

GRI Accelerate Funding

AY 2026-2027 Funding Cycle

Applications Open: Jan 15, 2026

Proposal Deadline: Feb 15, 2026, at 11:59 PM

Final Decisions Announced: March

Project Start Date: July 1, 2026

About GRI Accelerate

The Global Research Institute's Accelerate program represents GRI's most significant investment in faculty and staff-led research initiatives. Accelerate awards may provide up to \$300,000 over three years, along with comprehensive institutional support, to cultivate research projects with exceptional potential for sustained, real-world impact.

Accelerate Funding is an invitation to move your best ideas beyond the ivory tower and build a sustainable research enterprise. This program is designed for faculty and staff whose research is ready to shift from promising results to tangible influence—shaping policy, practice, markets, or lived experience at scale. Accelerate provides not just funding, but a launchpad: the infrastructure, partnerships, and strategic support needed to turn rigorous scholarship into action. GRI does not expect researchers to do this alone; the Accelerate program is built as a collaborative effort, with dedicated staff working alongside project teams to anticipate challenges, adapt strategies, and support success over time. If you have ever thought, "This work could change how decisions are made—if only it had the right backing," Accelerate Funding is your chance to build something bigger, bolder, and enduring, while maintaining the academic excellence that defines your work.

What Makes Accelerate Funding Distinctive

Accelerate projects receive funding and a comprehensive support ecosystem.

Financial Investment:

- Up to \$300,000 over up to three years for research activities

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- Funding is flexible for course buyouts, student teams, equipment, data collection, travel, partnerships, and dissemination

Institutional Infrastructure:

- Strategic support from GRI's Director of Research
- Dedicated Senior Research Manager assigned to your project
- Full fiscal and administrative support from the GRI operations team)
- Communications expertise for media engagement, policy briefs, and public impact
- Grant development coaching and proposal review support
- Partnership facilitation to strengthen and expand collaborations

Strategic Acceleration:

- Weekly meeting with the Senior Research Manager, with monthly check-ins with the GRI Director of Research
- Annual milestone reviews with performance-based continuation decisions
- Integration into GRI's research community and networks
- Access to GRI's ecosystem of visiting experts, workshops, and professional development

Program Expectations for Accelerate Projects

Required Activities & Deliverables

If your project is selected for Accelerate support, you will be expected to engage in the following activities. Continued funding is contingent on adherence to these expectations.

- Grant Submissions: Submit at least 5 significant external grant proposals over three years.
- Student Engagement: Meaningfully engage undergraduate and/or graduate students throughout the project as research partners. More than just data collectors, are students invited to co-author papers, for example, or present findings to stakeholders or at conferences? Are they empowered to collaborate with PIs on the research agenda?
- Progress Reporting: Submit progress reports every 6 months; participate in monthly check-ins with the GRI Director of Research and annual milestone reviews; and present at GRI Research in Progress (RIP) seminars (or similar venues) annually.
- Community Participation: Engage actively in GRI's research community, including participating in GRI workshops, seminars, public lectures, book talks, and peer learning

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opportunities, acting as a mentor to other GRI researchers when appropriate, and contributing to GRI's ecosystem-building activities.

- Dissemination: Produce both scholarly outputs (publications, presentations) and applied outputs (policy briefs, practitioner guides); engage with media to communicate research impact; and share research tools, methods, and insights with the GRI community.
- Partnership Management: Maintain active, equitable partnerships throughout the project; ensure partners are engaged in research interpretation and dissemination; and document partnership practices and lessons learned.

