WashU | Research Seed Grants
FY 2027

Transcend Initiative Grant

NEW Deadlines	**LOI Deadline:** November 2, 2026 at 11:59 PM **LOI Discussion Meetings**: December-January **Full Proposal Deadline**: February 28th 2027 at 11:59 PM
Award Information	Awarded Transcends will receive $150,000/year for up to 3 years with awards starting on **July 1, 2027**
All Program Webinars (Spark, Ignite, & Transcend)	**Fall Webinar** • September 11th at 11 AM • Register **Spring Webinar** • January 29th at 11 AM • Register
Transcend-Specific InfoSession	Wednesday, September 16 at 11AM DUC 276 – RSVP

New for FY27

- **FY27 Topic of Strategic Interest +AI**:
  Click here to read in full
- **Revised LOI & Application Processes**
  LOIs will be due in the fall and full proposals in the Spring. Application materials have also been revised from previous cycles.

Program Scope

Transcend Initiative Grants support cross-school teams that include leadership from **two or more** WashU schools to develop their infrastructure and research initiative **in preparation for securing highly competitive and strategic center-level extramural proposals**.

Successful teams will present a clear vision for transforming the research ecosystem around their area of interest at WashU. In addition to bringing together researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines across multiple schools and departments, **teams will outline and fulfill a clear three-year plan and strategy to:**

- Rigorously pursue external funding in support of their research vision and the initiative's sustainability
- Measurably grow WashU research and research culture in their selected area(s)

Additionally, Transcend Initiatives (i.e. Transcends) should generate visibility of WashU's leadership and expertise in the selected research area, synergize and leverage cross-campus activities, enhance community and local partnerships, and leverage school-based resources.

Transcend Initiative funds provide critical resources for WashU teams to build strong foundations for competitive center-level funding applications by:

- Demonstrating that the university is supportive of the research area (i.e., institutional commitment);

- Providing faculty with the opportunity to lead a (pilot) center, including funds and team science principles; thus, initiating experience and credibility for prospective Center Director roles in external applications;
- Establishing industry and community partnerships in service of the research area at WashU;
- Generating preliminary data, when appropriate, and prior evidence of a strong collaborative team around the area of interest;
- Structuring connections to the Research Development Office (RDO) for strategic guidance and proposal services in the pursuit of external research funding in the area. (https://research.washu.edu/offices/research-development/)

Transcend Initiatives are expected to include faculty (two to four representing multiple schools) in budgeted and active leadership roles, with multiple faculty members included in an affiliate capacity (approximately 10 or more) that are engaged participants in the initiative's activities. Prospective Transcend Initiatives should not duplicate, substantially overlap with, or subsume the mission of existing Transcend Initiatives (reference https://transcend.washu.edu/) or school-based centers. Centers, institutes, consortia, and other programs that are housed within a single school are not included in the definition of a Transcend Initiative.

Strong Transcend proposals feature **interdisciplinary and cross-school research groups** that can demonstrate the following:

- Documented collaborative discussions and/or projects around a critical challenge with a summary output which may have included a white paper, publication, or submitted proposal. Transcend funding may be utilized to expand on collaborations and pursue further external funding.
- Previous receipt of external sponsored funding to support collaborative research and other activities but explaining a need for additional funding to broaden the group's pursuits to elevate the research team to a higher or nationally-recognized level.

Transcend Initiative activities must include:

- Seeking extramural research funds with the goal of becoming a wholly sponsor-funded center or initiative,
- Facilitating research and research collaborations across multiple schools and disciplines.

Transcend Initiative activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Carrying out university and public services programs related to the initiative's research focus,
- Bringing national awareness to WashU's research strengths in the area by hosting national symposia, workshops, etc.
- Disseminating research results through conferences, meetings, and other activities,
- Supporting and strengthening graduate and undergraduate education by providing students with training opportunities and access to research facilities.

Transcend Teams: Who is who?

The Transcend Initiative Grant is intended to facilitate research teams as they move towards center-level proposals. As such, the leadership team will need to demonstrate that they are competitive leads for such proposals. Though not required to follow any one model of center leadership and membership structure, Transcend Initiatives usually include individuals in the below roles.

Transcend Leads/PIs

It is recommended that a core leadership team of between two and four faculty (representing multiple schools) be identified to convene at a regular cadence sufficient to maintain the initiative's vision and forward momentum (typically, this is monthly or weekly).

