MEIF SMALL CAMPUS INITIATIVE

Request for Applications (RFA) - FY 2026

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# Context, Target Outcomes, and Programmatic Changes

In 2009, the University of Maine System created the Small Campus Initiative (SCI) to provide Maine Economic Improvement Funds to the five smaller campuses of the University of Maine System and Maine Maritime Academy. Funds must be used in accordance with the Statutes that govern the Maine Economic Improvement Fund (MEIF).

The key components of the statutory language passed by the legislature are to invest in applied research and development in the target areas and to support the development of private enterprise based upon research and development performed within the University of Maine System and the Maine Maritime Academy. The target areas are identified below, in the section on eligibility.

The following goals have been established for the program:

* Generate measurable economic benefits for the State of Maine through financing high-impact innovation projects, with an emphasis on growing good quality technology jobs;
* Encourage stronger linkages among Maine’s research, development and commercialization organizations that will yield sustained gains in the future;
* Increase the level of economic activity in the State, through nurturing technology development entities here in Maine as well as attracting new activity from outside Maine.

To support these goals, the targets for the fund’s investments are to:

* Increase research capacity and activity;
* Support new technologies, licensing and commercialization;
* Increase economic development partnerships;
* Support R&D workforce development.

Any proposal made to the MEIF SCI must explain how it will address these targets. Projects are expected to have an emphasis on student research learning experiences and to discuss project alignment with the State Economic Development Plan (found at <https://www.maine.gov/decd/strategic-plan>) and recommendations of the Economic Recovery Committee (found at <https://www.maine.gov/future/initiatives/economy/economic-recovery-committee>).

In FY2026, the University of Maine System may allocate up to $655,500 to support the MEIF SCI. There are three separate competitions: Research Initiation Grants, Research Grants, and Research Infrastructure Grants.

* **Research Initiation Grants**, intended for faculty applicants who have not been prior recipients of MEIF support. (Funding level of $5,000 to $75,000, not to exceed three years).
* **Research Grants**, larger funding mechanism for scientific or engineering research. (Funding level of $20,000 to $200,000, not to exceed three years).
* **Research Infrastructure Grants**, small grants to support facilities and resources for faculty research in the targeted sectors. (Funding level of $2,000 to $5,000 for single investigator proposals, up to $75,000 for multi-investigator proposals).

Current award recipients may apply for additional funding for substantially similar projects as those previous rounds where they can demonstrate a strong need and significant economic impact. Applications relating to previously funded projects will be held to the highest standard, must have clear justification for additional funding and demonstrate significant economic impact.

# Eligibility

Applications must meet all eligibility criteria as follows.

The projects must fall within one or more of the following seven technology sectors:

* Aquaculture and Marine Technology
* Biotechnology
* Composite & Advanced Materials Technology
* Environmental Technology
* Advanced Technologies for Forestry and Agriculture
* Information Technology
* Precision Manufacturing Technology.

Special consideration may be given to proposals that also fall within the high growth target sectors identified in the state science and technology plan 2023 (available at <https://umaine.edu/mieab/executive-summary>: aerospace; artificial intelligence; biobased alternatives (specifically advanced building products, algae & algal products, biochemicals or biomanufacturing); human health (specifically bio-medicine &-engineering advances or healthy aging); renewable energy (offshore wind energy or tidal energy).

Only the following institutions may be the primary applicant:

* University of Maine at Augusta,
* University of Maine at Farmington,
* University of Maine at Fort Kent,
* University of Maine at Machias,
* University of Maine at Presque Isle, and
* Maine Maritime Academy.

Besides having an appointment at one of these institutions, applicants to the Research Initiation Grants may not apply as principal investigator (PI) in other categories. Applicants may submit only one Research Grant application as PI in this cycle but may be co-PI or subrecipient on other applications.

Any primary applicant is encouraged to collaborate with partner organizations including non-profit research organizations and private companies. MEIF SCI funds may be used to support partner organization expenses through sub-awards as long as all other award criteria are met (eligible expenses, technology sectors, match, etc.) and sub-awards include necessary provisions to support intellectual property protections and commercialization. The University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine may be partners in projects; however, MEIF SCI funds are not intended to fund expenses at these two institutions. Should such expenses be necessary for the project, please consult program staff before incorporating into a proposal.

State or federal agencies that carry out research or other related activities can be a collaborating partner on a project but cannot apply for nor receive award funds.

