

Report on Activities of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) for 2025-2026

Overview:

From: Orsolya Lautner-Csorba, Chair, Research Advisory Committee (RAC)

Subject: Report on Activities of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) for 2025-2026

Committee Members: Fadhl Alakwaa, Audrey Bennett, William A. Calvo-Quirós, Orsolya Lautner-Csorba, Karen Downing, Seth Guikema, Magda Ivanova, Tyler Nix, Greg Rybarczyk, Mrinal Sarkar, Quentin Stout, Nina White, Jesse Capecelatro (*SACUA Liaison*)

Meeting Dates and attendance:

- Wed. 9/17 from 1-2pm (Planning)
- Wed. 11/12 from 1-2pm, attendance: 8/13
- Mon 12/8 from 1-2pm, attendance: 7/13
- Mon 2/9 from 1pm-2pm, attendance: 9/13
- Wed 3/18 from 12-1pm, attendance: 7/13 and 5 guest from the ITC
- Wed 4/8 from 12pm-1pm, attendance: 10/13

2025-2026 Committee Charge

1. **IT/Research Collaboration** - In conversation with the Information Technology Committee (ITC), discuss ways that IT might enhance support for U-M researchers, including through AI technologies.
2. **Evolving Federal Actions** - Monitor and respond to evolving federal actions impacting research funding. Reassess the implications of federal policy shifts, including the drawdown of funding in critical areas, and explore viable alternative funding strategies. Evaluate the bridge funding program developed by the OVPR and suggest amendments that respond to the changing structures of federal funding. Discuss ways to support research and publishing in climate science, diversity, equity and inclusion, and other areas that have been de-funded by federal agencies.
3. **Communicating Research Impact** - Develop strategies for faculty to communicate the impact of UM research. Identify ways to articulate and disseminate the University's research contributions at the regional, state, national, and international levels. Engage community partners to help share these narratives with policymakers.
4. **Interdisciplinary Research Support** - Strengthen support for interdisciplinary research across units. Examine barriers to meaningful cross-unit collaboration and propose concrete solutions to enhance support for interdisciplinary centers and initiatives beyond the current limited frameworks (e.g., MIDAS, Blue Sky).



5. **Emergent Issues** - Consider emergent issues or topics brought forward by RAC committee members, SACUA, or the VP for Research and Innovation for discussion over the course of the year

Committee Actions and Information obtained

- **Worked** closely with Vice President for Research Arthur Lupia to **share faculty perspectives** and **provide advice on research issues** at the University of Michigan. **Provided ongoing feedback throughout the year** on concerns including: federal research funding and its direct impacts on faculty work; high-performance computing capacity; the use of AI in research; student-faculty collaboration; guidance affecting faculty and students with international backgrounds; promotion criteria for research-track faculty; transparency and communication between faculty and university leadership; research areas that receive limited attention or recognition; and emerging issues e.g., the CSCAR closure and BLOCK grant terminations.
- VP Lupia's **updates included:** research expenditure, grant submissions, grant termination and appealed cases, indirect cost rate challenges, FAIR model, new awards, challenges of international collaborations, safeguards, Bold Challenges Program as a means of cross-collaboration, Genesis initiative, DARPA's desire to collaborate with faculty, and ongoing conversations with congressional staff in both major political parties regarding future government-higher education collaboration, NIH's and NSF's current funding status.
- **Met** with Trachette Jackson, Associate Vice President of Research-Strategic Partnerships and Inclusive Excellence, to **discuss** Michigan Research Launchpad and **provide faculty feedback**. The Michigan Research Launchpad represents a "one-stop shop" that increases visibility of OVPR initiatives and connects faculty to support through workshops and events. Over 300 faculty have participated to date. Reported outcomes include 118 faculty supported and significant recognitions: 28 major honors and 33 medals and prizes.
- **Met** with Don Jordan, Senior Director of Research Communications, to discuss the *Michigan Research* Newsletter. **Discussed** strategies on how to galvanize lawmakers and the public to support research and **provided feedback** regarding communication on a variety of topics (questions), such as:
 - **Recommended feature themes/areas in upcoming issues:**
 - **E.g. Religion at U-M:** the university's historical foundations, current scholarship and initiatives, and U-M's commitments to inclusion and care across religious perspectives.
 - **Areas that need more visibility: e.g.**
 - Dialogue on the American experience: research and programming that convene diverse viewpoints and help communities understand societal change and prepare for the future.
 - Research infrastructure partnerships (Los Alamos + HPC): clear, accessible coverage of goals, timelines, benefits, and safeguards.
 - Under-recognized research, work