Leads are charged with:

- setting and meeting semester and annual objectives,
- making strategic decisions in collaboration with fellow leads,
- serving as champions for the initiative in general,
- delegating tasks to meet programming milestones,
- leading as key personnel on the development of center-level external funding proposals,
- launch and maintain relationships with representatives from University Advancement, including Corporate and Foundation Relations, to support sustainability
- proactively establishing plans for the group's communication, marketing, conflict-resolution, and succession of leads if they rotate off or leave the university

Generally, each lead PI will have a core area of responsibility detailed in the full proposal. **These members are considered the Transcend PIs equally.**

Affiliated Faculty Researchers*

This group can range widely in size depending on the proposed initiative, but it should generally match with the scope and goals in terms of measurably growing research and research culture in the area described. Typically, around 10 affiliated faculty, whose research expertise is relevant and necessary to the Transcend Initiative's vision, are included. The mechanics for participation as affiliate faculty should be described in the full proposal's narrative. To structure the affiliated faculty roles and contributions, prior Transcend Initiatives have designed various styles of working groups, committees, and research cores or project areas, among other mechanisms. Some partners may be external to WashU. (Please see budget notes about external research partners and funds.)

These participants are not considered Transcend PIs or applicants. Transcend Leads should confirm their participation before listing their name in the proposal, but they do not need to submit materials such as CV/Biosketches, etc.

Advisory Committees*

Many Transcend Initiatives have advisory bodies that serve scientific, community, industrial, etc. roles. As with the Affiliated Faculty, the role of these advisory boards should be explained within the proposal narrative and should fit the goals and scope of the initiative.

These participants are not considered Transcend PIs or applicants. Transcend Leads should confirm their participation before listing their name in the proposal, but they do not need to submit materials such as CV/Biosketches, etc.

***Note:** *Applicants should consider expanding collaborations and avoiding unnecessary duplication of effort by utilizing pre-existing groups of faculty, advisors, or stakeholders associated with partnering centers, cores, projects, or networks. If doing so, letters of support detailing the arrangement may be submitted with the application, though not required.*

Partnership with the Research Development Office

The Research Development Office (RDO) will partner with awarded Transcends. Research Development (RD) professionals will act as dedicated thought partners and collaborators on extramural center funding strategy and team-science.

The Transcend RD support team will meet with the leadership of the awarded Transcend Initiative at key intervals designed to best support the Transcend team goals:

- **Upon award/kick-off:** RD support team will attend or schedule a formal RD kickoff to describe and outline Transcend program resources and consult with the awarded group.
- **Throughout the 3-Year Award Period:** RD support team will join the group's leadership meetings at least once a quarter to check in, provide updates, and coordinate services.
- **If requested/ad hoc*:** RD support team will provide tailored funding intelligence and proposal management services for Transcend leaders and affiliated faculty.

In planning for the Transcend Initiative, consider that RDO can offer the following resources and services as part of the award, if requested:

- Develop guides and serve as moderator(s) of group discussions focused on extramural funding opportunities
- Ideation and team development
- Grant proposal management services including grant proposal team kickoff, collaborator identification, brainstorm sessions, proposal outlines/timelines/checklists, content development (limited), draft review, red team review coordination, site visits, etc.
- Strategic funding intelligence
- Scientific editing for proposals
- Consulting on strategic planning and program evaluation
- Connecting with MarComm for website development and resources

***Note:** There is no need to include RD support as a line-item on your budget. This comes as a "perk" of the award.*

Transcend Initiative Review and Selection Process

***Applicants should read this document in its entirety before initiating the application process*. All steps are required.**

1. **Socialize your proposed Transcend Initiative** Applicants must socialize their initiative with their department chairs, deans, potential affiliate members, and administrators in their school(s) prior to submitting a Letter of Intent (LOI) to submit.

2. **Letter of Intent (LOI) to Submit**
   DEADLINE: November 2, 2026 at 11: 59 PM

   Faculty seeking to establish a new Transcend Initiative should first submit a required LOI through the InfoReady Portal. You will be asked several questions about your proposed Transcend Initiative, your

initiative's leadership structure, proposed activities to grow research around the initiative, and plans for sustainability. **This stage is required.**

University leaders will evaluate the LOIs based upon the ability of the Transcend Initiative to increase research around their chosen area; the proposed initiative's alignment with or complement to the school's research priorities; soliciting their feedback on the initiative's proposal and any support and resources of which the teams should be aware and if the initiative, as described in the Letter of Intent, will be competitive at the full proposal stage.

3. **Meet with Research Development Office – December 2026 and January 2027**
   Teams that advance to the full proposal will meet with the Research Development Office, the Senior Associate Director of Programs and Seed Grants along with the Sr. Associate Director of Research Development charged with leading our Transcend Initiatives. In this meeting, RDO will provide guidance for the teams as they prepare for their full proposal submission.

4. **Submit Full Proposal**
   DEADLINE: February 28th, 2027 at 11:59 PM
   All proposals must be submitted via InfoReady.

