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# Grand Challenges

**Empowering our STATE of minds.**

GRANDCHALLENGES.UNM.EDU

# What are Grand Challenges?

Grand Challenges are problems of global, national and regional significance that require **researchers** to work together across disciplinary boundaries to develop and implement solutions. Grand Challenges address problems that, when solved, have a significant positive impact on people and society. These challenges are large in scale, ambitious in scope, and multi-disciplinary. They have carefully developed goals that enable multiple paths towards solutions, and that are relevant across varied disciplines and communities.

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# Grand Challenges at UNM

- President Garnett S. Stokes launched The University of New Mexico Grand Challenges initiative on Nov. 14, 2018.
- In early 2019, fourteen Grand Challenges proposals were received.
- President Stokes utilized reviews and the recommendations of the Grand Challenges Steering Committee to select three teams.

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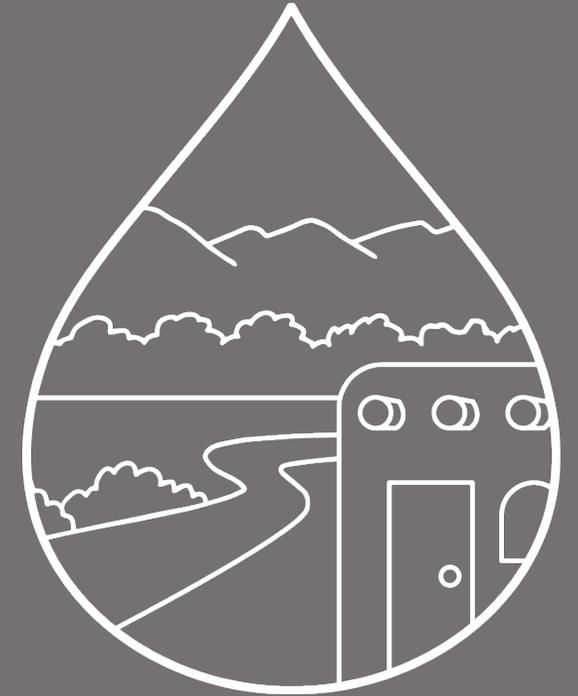
# The first Grand Challenge teams



**Successful Aging**



**Substance Use  
Disorders**



**Sustainable Water  
Resources**

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# Grand Challenges reimaged

- In 2021, UNM re-envisioned the Grand Challenges program to have even broader representation across the University. To achieve this, we increased our focus on using Team Science fundamentals to grow new interdisciplinary research teams with the potential to become Grand Challenges teams.
- The 3-level structure is meant to support those teams that are on track to build capacity and grow interdisciplinary research in their chosen area.
- There are intentionally designed on-and-off ramps that allow teams to exit the program when it no longer suits their needs or loop back around for additional team building when a team fundamentally changes membership or focus.

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# What happens in Level 2?

Teams are expected to:

- use the principles of Team Science to develop effective engagement and communication strategies including engaging community partners and a diverse set of UNM researchers and students;
- implement the initial stages of their team research roadmaps
- participate in Grand Challenges program research, evaluation, and reporting; and
- communicate the results of their research and their participation in the Grand Challenges program

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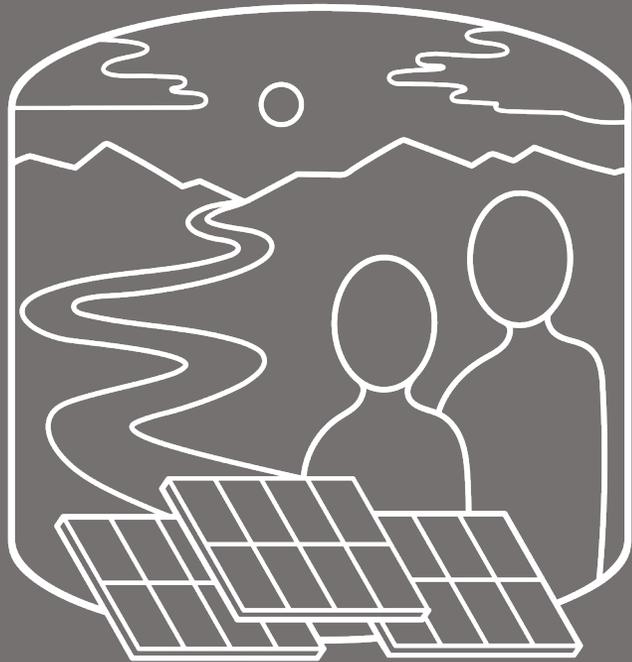
# The first Level 2 teams

- In 2023, three teams were given \$200,000 over two years to jump start their implementation plans.
- Teams were not required to have participated in Level 1 in order to apply for Level 2.
- The three teams all received six-month 'no cost extensions' and will complete the program in June 2026. All have received numerous external grants, including federal, state, county, and foundation funds.

