



## NDSGC ASCEND ANNOUNCEMENT REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

**RFP Issued:** Oct. 1, 2026

**Proposals due:** Nov. 1, 2026

**Selected Teams Notified:** ~Dec. 1, 2026

**Period of Performance:** Jan. 15, 2027 - Dec. 15, 2027

**Funding Available:** One \$10,000 *Catalyst* Award | One \$30,000 *Impact* Award

### Overview:

The [North Dakota Space Grant Consortium \(NDSGC\)](#) is soliciting applications for the [Affiliate Synergistic and Collaborative Engagements across ND \(ASCEND\)](#) program, available to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and education professionals at [NDSGC Affiliate Institutions](#). The purpose of ASCEND is to support opportunities for students, educators, faculty, and staff across the state to engage in STEM-centric experiences that are NASA-relevant and promote workforce development initiatives. For the Fall 2026 RFP, the ASCEND program will award up to two awards to meritorious proposals (one *Catalyst* and one *Impact*).

The **Catalyst Award** is designed to support new ideas, pilot projects, and exploratory activities. These awards provide seed funding for affiliate staff and faculty to initiate NASA-relevant projects, test innovative concepts, or collect and analyze preliminary data that may lead to larger external funding opportunities. **Examples include:** pilot research, outreach programs, college and K-12 student engagement activities, prototype development w/ student researchers, preliminary data collection, etc. This award is **ideal for:** new investigators, early-career affiliates, small teams, and first-time applicants.

The **Impact Award** is designed to support interdisciplinary ideas that include multiple affiliate representatives. These awards provide seed funding for affiliate faculty and staff to build partnerships across institutions, disciplines, or organizations to advance NASA-related research, education, or workforce development initiatives. Projects should demonstrate meaningful collaboration and shared expertise. **Examples include:** statewide STEM research collaborations, STEM industry partnerships for student experiences, professional

development workshops, K-12 and higher education partnerships, multi-institutional projects, etc. This award is **ideal for**: interdisciplinary teams, cross-campus collaborations, new or experienced investigators, and early-career affiliates.

Table 1. ASCEND Grant Specifications

|                                                   | Catalyst Awards        | Impact Awards        |
|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| <b>Purpose</b>                                    | New Projects           | Partner Projects     |
| <b>Narrative Page Limit (See Table 2)</b>         | <i>Up to 4 pages</i>   | <i>Up to 8 pages</i> |
| <b>Funding Amount</b>                             | Up to \$10,000         | Up to \$30,000       |
| <b>Period of Performance</b>                      | <i>Up to 11 months</i> | 11 months            |
| <b>NDSGC Affiliate Collaborators</b>              | Encouraged             | Required             |
| <b>Travel to a NASA Center / Industry Partner</b> | Strongly Encouraged    | Strongly Encouraged  |

### Eligibility:

Projects **must** include:

- Faculty / Staff Project Leads who are employed at an [NDSGC Affiliate Institution](#) (*UND and NDSU faculty and staff can serve as Co-Is or Collaborators, but **cannot** serve as Project Leads*)
- College Student Support or Direct Student Engagement (e.g. hourly work, fellowships, stipends, direct involvement of students enrolled in a specific college course, etc.)
- Stipends / Salary only for U.S. citizens (Non-U.S. citizens can participate in the project, but cannot be the project lead and cannot receive direct funding through the project)
- NASA Relevance and STEM or STEM Education Relevance
- A combination of **2 or more** of the following:
  - Travel funds (e.g. STEM field trip, NASA center, industry partner, field research, presenting at conferences, etc.)
  - Stipends / Salary (e.g. Part-time support for staff project leads, summer student internships, student hourly pay, etc.)
  - Materials & Supplies (e.g. Hands-on activities, research materials and supplies, research publications, meals for special events / workshops, etc.)

### Examples of Proposals / Items that do **NOT** Qualify:

- Proposals for solely purchasing faculty lab, research, or classroom materials
- Funding that does not include direct college student involvement

- Stipends / salary for Non-U.S. citizens
- Proposals solely for publication costs
- Foreign travel costs

### Funding:

- No cost-share / cost-match is required.
- The amount awarded will be governed by NASA federal guidelines, 2 CFR Part 200 the uniform administrative requirements, cost principles, and audit requirements for federal awards.
- Institutions may provide cost share from other non-federal sources such as local funding spent on project-related work.
- Pre-proposal budget requests may include funding for faculty and staff salary and benefits, undergraduate and graduate student stipends, research assistantships, or fellowships, project-relevant supplies, domestic travel, minor research equipment (items that are less than \$5,000 per unit), and faculty and student travel to present research at conferences or to NASA field centers for direct collaborations with NASA researchers, and F & A.
- Equipment can be purchased as long as it directly relates to the project. Equipment that is used only for research, scientific, educational, and technical activities directly related to the proposed activities are allowed. Funds **cannot** be used for foreign travel.
- Funds must be spent during the award period of performance.
- Funds **cannot** be used for computers, furniture, filing cabinets, wall cabinets, office supplies (including copy paper, pens, sticky notepads), telephone lines, lab renovations, building renovations, moving expenses, honorarium fees, subscription fees, or membership fees.
- NDSGC Sub-Award: All ASCEND projects will be sub-awards from NDSGC funds at the University of North Dakota. Awardees are expected to abide by the sub award details.