5. **Panel Review – March 2027**
   The reviewers are senior research faculty with a history of successful team research and/or experience in director interdisciplinary centers from research-active WashU schools. **Please note:** The panel is composed of senior researchers who will not be experts in the fields associated with your proposal. It is in the team's best interest that you define all acronyms, keep your plan free of jargon, and ensure that it is understandable and compelling to a non-specialist.

   During panel review, reviewers may request more information from applicants. Applicants will have *at least* one week to respond to reviewers' questions, if posed.

6. **Notification of Decision – Late April, early May 2027**
   Once the committee has reached their decisions and their recommendations approved by university leadership, teams will be notified of their status as soon as possible. For awarded teams, RDO will schedule a meeting to discuss Terms and Conditions, any feedback for the team including any required changes and confirm the budget. Teams that are not funded can meet with RDO to discuss reviewer feedback and potential next steps.

7. **Award Start – July 1, 2027**
   Transcend Initiatives awarded under this call will begin on July 1st, 2027.

LOI Instructions

LOIs must be submitted via InfoReady and are short answer responses to the following, in addition to the following information about the Leadership Team.

- Enter the names, appointments, school/departments, and emails of the Initiative co-Leads
- Initiative Title

- Initiative Abstract—150 words free of jargon, for a general audience

LOI Questions

Responses should be no longer than 200 words.

1. **Why should your Transcend Initiative exist at WashU?** Explain, at a high level, the research focus of the proposed initiative and it is important to the research ecosystem here at WashU. Why WashU? Why now?
2. **How will your Transcend Initiative increase research capacity around your area of focus?** How will the initiative enable research growth in this area? Explain the activities that the proposed initiative will undertake to support its goals.
3. **Who will be leading this Transcend Initiative?** Explain who will comprise the leadership team and what role they will play in its development and execution, and why their disciplinary and research expertise is necessary to the proposed initiative.
    - Required upload: An org chart depicting the leadership team, affiliated members, any potential (optional) steering/advisory committees/boards, external or internal. Prospective members and committee members should have expressed interest in participating and agreed to be listed on the LOI as an affiliate member or potential advisor, should the initiative be awarded, but no formal information is needed from them at this time.
4. **What sponsors and programs do you plan to target as an initiative?** Explain your prospective funding targets: what sponsors (federal, foundation, philanthropic, and industry), and if possible/relevant, what programs, will your proposed initiative be competitive for?

Full Proposal Instructions

All proposals must be submitted via InfoReady. In addition to applicant and initiative information (such as names of leadership team, emails, departments, etc.), you will need to upload several documents.

Applicant Eligibility

Applicants may submit only one application as a co-Lead of a Transcend Initiative Grant per fiscal year (July 1-June 30). Transcend Leads should be up-to-date with all reporting for *any* previously awarded WashU Research Seed Grants (Spark, Ignite, Transcend) to be eligible.

Section I: Team and Initiative Information

- Enter the names, appointments, school/departments, and emails of the Initiative co-Leads
- Enter the name of the individual who will be the post-award administrator, if awarded
- Initiative Title
- Initiative Abstract—150 words free of jargon, for a general audience
- # of Years requested
- Funding amount requested for the Transcend Initiative per year
- Does your Transcend Initiative plan on using community-engaged research methods?

Section II: Proposal Narrative

You will upload a PDF upload no longer than five pages, 8.5 x 11, single spaced, using a standard font in size 11 point (Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc.), with 1-inch margins. Please use page numbers throughout the document.

Proposals should discuss the following:

- **Purpose of the Initiative** and the benefit of the initiative to the research enterprise at WashU. What is the vision for the initiative? How would Transcend support allow teams to take their collaboration to a new level that would otherwise be impossible?
- **How is the Initiative a university-wide research initiative?** Explain how this initiative represents an important step forward for the cross- school research happening on the WashU campus.
- **Define Roles and Administrative structure of the Initiative**. Who are the leaders of the initiative and how will the team function? What are the expected contributions of each participant? What is the organizational structure? This section should coordinate with the required Organizational Chart upload in Section III.
- **Metrics for Success** How will you know that your Transcend Initiative is successful as each year passes? What metrics will you use to analyze your success?
- **What are the activities to take place in each proposed year of the Initiative?** These activities can include tasks related to administration, research, stakeholder engagement, development of the community/industry partnerships, etc. You should also discuss whether there are any external service functions of the initiative (this will not be applicable to every team). Explain how the proposed activities will grow the initiative's success at WashU and assist the team in achieving their selected metrics for success.
- **Sustainability Plan** What are the team's plans to sustain the Initiative beyond the years of Transcend Initiative Grant support? Be specific and detailed in your plan to secure continued funding, be it federal, foundation, philanthropic, industry, etc.

Section III: Uploads

For each category, all documents should be uploaded in a single .pdf document. Please note that the InfoReady application program requires that all .pdfs be combined using the "binder" mechanism rather than the "portfolio" option in Adobe.