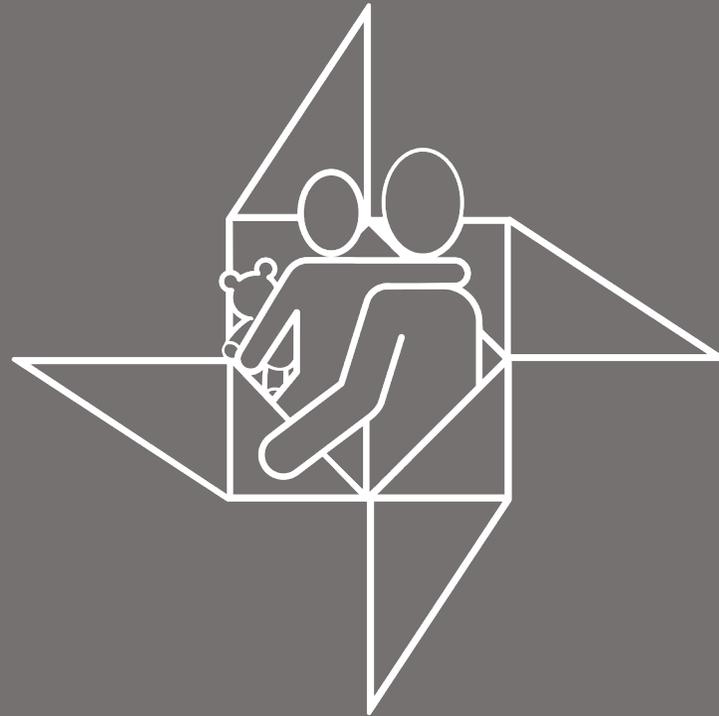
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# Level 2 teams



**Just Transition to  
Green Energy**



**Child Health**



**Sustainable Space  
Research**

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# Level 2 program 2026-2028

- A cohort of **approximately 2 to 5** teams with diverse disciplinary expertise will be competitively selected for the **two-year Level 2** program.
- Each team will receive **up to \$200,000** to promote program development and will receive facilitation, mentoring, and other program support and training provided by the Office of the Vice President for Research and other UNM units.
- Teams may also be eligible for additional strategic investments during the Level 2 program, depending on team progress and the availability of funds.

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# Level 2 team expectations (1/2)

Teams are expected to enter Level 2 with:

- A shared **mission, vision** and evidence of a cohesive and functional team as demonstrated by a **team charter or comparable mechanism** that clearly articulates shared agreements, practices, and operations
- Shared aspirational **goals and key research questions**
- A **three-to-five-year plan** that works toward the aspirational goals
- A **funding plan** that clearly identifies anticipated external funding sources
- A **budget and budget justification** for the use of internal funds
- A functioning **plan for team logistics** including regular meetings, communications, and shared workspaces (as needed to complete the proposed activities).

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# Level 2 team expectations (2/2)

- Conduct **proposal development and fundraising**, perform **research**, and participate in **outreach** activities
- **Hire a program/project coordinator** to help with meetings, budget management, and other logistics
- **Gather as a full team at least once a month**, with individual or subgroup activities expected between meetings
- **Participate in a kickoff retreat and quarterly cohort meetings** with the Grand Challenges Program Manager
- **Participate in periodic reviews** by the OVPR and Grand Challenges Steering Committee and actively contribute to and **participate in an annual Grand Challenges Day** where teams publicly present their team's goals and accomplishments.
- Conduct other activities as described in the team's proposal

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# Level 2 team member expectations

- Participate constructively in regular cohort and team meetings and trainings
- Conduct research, proposal development/fundraising, outreach and community engagement, and related activities in support of the team's vision and plans
- Be a constructive member of the team and the Level 2 cohort, supporting data collection and reporting requests, as well as participating in presentations or other media about team goals and accomplishments

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# Level 2 convener expectations

- Meet regularly with the Grand Challenges Program Manager and quarterly with other Level 2 teams
- Prepare brief quarterly reports for the Steering Committee, providing data and progress reports as requested with the knowledge that continued funding will rely upon satisfactory progress as determined by the Steering Committee
- Prepare annual reports for each year of the Level 2 program
- Manage the team's Level 2 budget and provide quarterly budget updates to the Grand Challenges Program Manager, Steering Committee, and OVPR fiscal officer as requested

