Due February 12, 2024

To ensure that we have reviewers who are able to fairly evaluate all of the proposals that are submitted, we request that project teams complete a 5-minute form providing some basic information about the proposal idea, including the impact goal, and domain focus (or foci). Completion of the Statement of Intent is highly *encouraged* to ensure that we have appropriate reviewers. However, at this stage, proposal teams are not required to submit a full proposal and the Statement of Intent can be updated or submitted after our preferred submission date. Please submit a [Statement of Intent via this form](#).

Proposal: Due March 12, 2024

The proposal will be submitted [via this submission form](#).

The form includes basic information about the team, proposal title, amount requested, one-sentence statement of the project's impact goal (i.e., the specific, Minnesota-relevant outcome that your project is working toward), 150-word summary of the idea, topical focus of the proposal, and some information that would allow for the administration of the award, if successful. [You may view the 150-word summaries of lonE's 2022 Impact Goal awardees at this link](#).

The proposal has 4 parts (described in more detail below):

- (1) Cover page (1-page)
- (2) Proposal description (5-pages)
- (3) Project management description (1-page), citations (no page limit), and 2-page biosketches for each team member
- (4) Budget documentation (no page limit)

Text must be 11-pt font or larger, use Times New Roman or Arial font, and the document must have 1" margins.

Part 1: Proposal should include a cover page (1 page) with the following information:

- Project title
- Project leader (or principal investigator, PI) and project team members.
  - Include name, title, and departmental/center/organizational affiliation, email address, and phone number for all team members.
  - Team Composition:
    - Team lead must be a UMN tenure-track faculty, contract faculty, or P&A staff in a long-term position.
    - Teams must include at least one non-UMN team member.
    - Teams must include UMN team members from at least two or more disciplinary fields.
    - Postdoc and student names should be included if known.

Part 2: Proposal description should be no more than 5 pages (including any graphics) and include the following:

- One sentence statement of the project-level impact goal at the very beginning of the proposal
- Problem statement and objective:
  - What domain(s) does your proposal address? (See list of 10 domains above.)
  - What is the barrier to the Impact Goal you identified within the domain? For example, what are the knowledge gaps, leadership or educational gaps, storytelling or communication, policy strategies, market-based solutions, or other barriers that stand in the way of achieving your specified goal?
    - Note: If the project is geographically based outside of Minnesota, the proposal needs to clearly articulate the benefit to Minnesota given the relevant state sustainability barriers.
  - What is your project objective?
- Project plan and approach:
  - How will you approach your project objective and work to overcome barriers to your stated goal?
  - What evidence and reasoning support your methods?

- How is this project new or a significant pivot from your existing work?
- Outcomes and intended impact:
  - What are the anticipated outcomes and impacts of this project? What is the intended generalizability or transferability to other places or contexts?
  - Who would benefit, and how, from this project being funded?
  - After this proposed work is done, what is the plan to continue and grow its impact?
  - What is the potential for this work to catalyze additional opportunities and external funding?
  - How would you evaluate or measure the impact of that outcome both during and 3-5 years after the project has concluded?
  - Note: The role of all team members should be identified within the proposal. Community partners should be fully integrated into the proposal as team members, and the role of those partners should be identified within the proposal.

Part 3: Project management description (1 page); citations (no page limit); and biographical sketches (2 pages):

- Project Management (total of 1 page): How will this team work together to achieve the project goals? What is the role of each team member? What existing resources will you be able to draw upon (e.g. knowledge, expertise, equipment, etc.)?
- Citations (no page limit) should be formatted fully and consistently, e.g., APA or MLA, but there is no required citation format.
- Biographical Sketches or Resumes (total of 2 pages for each team member): These biographical sketches or resumes should be provided for each named team member. There is no prescribed template.
  - For academics this section should include the name, position and title, education, professional appointments, and publications or significant work products or outcomes (broadly defined).
  - For team members outside of academia, resumes can follow the content and presentation norms of their profession and are requested to include education as well as current and previous work experiences and major responsibilities/outcomes.