***Required**

- ***Organizational Chart**: See optional template (including an org chart is not optional, following the sample template is optional)
- ***Gantt Chart/Timeline for Initiative Activities**: See optional template. You may use your own template/format, but this timeline should give a clear
- ***Budget and Budget Justification**: Include a budget of high-level expenses for the initiative over the course of each year of award using the provided template. Please consult the "Award & Budget Information" below. The justification should address how the funds will permit the Initiative to meet their Metrics for Success and achieve sustainability.
- ***CVs and Biosketches** for each Transcend Lead. No longer than 5 pages per Lead.
- ***Letters of Support** One page maximum per letter.
    - **Required** Letters of support from Department/Division Chairs for the Team Leads are required and should include any commitments from school-based units/groups. If the school does not have

divisions or departments, a letter of support from the dean or dean of research for the school is acceptable. One page maximum per letter.
    - **Optional** Letters of support from affiliated members. These do not need to be enthusiastic endorsements, but an acknowledgement that they intend to be involved with the initiative.
    - **Optional** Letters of support from external collaborators such as community members, industry partners, etc., that will be fundamental to your initiative's plans.

Award & Budget Information

Allowable costs: Expected budgets for Transcend Initiative Grants will be $150,000 per year for a maximum of three years, after which the Initiative should be sustainably funded by external funding mechanisms.

Transcend Initiative Grant funds may be used to:

- Fund collaborative team events and symposia, particularly those focused on funding outcomes
- Student and postdoc support,
- Developing joint infrastructure,
- Communication and marketing efforts
- Pilot projects to develop WashU's strength in the initiative's area

Unallowable costs

Costs that are generally unallowable are:

- Capital equipment
- Faculty hires
- Substantial research support beyond catalyst, pilot funding (i.e. funds may not be used solely for project support)
- Funds for student initiatives

Please note: Support will not exceed 3 years of funding. Initiatives are expected to become fiscally self-sufficient through sponsored program, and external fundraising. No follow-on funding will be granted. No-cost extensions (NCEs) will be granted only when there are clearly articulated extenuating circumstances and 60% of the annual funds have already been spent.

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.

Criteria for Review

Above all, this program is designed to grow research excellence and capacity at WashU in ways that are not currently possible by developing transdisciplinary, cross-school teams of researchers. It is your task in the proposal to explain how your proposed initiative will grow this research excellence and capacity. Beyond being successful researchers themselves, our selected reviewers have substantive experience as leaders in the university research enterprise.

A few things to note:

1. We assume that the research performed by the team is sound. You should **not** justify the merits of your methods on individual projects, but rather emphasize how individual projects will allow you to meet your metrics of success and sustain this initiative long term.
2. Transcend Initiatives should build capacity and have plans to continue growth through the acquisition of external funding, be it federal, foundation, corporate, or philanthropic dollars. At the end of the award period, it is expected that initiatives will be sustainably funded. There will be no extensions or follow-on funding.

In addition to soliciting their holistic read of the proposal within the context of the Research Excellence, we ask the reviewers to evaluate the following:

- Is there a clear and strong justification for why there should be an initiative on this topic at WashU?
- Does the composition of Team Leadership make sense given the goals and objectives of the initiative? Are faculty listed as affiliates with the Initiative suitable for the goals and objectives of the Initiative? Are there people and/or disciplines that should be affiliated with the Initiative?
- Does the vision presented by the proposal represent an exponential growth of research at WashU?
- Are the metrics of success defined by the proposed Initiative reasonable and justified? Is there a measurement of growth for WashU research and/or research culture?
- Are the activities designed to prepare the initiative for research growth and eventual sustainability?
- Is the business and sustainability plan clear and achievable? Does the plan for acquiring external funding match the strategic initiatives of the Transcend Initiative?
- Do the budget items proposed clearly connect with the activities and aims of the proposed initiative and connect to the initiative's long-term plans for sustainability? Do the budget items truly aid in taking the initiative to the next level?

Accountability & Reporting

Awarded Transcend Initiatives will submit an annual report via InfoReady; the report. It will be circulated amongst the provost's office and the deans of affiliated schools of the Transcend Initiative. This report will request information on the previous year's activities, financial summaries, and importantly plans for the upcoming year. This report should detail and explain any necessary changes to the initiative's plans, teaming, etc., so that leadership can understand the developing needs and objectives of the team.

In order to obtain the next year's funding, the successful completion of this report and satisfactory progress towards the anticipated metrics are required. A yearly review meeting will be held between the RDO and the team leadership to discuss any feedback on the annual review; this meeting is also required to obtain the next year of funding.

Questions

For questions relating to application guidelines, program scope, 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.