Awards made in the MEIF SCI must be used to fund direct expenditures that promote the goals and targets established above. These expenses can include faculty and staff time, student support, equipment purchase or facilities renovations to make universities eligible or competitive for federal or private-sector funding. Awards made in the Research Infrastructure Grant program should not duplicate equipment or facilities at the University of Maine or University of Southern Maine that are readily available for use by faculty at the small campuses.

# FY26 Funding Cycle

## Types of Funding Opportunities

In FY2026, the University of Maine System may allocate up to $655,500 to support the Small Campus Initiative (SCI). There are three separate competitions offered according to the timeline below: Research Initiation Grants, Research Grants, and Research Infrastructure Grants.

* **Research Initiation Grants**

A smaller funding mechanism for faculty members who have not been previously supported by MEIF. This mechanism is intended to prepare the faculty member to be able to submit competitive proposals to external organizations.

* + Funding level: from $5,000 up to $75,000 over a maximum of 3 (three) years. The maximum single year award for the grant may not exceed $50,000.
	+ Funds may be used for faculty time during the regular school year (via buy-out, pending unit approval) or summer, student support, equipment, access to specialized facilities, or other expenses that support the purpose. Emphasis is placed on gathering preliminary data and establishing capacity to submit competitive proposals to external organizations following directly from this support.
* **Research Grants**

A larger funding mechanism for more advanced scientific or engineering research.

* + Funding level: from $25,000 up to $200,000 over a maximum of 3 (three) years. The maximum single year award for the grant may not exceed $100,000.
	+ Funds may be used for faculty time during the regular school year (via buy-out, pending unit approval) or summer, student support, equipment, access to specialized facilities, or other expenses that support the purpose. Emphasis is placed on the conduct of top-quality research and development; student engagement; and the achievement of the targets of the MEIF as listed in the section on Context, Target Outcomes, and Programmatic Changes above.
* **Research Infrastructure Grants**

A mechanism to ensure facilities and resources are available to support faculty research in the targeted sectors on the small campuses.

* + Funding level: from $2,000 up to $5,000 for single faculty applicants, from $5,000 up to $75,000 to support multi-investigator needs.
	+ May include partial or whole support of shared facilities, equipment and software (including operation and maintenance, licensing and support), technicians or other elements directly related to the conduct of research and development.
	+ The infrastructure must support research and development but may also be used in student training.
	+ PIs must be tenure or tenure-track faculty at an eligible institution. Applicants must demonstrate current and articulate projected demand for requested infrastructure support over an appropriate time period.

## Application and Review Process and Timeline*[[1]](#footnote-1)*

The application and review process consists of the steps listed below:

FY 2026 Award Cycle Activity

September 8, 2025 Release of MEIF-SCI RFA

January 14, 2026 Applications due

January 14 - April 14, 2026 Reviews conducted and awards negotiated

June 1, 2026 Anticipated award start date

Final applications must comply with all the requirements of this RFA. Applications must be received by 5:00 pm on January 14, 2026 through the UMS InfoReady grant review portal: <https://umaine.infoready4.com/> . All applications will be subject to an administrative review where applications will be reviewed for compliance with RFA requirements and guidelines. Applications found incomplete or not in compliance with requirements will not be reviewed. Applicants will receive acknowledgment of receipt of their application via email within two business days. Questions about the application process can be directed to Edward Derrick, Office of Research Development, University of Maine, edward.derrick@maine.edu and 207-581-2461. All applicants will receive their written reviews by electronic communication.

## Research Initiation Grants

Proposals should be written in 12pt font with 1” margins. A Research Initiation Grant application has the following elements:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Content | Page Limit |
| **I.** | **Coversheet** | 1 page using template provided |
| **II.** | **Executive Summary** - Clearly summarize the applicant’s qualifications, the significance, objectives, and methods of the proposed research for a general audience, and the expected impact on MEIF target interests.  | 1 page entered directly into a text box in InfoReady |
| **III.** | **Scope of Work**  |   |
|  | **A. Background** - Provide information necessary to understand the proposal research and technologies being developed in the project. | 3 pages |
|  | **B. Project Description** - Clearly describe goals, impact, and feasibility of proposed research or technology specifically being catalyzed through this funding. As much scientific detail should be included so reviewers can make an informed evaluation of the quality of the project. |
|  | **C. Team/Institutional Merit and Commitment** - Explain the experience, skills, and capability of the personnel conducting work on the project and the quality of the institution’s commitment to the project. Include discussion of the nature of any collaborations or linkages between research, development and commercialization. |
|  | **D. Relevance to Targets** - Explain the impact on MEIF targets of: a) increasing research capacity and activity (particularly focused on opportunity for follow-on funding); b) supporting new technologies, licensing and commercialization; c) increasing economic development partnerships; and d) supporting R&D workforce development (including student engagement in the work). Please also discuss notable alignment with the State Economic Development Plan and recommendations of the Economic Recovery Committee. |
|  | **E. Project Milestones Schedule** | 0.5 pages |
| **IV.** |  **Budget and Justification** | up to 2 pages |
| **V.** | **Application Attachments** |   |
|   | **A.    Curriculum Vitae – PI** | 2 pages |
|   | **B.    Curriculum Vitae – collaborators** | 2 pages per |
|   | **C.    Letters of collaboration** | as needed |

