George Mason University researchers generate cutting-edge sustainability, climate, and resilience research, but only some of this research is tested in real systems, translated into operational decisions, or scaled beyond pilot projects. At the same time, local governments, federal agencies, and industry partners face urgent, complex challenges but lack low-risk environments to test solutions before broad deployment. Together we can bridge the structural gap between **knowledge creation** and **real-world implementation**.

George Mason University's Living Lab platform transforms the campus into a regional innovation infrastructure—where research, education, and operations converge to develop, test, validate, and scale solutions to society's most urgent sustainability issues. With over a dozen projects in progress, Mason's Living Lab program continues to support the development of new research and scholarship initiatives that use the campus environment including the green spaces, waterways, forests, as well as the building infrastructure system to develop and advance sustainability research. The Institute for a Sustainable Earth (ISE) and its partners – the Patriot Green Fund and OSCAR – seek to support on-campus research projects within the Living Labs Initiative.

Mason faculty **are invited to submit proposals** for funding to support research projects that utilize Mason's campuses and socio-environmental systems to develop innovative solutions that advance a sustainability-focused research agenda.

University Sustainability has identified the following specific research or innovation interest **themes**:

- WASTE: waste management, especially redistribution/reuse systems and behavioral interventions;
- TRANSPORTATION: sustainable transportation, especially survey and analysis of university transportation modalities;
- WATER: water and wastewater management or reuse; stormwater quantity and quality monitoring
- PROCUREMENT: sustainable procurement practices, especially green purchasing and contract language;
- FOOD: food systems, especially food insecurity, food redistribution, and on-campus food production;
- CAMPUS CULTURE: campus sustainability culture and literacy assessment;
- DATACENTERS: datacenter energy issues, including electricity and district heating
- OTHERS: researchers are also encouraged to submit innovative proposals on other high impact sustainability topics.

Initial data collection, implementation of a pilot project, advancing ongoing research, proposal development, testing solution prototypes, and/or implementing a demonstration project of a specific innovation are examples of supported activities, but we encourage other activities beyond these as well. Projects may address all stages of research and scholarship from basic research and scholarship to applied projects. Proposals must discuss how the work will enable the applicants to **scale their research agenda** and/or **advance entrepreneurial activity.**

Proposals will be considered from individuals or teams. Applicants may submit proposals for **up to one year of funding** with a **budget not to exceed $25,000**. Projects involving undergraduate students should also **leverage funding available from OSCAR**. Projects requiring materials purchase should also include a **complementary PGF application** up to the allowable funding limit. If applying for these additional funding sources, include them in the budget as line items and explain in the justification.

We expect to fund 2-3 projects in 2026.

Funding decisions are contingent upon Mason Facilities' approval of the proposed use of the campus environment. APPLICANTS MUST NOT CONTACT MASON FACILITIES SEEKING APPROVAL PRIOR TO SUBMISSION OF THEIR PROPOSAL. The Living Lab program manager will work with applicants of recommended proposals to obtain the necessary approvals.

Applicants may contact the Living Lab program managers at malila@gmu.edu prior to proposal submission with questions about potential use of the campus environment.
Details about the proposal requirements and process can be found below.

Key Dates
Call for Proposals Released: Jan 30, 2026
Proposal Due Date: Mar 4, 2026
Funding Decisions: April 15, 2026* (*contingent upon Mason Facilities' approval)

Eligibility
• All faculty who are currently allowed to submit proposals under Mason's Principal Investigators Policy 4012. Faculty are encouraged to propose projects that integrate multiple PIs, disciplines, and programs.
• A faculty member may only participate as a member of the proposing team on 1 proposal in this competition**.**

Proposal Requirements
Submit a proposal that includes the following components:

1) **Cover Page** (Up to 1 page)
   a) Title of Proposal
   b) Names and Affiliations of Proposing Team Members [both Mason members and external partner(s), if any]. For Mason team members, include the Department and College/School.
   c) Project Summary (200 words maximum) – brief description of the project to be published on the Living Lab webpage
2) **Project Description.** (3 page maximum).
   The project description must:
   a) Clearly identify and justify how the proposed work will advance sustainability; describe how the proposed work will engage Mason's campus environment and its socio-environmental systems; describe how the proposed project will lead to sustained or scalable research and/or impact;

and discuss how the project can advance Mason's strategic goals. Identify which research or innovation interest theme is being addressed.
   b) Include a detailed work plan that outlines a timeline for the proposed work, identifies the project team and their roles in the proposed work, and describes the milestones and anticipated outcomes. Include the estimated number of people affected by the project outcomes.
   c) Describe how you will engage student researchers and scholars during the activities.
3) **Funding Plan.** (3 page maximum, provide an itemized proposal budget spreadsheet that also includes current and pending support from other sources for this project).
   The project budget must be detailed and well-justified. The project budget request from the Living Labs initiative may not exceed $25,000. Projects with smaller budgets are encouraged.
   Funds may be used for research support personnel (including students), consultants, training and/or other project-related expenses. Budgets may include small stipends for faculty ($500 per faculty member) but may not be used for faculty summer salary or release time during the academic year.
   Funding leverage opportunities:
   Projects involving undergraduate students should also consider funding available from OSCAR.
   OSCAR offers campus-wide support for grants with undergraduate student participants, including a research or project assistant program, funding programs for student projects related to the grant, a travel fund for students presenting their work off campus, writing support for grants and supplements supporting undergraduate students, and help recruiting students to work on projects. Any undergraduate student from any college or major who is enrolled at George Mason University can be supported by OSCAR's programs.
   For materials purchase applicants should also present a complementary Patriot Green Fund (PGF) application up to the allowable funding limit.
   OSCAR and PGF funding should be included as line items of pending support in the budget.
4) **Biographical statements.** Proposing teams should submit brief biographical statements for each team member (200 word maximum per person).
5) **Letters of collaboration (OPTIONAL).** Proposals may include letters of collaboration that confirm the participation of key partners in the proposed work. These letters must be brief (no more than 1 page each) and should not include description of work beyond what is included in the project description.

Format
Margin: No smaller than 1-inch margins
Font Size: No less than 11 point
Line Spacing: No more than 6 lines per vertical inch, single space
Figures are included in the page count.
References are **not** included in the page count and should be listed after the Project Description.

Submission
Applications must be submitted **as one complete PDF document** by 11:59 pm EST (Eastern Standard Time) by March 4, 2026, to malila@gmu.edu, use subject line **"Living Labs Grants 2026".**

Review Criteria

Reviewers will use the following criteria to evaluate proposals:

- ***Overall quality of the project proposed***
- ***Clarity, feasibility and promise of proposed project goals, funding plan, and outcomes***
- ***Experience and expertise of project team***

Post Award

• Applicants will be required to submit a brief Final Report.

Points of Contact

Please direct any questions to malila@gmu.edu or Judit Ungvari at jungvari@gmu.edu. Applicants are encouraged to contact the program managers before sending their proposals. For PGF related questions contact Demin Zhu, Patriot Green Fund Coordinator at pgf@gmu.edu, for OSCAR related questions contact Karen T. Lee, Assistant Director OSCAR at klee57@gmu.edu.