Annual Milestone Reviews

Accelerate funding is contingent on annual performance reviews:

Year 1 Review (July 2027):

- Progress toward research milestones as agreed with the GRI Director of Research at the outset of the year
- Partnership development and management
- Student engagement and mentorship
- Grant submissions and funding pipeline
- Decision: Continue to Year 2 or transition out

Year 2 Review (July 2028):

- Quantity and quality of research outputs
- Progress toward growth and impact goals
- External funding success and pipeline
- Partnership strength and student outcomes
- Decision: Continue to Year 3 or transition out

End of Year 3 (June 2029):

- Final project report and outcomes assessment
- Transition planning to Tier 4: Sustain, to include future home for project
- External funding secured and sustainability plan

What Happens if Milestones Are Not Met:

- Projects that do not meet agreed-upon benchmarks may have funding reduced or discontinued, after consultation with GRI leadership
- GRI leadership and staff will work with research teams to address challenges and adjust plans when appropriate

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Transition to Tier 4: Sustain

Projects that complete the Accelerate program may transition to Tier 4: Sustain, which provides:

- Continued communications and partnership facilitation
- Administrative transition support to the departmental home or other unit at W&M
- Ongoing grant development and strategic coaching
- Connection to GRI networks and community

The goal is for projects to become financially sustainable through external funding while maintaining strong academic and real-world impact and GRI connections.

Funding Details

Award Amount

Up to \$300,000 of flexible funding over up to three years (July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2029)

Number of Awards

GRI anticipates funding 1-2 Accelerate projects in this funding cycle.

Eligible Expenses

Accelerate funding can support:

- Faculty time: Course buyouts
- Research team salaries: Postdocs, project managers, research coordinators, data analysts
- Student researchers: Undergraduate and graduate research assistants
- Data collection: Surveys, interviews, experiments, administrative data access
- Research materials: Equipment, software, lab supplies, fieldwork costs
- Partnership development: Partner capacity building, convenings, collaborative workshops
- Travel: Research fieldwork, partnership development, conference dissemination
- Dissemination: Publications, policy briefs, stakeholder workshops, media engagement
- Professional services: Statistical consulting, qualitative analysis support, specialized expertise

Eligibility

Who Can Apply

- All William & Mary faculty and staff are eligible. This opportunity is not open to postdoctoral fellows.
- Applicants from any school, department, or discipline are welcome
- Multi-PI applications are encouraged

Project Requirements

To be eligible for Accelerate Funding, projects must:

1. Address a significant real-world problem with clear potential for meaningful impact
2. Demonstrate proof-of-concept or preliminary research results/track record
3. Include established external funding sources(s) documented with a letter of support from an organization currently funding the effort
4. Show an ambitious trajectory/plan for additional external funding with identified prospects
5. Propose research activities and scaling pathway feasible within three years
6. Commit to meaningful engagement with students as research partners throughout the project
7. Agree to required program activities, including annual milestone reviews, grant submissions, and GRI community participation

Requirements

Components

1. Application Form including basic project and team member information.
2. Proposal (maximum 5 pages, single-spaced, 11pt font minimum, references do not count toward page limit)
3. PI/Co-PI CVs (2 pages maximum per person) that focus on relevant experience, funding, and outputs, including evidence of prior research impact and student mentorship.

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4. List of Current & Pending awards relevant to this proposal, annotated to include award amount, duration, and brief abstract of award purpose.
5. Budget & Budget Justification (1 page maximum) including rough allocations across major categories.
6. Letter(s) of Collaboration (1 page maximum, optional but strongly encouraged) from any external partner organizations describing partner's role, commitment, and alignment with research goals.

Proposal Instructions

Your 5-page proposal should address the four review criteria below. You may organize your narrative as you see fit, but ensure all the primary criteria are addressed. Use clear section headings to improve readability.