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# Level 2 application overview

- A narrative that includes title, challenge description, a detailed research plan and a team self-assessment (maximum 10 pages in a font **no smaller than 11-pt**)
- A team charter (or comparable mechanism) that includes a vision, mission, goals and deliverables, team structure, communication plans and norms, and a conflict management plan
- A list of all team conveners, members, and external partners on the provided template
- A two-year budget by fiscal year and detailed budget justification
- Biosketches for all team conveners and members (letter of commitment or two-page resume/CV if external)
- References, if used in narrative

# Level 2 application narrative

Attach a document (10 pages maximum) with the following items:

- **The challenge (2 pages)** Provide an overview of the challenge. In your description, address high-level or aspirational goals and impact of your proposed work on the state of New Mexico and New Mexicans.
- **The plan (3-7 pages)** This section contains the research questions, goals, and plans for the team's research and related activities. The contents of this section are intended to provide the reviewers with a picture of how the team will go about their research to address the identified challenge.
- **Team self-assessment (1 page)** How does your team hope to benefit from participating in the Grand Challenges? If selected to participate, how can the Grand Challenges program best help your team succeed?

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# Level 2 application team charter/norms

Team charters/norms or comparable mechanisms should include:

- **Team vision and mission**
- **Goals and deliverables** - Outline the team's goals for the two-year program and what deliverables the team intends to produce (e.g., publications, public events, community-engaged research work).
- **Team structure** - Describe how your team is structured in terms of leadership, membership, and partners.
- **Communication plans and agreements** - Describe how your team will communicate, including meeting schedules, tools or resources that will be used for project management, file storage, and collaborative work. The team may want to include a community agreement that guides how individuals will interact respectfully and inclusively.
- **Conflict resolution process** - Everyone hopes their team will be conflict-free, but that does not reflect the reality of working collaboratively. Please describe how your team will resolve disagreements.

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# Level 2 application budget

- Level 2 is budgeted for a maximum of \$200,000 per team over the 2-year program. Indicate the major items for which your team will utilize its budget with a justification narrative explaining what each budget line supports.
- Your team should budget for a program coordinator; options include paying for a portion of an existing administrative staff member's time or hiring a student/graduate assistant on a part-time basis.
- Other appropriate budget items include expenses for effort coordination, student hires, participant incentives, stakeholder outreach, and pilot data collection and analysis, including pilot project funding. Large portions of the budget should not go to faculty time or course buyouts, though a modest amount of summer salary is allowable.
- Please break down the budget by fiscal year, assuming a start date of July 1, 2026, and an end date of June 30, 2028.

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# Level 2 additional attachments

- A list of all team conveners, members, and external partners on the provided template
- Biosketches for all UNM-based team conveners and members
- Letters of commitment or two-page resume/CV for all non-UNM/external team members
- References if used in narrative

# Level 2 key dates and deadlines

- Letter of Intent due **Friday, February 27, 2026**
  - Teams are asked to submit a brief letter of intent that includes team name, name of person submitting the letter and their contact information, and a very brief (1-2 sentence) description of the topic area. Submit letter to [grandchallenges@unm.edu](mailto:grandchallenges@unm.edu).
- Application Deadline **Friday, May 1, 2026, at 5:00pm**
  - Application materials must be submitted through UNM's InfoReady System
- Decisions expected by mid-July 2026

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# Resources

- The full RFP can be found at <https://goto.unm.edu/od7ne>
- Several team science resources are available at <https://grandchallenges.unm.edu/resources/index.html>
- The Grand Challenges office has resources for developing team charters, visions and missions, research roadmaps, community agreements, and other key application components.
- Grand Challenges and the Faculty Research Development Office can assist with development of team charters and other application materials.

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# Frequently asked questions

- **Can my team apply if we didn't complete Level 1 of the program?**
  - YES!
- **Who should be on my team?**
  - At least four members from at least two disciplines; GC and FRDO can help you find members
- **Is Grand Challenges Level 2 funding a grant?**
  - No, you are participating in a program, and the funding is just one piece

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# Grand Challenges Level 2 program

**What questions  
do you have?**

Tracy Wenzl, Sr Program Manager, [grandchallenges@unm.edu](mailto:grandchallenges@unm.edu)  
Faculty Research Development Office, [frdo@unm.edu](mailto:frdo@unm.edu)

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