## Proposal Guidelines:

Table 2. ASCEND Proposal Checklist\*

| Element                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Page Limit                                                             |
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| Proposal Cover Sheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><i>MUST use this <a href="#">Proposal cover sheets template</a></i></b></li> <li><i>Note: After saving PDF with text inputs, it is recommended that proposers send through DocuSign for signatures.</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | 1                                                                      |
| CV of Project Lead                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | ≤ 2                                                                    |
| CV of Co-I(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Section only required for proposals with Co-Is / Collaborators</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1 page for each Co-I                                                   |
| <b>Proposal Narrative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b><i>MUST include all headers (A-G) in the following order.</i></b></li> <li><b>Bullets are guiding content (not to be included as headers).</b></li> </ul> <p><b>A. Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overview of the scope of work</li> <li>Brief description of NASA-relevance</li> <li>Research team and collaborations</li> </ul> <p><b>B. Background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Description of current relevant research / projects</li> <li>Justification of the proposed work as addressing a gap in ND needs, STEM Research needs, or STEM Education needs</li> <li>Any preliminary research results</li> </ul> <p><b>C. Goals &amp; Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clear Overarching Research Goal</li> <li>S.M.A.R.T. Objectives that directly support overarching goal</li> <li><a href="#">Guide to Writing SMART Objectives</a></li> </ul> <p><b>D. NASA Relevance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cite specific NASA Priority Alignment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NASA 2017 <a href="#">Strategic Technology Investment Plan</a></li> <li>NASA 2020 <a href="#">Technology Taxonomy</a></li> <li>NASA 2022 <a href="#">Strategic Plan</a></li> <li>NASA 2025 - 2026 <a href="#">Science Plan</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>Cite specific NASA Directorate Alignment</li> </ul> | 4 page limit for <b>Catalyst</b><br><br>8 page limit for <b>Impact</b> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <a href="#">Science Mission Directorate (SMD)</a></li> <li>ii. <a href="#">Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate (ARMD)</a></li> <li>iii. <a href="#">Space Technology Mission Directorate (STMD)</a></li> <li>iv. <a href="#">Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate (ESDMD)</a></li> <li>v. <a href="#">Space Operations Mission Directorate (SOMD)</a></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cite current NASA mission / NASA project alignment</li> <li>○ <b>If applicable:</b> Describe details of NASA collaboration (Collaborator contributions, NASA center visits, nature &amp; frequency of meetings, etc.)</li> <li>○ Clear alignment between project S.M.A.R.T. objectives and specific NASA priorities</li> </ul> <p><b>E. Implementation Strategy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Direct alignment of milestones / deliverables with S.M.A.R.T. objectives</li> <li>○ Must include: detailed <b>Timetable</b> of Milestone Completion with clear Team Leads</li> </ul> <p><b>F. Management Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Team structure: Hierarchy of individuals / institutions involved in the project</li> <li>○ Collaboration details and team roles, including student involvement &amp; specific tasks</li> <li>○ Comprehensive recruitment plan for team members not yet identified</li> <li>○ Must include <b>Assessment / Evaluation Plan</b>: What specific tools and methods will be used to assess adequate progress throughout the project and effective strategies?</li> <li>○ <b>If applicable:</b> Methods for arranging travel</li> </ul> <p><b>G. Anticipated Outcome</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expected project outcomes</li> <li>○ <b>If applicable:</b> Specific plans for publications (e.g. specific journals)</li> <li>○ <b>If applicable:</b> Planned conference attendance (e.g. specific conferences, dates of attendance, team members to travel, etc.)</li> </ul> |  |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Future project goals and expanded collaborations</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |          |
| <b>Budget Table</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><u>MUST</u></b> use this <a href="#">Budget Table Template</a></li> <li>● Clear alignment between budget justification, budget table, and research narrative</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | No limit |
| <b>Budget Justification</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear alignment between budget justification, budget table, and research narrative</li> <li>● Details of Project Lead, Co-I staff/faculty salary and description of any fringe rates</li> <li>● Details on collaborator pay, consultant stipends</li> <li>● Competitive pay rates for student researchers (~\$20/hr for undergraduates and ~\$25/hr for graduate students)</li> <li>● Details on cost-estimates for specific materials and supplies to justify amount requested</li> <li>● Detailed breakdown of travel funds (e.g. specific estimates for lodging, per diem, airfare, ground transportation, conference registration, named travelers, etc.)</li> <li>● Details on other lab fees, publication costs, etc.</li> </ul> | No limit |
| <b>References</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Up-to-date and relevant citations</li> <li>● Scientific / technical citations</li> <li>● Specific NASA-relevance citations</li> <li>● <b>AI Disclosure Statement</b> (See Instructions: "Proposal use of AI")</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | No limit |
| <b>Letters of Commitment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b><i>MUST</i></b> include email or letter of support from any Co-Is &amp; collaborators (and NASA centers, if applicable)</li> <li>● Letters must include: Name, Title, and Dept. / Organization</li> <li>● Letters must outline specific contributions of collaborators to the project and align with the research narrative</li> <li>● Letters must be dated</li> <li>● Letters must include collaborator contact information</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | No limit |