Criteria	Weight	Description	Potential Guiding Questions
Real World Impact and Scaling	35%	Describe the problem you aim to address, your theory of change, and your concrete plan for achieving impact at scale.	<p>What is the problem/issue you're addressing? Why is now the right time to work on this problem?</p> <p>What's the theory of change: How will your research lead to meaningful improvements in people's lives, environmental outcomes, policy, or practice?</p> <p>How will insights from your research reach practitioners, policymakers, or communities at scale? How will you facilitate translation and uptake and measure impact?</p>
External Funding Trajectory	30%	Describe your strategy for securing major external funding to sustain this research program beyond GRI support.	<p>What specific grant programs will you target (name programs, agencies, foundations) and what is the timeline for each submission? What is your goal for total amount of external funding over 3-5 years? Remember, you will be seeking funding to build the research team you need to scale and sustain this research.</p> <p>How will this funding strengthen your competitive position to make external funding more likely?</p> <p>What does the funding landscape look like for this research area, and what are funders looking for?</p> <p>What is your past track record of success on external</p>

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			funding?
Research Excellence and Innovation	25%	Describe your research approach, scientific contribution, and what you will accomplish in three years.	<p>What are your core research questions and research design and methodology? What makes this research innovative or novel?</p> <p>How will it advance knowledge in your field and influence other researchers?</p> <p>What are some key milestones and deliverables across the three years?</p> <p>What prior work has demonstrated feasibility, and what have you learned from earlier phases?</p>
Partnership Strength, Team Capacity, and Potential Impact within W&M	10%	Describe your external partnerships and your team's capacity to manage a major research program.	<p>Who are your external partners (implementers, funders, etc) and how did these partnerships develop? How deep are existing ties?</p> <p>How will external partners (funders or non-funding partners) shape research design, implementation, and interpretation?</p> <p>What relevant expertise and track record does each PI bring, particularly regarding managing major grants?</p> <p>Do you currently have other funded staff working on your research project? Who are they and what are their roles? What other W&M faculty and staff would you like to see integrated into this research project if you can collaborate with them to identify funding?</p> <p>How will students be engaged as research partners?</p>

Current & Pending Awards

Please provide a list of current and pending awards relevant to the proposal. Please include the level of funding, the duration of funding, and a 2-3 sentences explanation of the funding's purpose.

Budget Guidance

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Provide a sketch of your budget (a template can be found in the appendix of this document).

Budget Justification (1 page maximum)

Provide brief justification for major budget items, such as:

- Student researchers: Number of students
- Materials/equipment: Specify what you need and why
- Data collection: Survey platforms, participant incentives, data access fees, etc.
- Travel: Research sites, partnership development, conferences for dissemination
- Partnership costs: Partner honoraria, convening costs, capacity-building support

Budget Guidelines

- Be realistic about what can be accomplished with your total budget
- Clearly show how funding will support student engagement
- Include costs for external partnership development if applicable
- All expenses must comply with W&M financial policies

Appendix

A) Accelerate Funding Selection Criteria

Applications will be evaluated using the four criteria below. Reviewers will assess proposals holistically, applications demonstrate:

- Strong alignment across all criteria
- Compelling evidence of readiness for acceleration
- Clear potential for transformative real-world impact
- Realistic pathway to major external funding

1. Real-World Impact & Scaling Pathway (35%)

Excellent (9-10 points):

- Addresses highly significant problem with clear, urgent importance
- Compelling, evidence-based theory of change
- Concrete, realistic scaling pathway with identified decision-makers/implementers
- Strong evidence of demand from practitioners/policymakers/communities
- Clear understanding of policy/practice landscape
- Specific plans for measuring and achieving real-world impact
- Partners positioned to implement or scale insights

Good (7-8 points):

- Addresses real-world issue problem with comprehensible scope
- Solid theory of change with identified mechanisms
- Reasonable scaling pathway with some specifics
- Evidence of stakeholder interest in research
- Understanding of implementation context
- General plans for impact measurement

Adequate (5-6 points):

- Problem significance unclear or impact pathways vague
- Weak theory of change or unrealistic scaling assumptions
- Limited evidence of demand or stakeholder engagement
- Unclear how insights will reach decision-makers at scale
- Appears purely academic despite impact claims

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Needs Development (1-4 points):

- Problem significance unclear or not compelling
- Weak or absent theory of change
- No evidence of demand or need for research
- No clear pathway from research to impact

