



WashU

Research Seed Grants FY 2027

Ignite Interdisciplinary Grant

Dates and Deadlines

Informational Sessions	In-Person Info Session September 15 at 11 AM in Danforth University Center 276 RSVP
	Fall Webinar • September 11 th at 11 AM • Register Spring Webinar • January 29 th at 11 AM • Register
	Proposal Deadlines Fall: October 15 th at 11:59 PM Spring: February 17, 2027 at 11:59 PM
Award Period	Fall: January 1 st until December 31 st 2027 Spring: June 1st, 2027 until May 31st, 2028
Award Ceiling	Up to \$50,000 over one year
Number of Awards	Around to 5 to 8 awards per semester

Program Scope

The Ignite Interdisciplinary Grant provides project support to catalyze innovative interdisciplinary research projects that address complex, transformative problems that require a novel interdisciplinary approach. These projects should be currently **unfunded**, and they must have the potential for increased funding either through federal, foundation, or philanthropic support.

Projects can range from proof-of-concept/feasibility studies to the development of new interdisciplinary teams that lead to the formation of large, collaborative research proposal submissions. These funds can be used to gather pilot data with the goal of successfully competing for future sponsored research opportunities. **This program is particularly interested in funding imaginative and innovative research proposals, especially those that are particularly novel in their interdisciplinary collaboration.**

New for FY27

- **FY27 Topic of Strategic Interest +AI:**
Click here to read in full
- **Undergraduate Research Supplement Pilot launch** (Ignite Fall 2026 cycle only)
In collaboration with the Undergraduate Research Office and Beyond Boundaries, we are launching a pilot program that can connect undergraduate students with selected seed grant awardees.
Learn more by clicking here.
- **Revised Proposal Narrative Questions**
The proposal narrative prompt has been changed from FY26 to FY27 to strengthen interdisciplinary review.

Eligibility

- **There must be a minimum of two Co-Principal Investigators (co-PIs) on each project.** Co-PIs must be full-time faculty at WashU at the time of application and remain so for the award's duration.
 - There is no formal distinction between co-PIs. One of the collaborators will need to submit via InfoReady, but there is otherwise no formal distinction between the “submitting PI” and “co-PI.”
- **Co-PIs must have primary appointments from two different schools within WashU.** The collaboration must be tangible and impactful. More than 2 co-PIs and schools can be listed once basic eligibility is met.
 - External collaborators are allowed as long as their participation is in addition to and complementary with both/all of the co-PIs on the grant and their role is clearly articulated.
 - External collaborators can be both domestic and global. Please see the Budget section for more information about global collaboration.
- **Co-PIs may only submit one proposal to the Ignite Interdisciplinary grant per academic year.** If a proposal is unawarded in the Fall cycle, applicants may reapply in the Spring cycle. However, the proposal will not be given special consideration in subsequent review. If awarded in the fall semester, the applicant may not serve as co-PI on a proposal in the spring. Eligibility refreshes with every FY.
- All co-PIs must be current on their reporting from any previously received WashU Research Seed Grants (Spark, Ignite, Transcend) to be eligible for subsequent awards. If you have a question about your eligibility, please contact researchseedfunding@wustl.edu.

Application Information

General Tips & Guidelines

- **All responses should be written to be understandable to non-specialists, a general academic audience.** Reviewers are WashU faculty peers across all schools and disciplines. An in-field review is thus not possible for each submitted proposal.
- It is strongly recommended that applicants directly respond to the prompts below and not repurpose materials submitted to an external sponsor.

Part I: Team Information & Project Summary

- Enter the names, appointments, schools, departments, and emails of the project's co-PIs and upload their 5-page biosketch or cv.
 - Please note: we do not require CVs or Biosketches to be certified if that presents a difficulty with your upload.
- Enter the name of the staff who will be the post-award administrator, if awarded. This person will be responsible for providing RDO with the Cost Center and Project Journal Code for the award.

- Project Title
- Project Abstract—150 words free of jargon, for a general academic audience
- Amount Requested
- Select general area of research interest/review bucket
- Is the research proposed community-engaged? Yes/No

Part II: Project Description

Applicants should consider the evaluation criteria when composing their proposal materials.

Proposal Narrative¹

In no more than three pages, single spaced using a standard font (Times New Roman, Calibri, Aptos, Arial, etc.) sized 11-12 pt font, please discuss the below questions to explain your project to a generalist academic audience. You will upload your proposal narrative to the InfoReady in a .pdf document.

- **Why and When: The Problem and Innovation** (~ one page)
 - What problem are you trying to solve?
 - Why is it relevant now?
 - Briefly describe gaps and constraints of existing approaches, practices, or methods.
 - What is new or transformative about your approach and collaboration?
 - Explain what makes your work innovative and compelling and why interdisciplinary collaboration is necessary to approaching the isolated problem.
- **Who: The Investigators and Roles** (~half page)
 - Who are the co-PIs on the project, and how does each investigator's research expertise contribute to the intellectual development of the project? (e.g., how is this work and collaboration truly interdisciplinary.)
 - What are the roles and responsibilities of each of the co-PIs?
- **How: Work Plans and Budget** (~one page)
 - What will you be doing during the award period concretely (e.g., what activities, experiments, efforts, etc., will you undertake over the course of a 12-month award period?)
- **What: Results, Outputs, and Impact** (~half page)
 - What research and scientific goals will this work enable?
 - Will it reduce uncertainty or risk for
 - What external funding goals will this work enable?
 - How will this work support subsequent, larger scale research?
- Applicants may include at **one or two** figures or illustrations but please keep in mind that this counts towards your page limit. Small images are hard to read in the InfoReady system.
- References may be included, but they should be used sparingly given the questions posed and that the reviewers will not be specialists in your discipline or field.