\*Proposers **MUST** combine all forms into one e-readable / searchable (i.e. not scanned) pdf document. Any proposals with missing elements or exceeding page limits will NOT be reviewed.

**Note:** It is the responsibility of the Project Lead to facilitate work efforts, guide students and collaborators, coordinate subcontracts, and arrange travel related to the project. The

Project Lead will adhere to the principles of the NDSGC, provide on-time progress reports, final reports, and maintain an open line of communication. Failing to adhere to the standards above may render the Project Lead ineligible for future NDSGC funding.

- Any proposals selected for funding must complete the following award requirements:
  - Mid-project Progress Report
  - Final Report
  - Presentation at Annual NDSGC Affiliates Meeting and Student Symposium

### **Proposal Evaluation:**

Proposals will be evaluated using the following criteria: Goals & Objectives, NASA Relevance, Scientific / Education Merit, Implementation Strategy & Management Plan, Anticipated Outcomes, and Budget Reasonableness. The review committee will use the guidance provided in “Table 2. ASCEND Proposal Checklist,” to evaluate proposals. Any and all proposals may be rejected.

**Strong proposals** will have:

- Clear and intentional engagement of college students (authentic, hands-on experiences, active learning/research, potential for K-12 involvement, etc.)
- Explicit SMART objectives that are directly aligned with overarching project goal, overall methods, and expected outcomes
- Organized Implementation Strategy and Management Plan (including timetable and assessment plan that clearly align with proposed project)

### **Proposal use of AI:**

The NDSGC values transparency. The NDSGC Team is committed to a comprehensive review of all proposals that meet RFP requirements; the team / review committee will **not** use AI in proposal evaluation. While the NDSGC does not encourage the use of AI in proposal development, any AI use will not impact the outcome of proposal evaluation. Proposals are evaluated on content and commitment to NDSGC and NASA priorities, as stated in this RFP.

The NDSGC also expects full transparency and disclosure from proposers in any use of AI in proposal development. Any proposals that use AI must include an “AI Disclosure Statement.” This statement must describe specific tools used and at which stage(s) of proposal development they were utilized, purpose of tools, and a brief description of the overall use of AI.

## **Proposal Submission:**

All proposals and selected full proposals must be routed through the Department Chair, Dean's office, and Grants and Contracts / Sponsored Programs Administration (or equivalent office) for signatures. Project Leads must also complete proposal transmittal forms specific to their universities (if applicable).

All proposals must be routed through the proposer's home institution Grants and Contracts office for appropriate signatures, prior to submission to the NDSGC (e.g. Sponsored Programs Administration, Division of Research & Economic Development, etc.). If the proposer's home institution does not have this office, procedures at their specific campus must be followed regarding grant proposal submissions.

Proposals must be submitted to institutional grants offices at least five business days prior to the pre-proposal deadline. Proposals that do not meet this approval deadline may not be reviewed. After proposals have been approved by appropriate grant offices, proposals must be submitted via the online submission form.

**Note:** This online submission form does allow proposers to save progress, navigate between pages, and continue entering information at a later date.

**[NDSGC General ASCEND Webpage](#)**

**[ASCEND F26 RFP | NDSGC Blogs](#)**

**[Online Proposal Submission Form](#)**

### **NDSGC Team:**

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### **Questions:**

**Applicants are expected to thoroughly review RFP and associated links prior to reaching out with questions.**

**General** questions regarding the RFP may be directed to the NDSGC Director, Dr. Caitlin Milera, [caitlin.milera@und.edu](mailto:caitlin.milera@und.edu).

**Finance** questions regarding the RFP may be directed to UND Aerospace Fiscal Affairs Associate Director, Laurie Baumgartner, [laurie.baumgartner@und.edu](mailto:laurie.baumgartner@und.edu).