2. External Funding Trajectory (30%)

Excellent (9-10 points):

- Multiple specific grant programs identified with excellent strategic fit
- Detailed timeline with specific submission dates over three years
- Clear evidence of how Tier 3 addresses competitiveness gaps
- Strong prior external funding track record
- Evidence of funder conversations or preliminary feedback
- Concrete plan for 5+ grant submissions over three years
- Deep understanding of funder priorities and landscape

Good (7-8 points):

- Several appropriate funders identified with reasonable fit
- Timeline with general submission windows
- Solid explanation of how Tier 3 strengthens proposals
- Some external funding track record
- Good understanding of funding landscape
- Feasible plan for 5+ grant submissions

Adequate (5-6 points):

- Some potential funders mentioned but fit unclear
- Vague timeline for external funding pursuit
- Weak connection between pilot and fundability
- Limited knowledge of funding landscape

Needs Development (1-4 points):

- Vague or unrealistic funders mentioned
- No clear timeline or strategy for submissions
- Limited external funding track record
- Weak connection between Tier 3 and fundability
- Plan for 5+ submissions appears unlikely

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- Poor understanding of funding ecosystem

3. Research Excellence & Innovation (25%)

Excellent (9-10 points):

- Clear, important research questions with innovative approach
- Rigorous methodology well-suited to questions and context
- Strong preliminary work or proof of concept demonstrating feasibility
- Significant scientific contribution expected
- Novel theoretical framework, methods, or application
- Realistic three-year plan with clear milestones
- Thoughtful risk mitigation and contingency planning
- High-quality outputs expected (publications, tools, data)

Good (7-8 points):

- Sound research questions and appropriate methods
- Solid research design with good rigor
- Some preliminary work showing promise
- Good scientific contribution anticipated
- Reasonable innovation in approach
- Feasible timeline with key milestones
- Awareness of main risks

Adequate (5-6 points):

- Reasonable research questions but methods underdeveloped
- Research design needs refinement
- Incremental contribution to field
- Limited attention to challenges or risks

Needs Development (1-4 points):

- Unclear research questions or underdeveloped methods
- Limited preliminary work or proof of concept
- Incremental rather than significant contribution
- Limited innovation
- Overly ambitious or vague three-year plan
- Major risks unaddressed
- Feasibility concerns

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4. Partnership Strength & Team Capacity (10%)

Excellent (9-10 points):

- Strong, established partnerships with documented collaboration history
- Partners deeply engaged in research design and implementation
- Demonstrate proven track record at attracting significant funding
- Partners positioned to implement/scale insights at meaningful level
- Exceptional PI/Co-PI expertise and track record
- If multi-PI, excellent complementarity and clear leadership structure
- Strong capacity for managing complex, multi-year research programs
- Demonstrated student mentorship excellence and a clear plan for fostering student learning
- Clear plan for working with GRI infrastructure

Good (7-8 points):

- Solid partnerships with clear roles and commitment
- Track record of attracting some funding
- Partners have reasonable implementation capacity
- Strong PI/Co-PI expertise with relevant experience
- Good team composition and management plan
- Solid student engagement approach
- Should be able to manage Tier 3 program successfully

Adequate (5-6 points):

- Adequate student engagement plan but unclear learning outcomes
- Partner mentioned but role/commitment unclear
- Team composition reasonable but gaps present

Needs Development (1-4 points):

- Partnerships appear underdeveloped
- Lacking external funding
- Limited PI/Co-PI track record for this scale of program
- Team capacity concerns for managing \$300K program
- Vague student engagement plan
- Unclear how team will work with GRI support

Scoring

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- Each criterion scored on 10-point scale
 - Weighted according to percentages above
 - Maximum total score: 100 points
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B) Budget Template

Please use the following format for your budget.

Budget Category	FY27	Justification
Student Researchers		
Research Materials/Equipment		
Data Collection Costs		
Travel		
Partnership Development		
Other (specify)		
TOTAL		