Part III Budget and Budget Justification:

Applicants should submit a high-level budget using the excel document in the InfoReady portal for a maximum of \$50,000. In addition to the excel document, teams can submit a one-page budget justification detailing the need/rationale for the expense.

¹ The proposal questions are based upon the Heilmeier Catechism. - <https://www.darpa.mil/about/heilmeier-catechism>

Research Administrators: Budgets do not need to be submitted through RMS or go through OSRS approval as these are internal WashU funds and not from an external sponsor. Likewise, **no indirect costs are permitted as these are internal WashU funds.** If there are any questions about the budget, allowable, or non-allowable costs, please reach out to researchseedfunding@wustl.edu.

Allowable Costs	- Research materials (such as data sets, contractor person hours, compute, lab supplies, etc.) - Non-faculty personnel (postdoctoral fellows, students, etc.)
Non-Allowable Costs	- Faculty salary - Staff whose positions are on hard money - Course relief - Equipment or capital expenses* - Indirect costs - Sub-Awards/Research outside of WashU* - Travel*

***Sub-Awards/External Researchers:** WashU Research Seed Grants cannot be used to grant sub-awards to other research institutions. Funds can be spent to support community partners and stakeholders if it’s necessary to the proposed pilot project. Applicants will need to explain this necessity in their budget justification.

***Travel:** Travel will only be permitted on Ignite Grants when it supports **a justified research need** as required by the work proposed, for example, traveling to a work site, laboratory, archive, community, etc. (This list is not exhaustive.) It does **not** support travel to conferences or convenings of professional organizations.

***Equipment & Capital Expenses:** Generally speaking, any equipment that costs more than \$5,000 and that requires dedicated upkeep by the institution over the course of the equipment’s multi-year lifespan. Building improvements are not allowed under the Ignite grants.

Evaluation Criteria

- Clarity of the Project’s Scientific/Research Significance, Innovation, and Impact**
Proposals will be evaluated upon how clear the articulation of the stated problem is (significance) and the innovation in the investigators’ proposed solution and the potential impact of the research results/products. The framing should be directed to a non-specialist reader as in-field review is not guaranteed.
- Novelty of Research**
The proposed work should be a new line of research for the investigators. Convincing evidence must be presented to demonstrate that the proposed project is a new line of research or **significant** departure from the investigators’ previous work either as solo researchers or in previous collaborations.
Please note: *while the project should be a new project and not yet been funded, this does not need to be the first collaboration between co-PIs.*
- Qualifications and Expertise of the Investigators**
The proposal narrative should clearly address how each co-PI has the relevant expertise and experience needed to accomplish the proposed project as described.
- Interdisciplinary Nature of the Investigative Team**
Proposals should clearly delineate the interdisciplinary, team-based approach that will be incorporated into the project. Draw attention to innovative, novel, and atypical collaborations that will break down

previously siloed groups. Such collaborations will be given preference. The roles and responsibilities of each team member should be clear to the reviewers.

5. **Likelihood of Future Funding and Alignment with Non-Traditional Funding Opportunities**

Proposals should explain how this proposed project may lead to new and varied opportunities for the research team and the University and how this work enables the team to be more competitive within the guidelines and merit review for extramural funding. Preference is generally for projects that pursue funding beyond traditional funding mechanisms (like R01s) in favor of larger complex proposals such as center proposals, interdisciplinary proposals, high-risk/high-reward calls.

Review Process & Timeline

The Ignite Interdisciplinary Grant uses a peer-reviewed process with a panel composed of WashU faculty researchers across disciplines and schools. The names of the reviewers are confidential. Reviewers read and evaluate your proposal with the above criteria in mind. The review committee's recommendation is then sent to the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Research.

Decisions are targeted for the end of the corresponding semester in which proposals are submitted. We will inform you as soon as there is news to share. All applicants can request feedback on their proposals regardless of funding outcome.

Reporting Requirements

A report detailing project activities, outcomes, and financial expenses will be due 30 days after the award period's end. There will be another follow-up one year after the award period's end. All reports will be due in the InfoReady system. **The reports are not financial reports, but reports on the team's research activity and external funding progress.**

No-cost extensions *may* be granted in the event of a legitimate extenuating circumstance; to be eligible, at least 60% of the funds (~\$30,000) must be spent prior to the request. Regardless of the status of the NCE, investigators must submit a report detailing their progress at the end of the period of performance.

Questions and More Information

For questions about this or other WashU Research Seed Grants or InfoReady, please reach out to researchseedfunding@wustl.edu.