Research Initiation Grants will be reviewed against the following criteria, further described in the accompanying document, *Evaluation Criteria*: scientific or engineering importance and merit; feasibility; team and institutional merit and commitment; and broader impact on Maine’s economy (including student engagement and workforce development, potential to support new technologies, licensing and commercialization, or increased multisectoral partnerships). Priority will be given for those proposals clearly articulating a path for future external support and engaging students.

## Research Grants

Proposals should be written in 12pt font with 1” margins and include the following elements:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Content | Page Limit |
| **I.** | **Coversheet** | 1 page using template provided |
| **II.** | **Executive Summary** - Clearly summarize the significance, objectives, and methods of the proposed research for a general audience, and the expected impact on MEIF target interests.  | 1 page entered directly into a text box in InfoReady |
| **III.** | **Scope of Work**  |   |
|  | **A. Background** - Provide information necessary to understand the proposal research and technologies being developed in the project. | 5 pages |
|  | **B. Project Description** - Clearly describe goals, impact, and feasibility of proposed research or technology specifically being catalyzed through this funding. As much scientific detail should be included so reviewers can make an informed evaluation of the quality of the project. |
|  | **C. Team/Institutional Merit and Commitment** - Explain the experience, skills, and capability of the personnel conducting work on the project and the quality of the institution’s commitment to the project. Include discussion of the nature of any collaborations or linkages between research, development and commercialization. |
|  | **D. Relevance to Targets** - Explain the impact on MEIF targets of: a) increasing research capacity and activity (particularly focused on opportunity for follow-on funding); b) supporting new technologies, licensing and commercialization; c) increasing economic development partnerships; and d) supporting R&D workforce development (including student engagement in the work). Please also discuss notable alignment with the State Economic Development Plan and recommendations of the Economic Recovery Committee. |
|  | **E. Project Milestones Schedule** | 0.5 pages |
|  | **F. If applicable, relation to prior MEIF SCI funding**  | Up to 1 page |
|  | **G. Summary of results from each MEIF SCI award to PI in the past three years** | Up to 1 page per award |
| **IV.** |  **Budget and Justification** | up to 2 pages |
| **V.** | **Application Attachments** |   |
|   | **A.    Curriculum Vitae – PI** | 2 pages |
|   | **B.    Curriculum Vitae – collaborators** | 2 pages per |
|   | **C.    Letters of collaboration** | as needed |

Research Grants will be reviewed against the following criteria, further described in the accompanying document, *Evaluation Criteria*: scientific or engineering importance and merit; feasibility; team and institutional merit and commitment; and impact on Maine’s economy (including student engagement and workforce development, potential to support new technologies, licensing and commercialization, or increased multisectoral partnerships). Priority will be given for those proposals articulating a path for future external support; impacting community and/or industry; and engaging students.

## Research Infrastructure Grants

Proposals should be written in 12pt font with 1” margins. A Research Infrastructure Grant application has the following elements:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Element | Content | Page Limit |
| **I.** | **Coversheet** | 1 page using template provided |
| **II.** | **Executive Summary** - Clearly summarize the current and anticipated research to be supported by the research infrastructure proposed, and the expected impact on Maine across the MEIF investment targets. | 1 page entered directly into a text box in InfoReady |
| **III.** | **Scope of Work**  |   |
|  | **A. Background** - Provide information necessary to understand the capacity of the applicant(s) and institution to take advantage of the requested infrastructure. | 5 pages |
|  | **B. Project Description** - Clearly describe the infrastructure being proposed and the trajectory of research or technology development specifically being catalyzed through this funding. As much scientific detail should be included so reviewers can make an informed evaluation of the quality of the project. |
|  | **C. Management and Commitment** - Describe how the infrastructure will be managed, maintained and shared if applicable. Include discussion of the participating organization’s commitment to the infrastructure during and, if applicable, after the grant period. Include discussion of the nature of any collaborations or linkages between research, development and commercialization. |
|  | **D. Relevance to Targets** - Explain the impact on MEIF targets of: a) increasing research capacity and activity (particularly focused on opportunity for follow-on funding); b) supporting new technologies, licensing and commercialization; c) increasing economic development partnerships; and d) supporting R&D workforce development (including student engagement in the work). Please also discuss notable alignment with the State Economic Development Plan and recommendations of the Economic Recovery Committee. |
|  | **E. Project Milestones Schedule** | 0.5 pages |
| **IV.** |  **Budget and Justification** | up to 2 pages |
| **V.** | **Application Attachments** |   |
|   | **A.    Curriculum Vitae – PI** | 2 pages |
|   | **B.    Curriculum Vitae – collaborators** | 2 pages/collaborator |
|   | **C.    Letters of collaboration** | as needed |