Part 4: Budget documentation (no page limit, uploaded separately) should include the following:

- **Total Requested Budget:** Funds may be used to underwrite salary for the project leaders or other members of the team (including students) and to cover travel or virtual meeting expenses, supplies and materials, or other project expenses. *Note: Funding cannot be used for capital equipment or to purchase computers for staff use. IonE will defer to intra-unit/collegiate policies in regards to allowability of expenditures.*
  - Project start date is July 1, 2024.
  - Budget should follow the format in [this template](#). Make a copy of the template so that you can customize it for your proposal.
    - The template includes example budget items to help clarify how to complete the form; these will not necessarily be relevant or include correct salaries or effort for all proposals.
    - Note that tab 1 includes the budget and tab 2 includes the justification. These tabs can be printed to a PDF. To do so, select “landscape orientation” and [“fit to width” or “fit to page”](#) formatting, ensuring that the tabs are no more than 1 page wide each.
  - Funds can be used to support non-University team members. Budgets should be deployed fairly in accordance with the work proposed to support the project work. Typically, this work is set up as a Contract for Professional Services.
- **Budget Justification:** Provide a brief justification (~1-3 sentences) for each budgetary line item (no word limit). If any team members or organizations will be providing formal or informal in-kind support necessary for the success of this project, please include this information in the budget justification. See tab 2 of [this template](#) for the budget justification template.
  - Note: In-kind support is not required or expected, and it will not factor into proposal decisions.

Proposal should be submitted as a single PDF (compiled in the 4-part order listed above) by 11:59 pm CDT on March 12, 2024, to [the proposal submission form](#), which will allow you to submit your proposal as an attachment. Note this form will automatically close and will not accept submissions after the deadline.

Finalist Project Pitches: May 7 and 8, 2024

Finalist teams will be invited for a second-round review on May 7 and 8, 2024. These teams will provide a 10-minute presentation, which will be followed by a 10-15 minute question and answer period (Q&A). All team members, including community partners, should be a part of the presentation. To facilitate participation, the presentations will be held virtually via Zoom.

We will work with the finalist teams to schedule a 30-minute time slot for their second-round review; times are not guaranteed until scheduled, so we encourage all proposal teams to reserve May 7 and 8, 2024 on their calendars. Prior to the second-round review, finalist teams will receive additional instructions about the project pitch process, comments or questions from the first-round reviewers to anticipate, and whether there are any necessary modifications to make to the proposal or to consider as part of your pitch.

## Criteria for Evaluation and Review

- Project advances a sustainable future in one or more of the 10 domains defined in this RFP.
- Project is interdisciplinary (i.e., team members from more than one field) and community-engaged (i.e., team members from outside of the University).
- Project is a new endeavor or significant pivot in direction from an existing project. Proposals cannot simply be a continuation of existing projects.
- Proposals should clearly specify the sustainability goal the project is working toward (i.e., the project's Impact Goal) and identify at least one specific barrier to achieving a sustainability challenge that the project aims to address or overcome.
- Proposals should use rigorous methods that creatively and thoughtfully address the proposal focus.
- Proposals should clearly identify the outcome that they will achieve with this project and the intended impact of that outcome (for guidance on "impact," see [FAQ](#)).
- Project team is well equipped to conduct the proposed work and has a clear plan for that work and its impact.
- Budget and budget justification are reasonable given the scope of work.

- Proposed team has the potential to leverage this seed support by attracting and securing additional funding or growing the project in other ways.
- Projects will be particularly competitive if they pursue innovative ways of engaging historically excluded people or marginalized communities and/or new stakeholders, and/or if they explicitly use project approaches intended to address or reduce inequitable sustainability pathways.

## Submission Timeline

1. RFP released on January 16, 2024.
2. Submit a Statement of Intent by February 12, 2024 (for purposes of review selection).
3. Full project proposal submissions are due March 12, 2024.
4. Peer review of RFP responses will begin immediately, conducted by an interdisciplinary panel of scholars and community representatives using the evaluation criteria included in this RFP.
5. All teams will be notified of their status by April 12, 2024. Finalist teams will be invited to make a presentation to a panel for the final award decision. Teams may also be asked to clarify or amend their proposals.
6. Finalist team presentations, conducted virtually with a review panel, will take place on May 7 and 8, 2024.
7. Final award selections will be made and officially announced by June 1, 2024, with the period of performance beginning July 1, 2024.

If you have questions about your specific proposal idea or anything that has not been addressed by this document or our [FAQ](#), please contact:

[ione-grants@umn.edu](mailto:ione-grants@umn.edu)

The [FAQ](#) will be updated with answers to questions until the proposal deadline.

Summary of important links:

Request for Proposals: <https://z.umn.edu/lonE2024ImpactGoalsRFP>

Frequently Asked Questions: <https://z.umn.edu/lonE2024ImpactGoalsFAQ>

Statement of Intent Submission Form: <https://z.umn.edu/lonEImpactGoalsStatementofIntent>

Proposal Submission Form: <https://z.umn.edu/ImpactGoalsSubmissionForm>