Appendix I: FY 2027 Topic of Strategic Interest

The WashU Research Seed Grant Program encourages applications from innovative, interdisciplinary research projects and teams that meaningfully integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) into their research. The aim is to catalyze cross-school, interdisciplinary collaborations to advance discovery, enhance research capabilities, and address complex societal challenges by leveraging AI as a transformative, enabling tool. By supporting work that integrates AI thoughtfully and responsibly, this initiative aims to catalyze research that is both **innovative within its field and competitive for external support**.

In line with the Provost's [WashU+AI initiative](#), AI is understood not as a standalone field but as a capability that augments disciplinary expertise enabling new approaches to research, scholarship, and practice. AI should be used to enhance—rather than replace—human creativity, judgment, and domain-specific knowledge, and should be applied in ways that are responsible, secure, and contextually appropriate.

Thus, proposals should bring together researchers from multiple schools to integrate AI in ways that expand the scope, scale, and impact of the world-class research happening here at WashU on both sides of the park. Projects should demonstrate how AI enhances existing methodologies, enables new lines of inquiry, or accelerates translation to practice.

Potential Areas of Focus:

The examples below are illustrative and not exhaustive:

- **AI as an Enabler of Discovery (“X + AI”):** Work that integrates AI to generate new knowledge, augment existing methods, and foster cross-disciplinary collaboration between computational and domain experts.
- **AI-Augmented Research Workflows:** Work that uses AI to enhance research processes, including data analysis, modeling, simulation, and hypothesis generation, as well as the development of scalable, AI-assisted approaches.
- **Data, Infrastructure, and AI Readiness:** Work that advances the development or use of datasets, data pipelines, and computational tools that enable effective and responsible use of AI.
- **Responsible, Ethical, and Human-Centered AI:** Work that addresses fairness, bias, transparency, explainability, governance, and the broader ethical, legal, and societal implications of AI, including human-AI interaction and AI-enabled decision making.
- **Translation, Practice, and Real-World Impact:** Work that advances AI-enabled applications in applied or practice-based settings including pilot projects, prototypes, and implementation-oriented research.
- **AI for Complex and Societal Challenges:** Work that applies AI to pressing challenges such as resilient ecosystems, health and wellbeing, and social and economic systems, as well as other emerging areas of inquiry

For general AI resources available to WashU researchers and educators, please visit ai.washu.edu. Teams without in-house AI expertise are welcome to apply; the DI2 Accelerator can advise on methods, compute, and technical scoping during project development. Please reach out to di2accelerator@wustl.edu for support.

NEW Appendix II: Undergraduate Research Supplement, Fall 2026 Cycle Pilot

As part of a pilot initiative, the Ignite Interdisciplinary Grant is offering an **optional Undergraduate Research Supplement** to support faculty teams interested in integrating undergraduate researchers into their research project. Requesting support through this supplement is optional.

This supplement is administered in collaboration with the [Office of Undergraduate Research](#), the [Beyond Boundaries Program](#), and the **Research Development Office**, and is designed to expand access to meaningful undergraduate research experiences while supporting project development. Undergraduate researchers can contribute fresh perspectives, creative energy and diverse academic interests. Incorporating undergraduates can also help investigators develop training and educational activities that could contribute to future funding proposals.

Funding

Research teams may request funding to support **up to two undergraduate research assistants** during Summer 2027.

- Estimated award: ~\$4,800 per student (full-time, 8 weeks)
- These funds are provided as a **supplement to the Ignite award** and are administered separately.

Eligibility and Timing

- This pilot opportunity is available to **Fall 2026 cycle applicants only (FY27)**
- Requests must be submitted **at the time of the Ignite application**

Undergraduate Research Role

Faculty teams requesting the supplement should propose a role that:

- Provides a meaningful entry point into research for undergraduate students
- Includes clearly scoped tasks appropriate for a beginning researcher
- Contributes to the overall project goals

Supplement Request

Teams electing to apply for the supplement will be asked to briefly describe:

- The proposed **role and responsibilities** of the undergraduate researcher(s)
- How the student(s) will be **trained, mentored, and supervised**
- One or two **goals or expected outcomes** for the student experience

Student Recruitment

Research teams may:

- Recruit undergraduate researchers directly, **and/or**
- Be provided an undergraduate researcher through a **coordinated student application and matching process** facilitated by the Office of Undergraduate Research and the Beyond Boundaries Program.

Review Process

Requesting an undergraduate research supplement will not influence the review or funding decision of the Ignite proposal. Supplement requests will be reviewed **separately** by a collaborative group including representatives from:

- Office of Undergraduate Research
- Beyond Boundaries Program
- Research Development Office

Review will focus on the feasibility and quality of the proposed undergraduate research experience, including the appropriateness of the role and the plan for student training and support.

Faculty Support

Participating faculty will have access to optional support from Undergraduate Research and Beyond Boundaries, including:

- Guidance on structuring undergraduate research roles
- Sample position descriptions and mentorship resources
- Optional advising on student recruitment and onboarding

Questions?

Reach out to researchseedfunding@wustl.edu with questions about this program.