Research Infrastructure Grants will be reviewed against the following criteria, further described in the accompanying document, *Evaluation Criteria*: the scientific importance and merit of the research to be conducted; the extent to which the infrastructure will make a substantial improvement in the applicant’s capability to conduct relevant scientific or engineering research, to improve the ability to attract non-state funds, or to support advancement of Maine’s priority technology sectors; the team and institutional merit and capacity to support the infrastructure; and impact on Maine’s economy (including student engagement and workforce development, potential to support new technologies, licensing and commercialization, or increased multisectoral partnerships). Priority may be given to proposals with a plan for continued support after the end of the grant period.

## Applicants in Multiple Categories and Previous Recipients

Applicants to the Research Initiation Grants may not apply as PI in other categories. Applicants may submit only one Research Grant application as PI in this cycle but may be co-PI or subrecipient on other applications. Current award recipients may apply for additional funding for substantially similar projects as those previous rounds where they can demonstrate a strong need and significant economic impact. Award winners from any of the past three competitions are asked to summarize outcomes of their awards.

## Review of Proposals

Applications will be scored and ranked according to the criteria described above for each opportunity. Appropriate reviewers will be recruited by UMaine’s Office of Research Development. Completed reviews from the panel will be confidential information and may be disclosed only to the applicant and program administration staff. All applicants will receive their written review scores and comments by electronic communication.

The Written Review phase will conclude with a report by the review panel to the UMS of its grouping of applications as Highly Recommended, Worthy of Consideration, and Not Recommended, based upon the consensus review of each application. Because any competitive application must have solid technical and scientific merit, strong institutional commitment and clear economic benefit to Maine, only the highest ranked applications will be recommended to move forward to the next stage of consideration.

# Award Details

Following award notification, UMS staff will prepare the final terms of the award contract for each project. The contract may include changes to the application and/or budget due to evaluation findings or funding availability. Awards are made to institutions on behalf of the principal investigator. Award recipients are expected to complete the project as described in the application as funded and as amended, and the contract will bind the award recipient to a scope of work. MEIF SCI awards will be for projects of three years or less in length. All award agreements will require:

1. Reporting requirements. Reporting requirements will be finalized in the award agreement, but will include at a minimum:
	1. Regular (at least annual) or milestone reports including progress and economic impact measures, and milestones met;
	2. Final reports, including financial information;
	3. Proprietary information: If a report contains proprietary information, the information must be identified by asterisks and bold brackets on the page in which it appears.
2. Intellectual property information. Applicant institutions must comply with the University of Maine System Policy Governing Patents and Copyrights. For awards involving partners with the primary applicants, all technology developed prior to the award will continue to be owned by the party that developed the technology. Improvements or new inventions developed during the course of the award will continue to be owned by the discoverer/developer of the technology. In situations where another party owns the technology, the participating company may enter into a licensing agreement to use the technology. In some cases, a pre-existing ownership agreement may be in place between the parties. The existence of such an agreement must be stated in the applicant’s application. In a collaboration of researchers or institutions, where intellectual property might be an issue, parties are encouraged to enter into an intellectual property agreement and indicate this in the application.
	1. Intellectual Property Plan: Where applicable, awardees are required to submit an intellectual property plan as part of the award contract process.

In addition, contracts will require, where appropriate, provisions such as, language governing human subjects and animal use, required disclosures, and changes in project personnel, team, scope, and budget.

Award payments will be made upon receipt of regular and milestone reports and back up financial information demonstrating the use of funds as detailed in the approved application and budget. Payment will be made within 30 (thirty) days of receipt of narrative and financial reports that meet UMS’s approval. Funds should be expended according to the timeline of the proposal, although campuses may request unspent money be carried forward through a written request that is well justified.

1. Timeline subject to slight variation; any changes made before the due date will be amended in this document; any changes made after the due date will be announced to all applicants. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)