- Elevate dialogue-focused work that bridges differences and surfaces multiple perspectives.
- **How can OVPR better support this?**
 - Strengthen communications support for research faculty
 - Provide training to translate research/messages for external academic audiences.
- **Identifying key audiences for research, and does the message get through to them?**
 - Better define and intentionally target external academic partners (beyond campus), ensuring outreach is planned and measurable.
 - Address misinformation proactively regarding U-M/Los Alamos collaboration and the forthcoming HPC center (shared facts, FAQs/talking points).
- **Met** with Lisa Prosser, Associate Vice President for Research-Health Sciences and Research Faculty Affairs, to discuss updates to the research scientist criteria review. RAC **suggested** that some scholarly contributions (e.g., patents) are not consistently recognized in appointment and promotion criteria and welcomed the review committee's support in ensuring these accomplishments will be reviewed and appropriately considered. The review committee will work on sharing their findings with stakeholder groups through the Winter term. In June the revised criteria will be disseminated in the annual promotion memo. Implementation is expected in September 2027.
- **Met** with Shandra White, Associate Vice President for Research-Sponsored Projects to discuss the Research Safety and Security Initiative Program. AVP White **discussed** the recommendations across five workstreams with focus on specific outcomes. The five workstreams include Oversight of Biological and Other Research Materials, Training and Policy, Research-related Vetting and Onboarding, Facilities Security, and Change Management and Communications. AVP White and the Committee discussed the development of two new SPGs that focus on Principle Investigator responsibilities and research security. The Committee **provided feedback** on these items, as well as on the training program recommendations, via a separate form.
- **Advocated** for the re-opening of CSCAR to Vice President Lupia, in alignment with SACUA and Senate Assembly advocacy goals. RAC **offered** to serve as a sounding board for future decisions on similar issues. RAC also **expressed a willingness to help identify and advance** solutions that best meet faculty needs.
- **Advocated** for the importance of Block grants for the arts and humanities and **pursued additional contacts** to further investigate the impact of the loss of block grants and potential alternative funding ideas.
- **Held a joint meeting** with the Information Technology Committee (ITC) and Vice President Ravi Pendse to discuss his team's efforts to **improve research computing** for the U-M community and artificial intelligence. RAC **requested** transparent communication regarding the Great Lakes High Performance Computing Cluster and on the communication/negotiation with Los Alamos. RAC



also **discussed new updates** on the responsible use of different AI tools, network infrastructure, data protection and cybersecurity.

- **Met** with Zach Weber, Government Affairs Manager, to **discuss** the state of indirect costs and government funding on research. It was also noted that the U.S. Senate HELP Committee recently held a hearing titled “Transparency and Trust: Exposing Malign Foreign Influence in Higher Education,” underscoring that research security in higher education remains a key focus in Congress.
- AVP Orr **updated RAC on recent trends in federal funding** to U-M relative to prior years, highlighting factors to monitor such as agency budget levels, NIH’s transition to multi-year budgeting, and shifts in federal priorities toward corporate performers and historically less-funded locations. RAC also **initiated** a discussion on U-M’s response to evolving federal guidance on work involving international students, particularly those from countries designated by the federal government as adversaries.
- **Met** with Assistant Vice President for Research Development Jill Jividen and **discussed** the topic of ‘Interdisciplinary Research Support’. The committee **received an overview** of OVPR’s Bold Challenges initiative (launched in 2022) aimed at breaking down silos, catalyzing cross-campus collaboration, and increasing large, center-scale grant success through flexible funding and staff support. OVPR outlined three support pathways for faculty teams: Pollination events (networking + up to \$10K for follow-up activities), Boost (semester-long early-stage collaboration support + staff help and up to \$75K), and Accelerate (positioning teams for large external awards + staff support and up to \$125K). **RAC voiced strong support for interdisciplinary efforts** and **urged** OVPR to help units value interdisciplinary research and ensure promotion pathways recognize and encourage such collaborations.

Recommendations and discussion points included:

- Leveraging senior faculty/administrators with experience on major grant panels to help teams prepare stronger proposals.
- Improving awareness on the Flint and Dearborn campuses (e.g., via the committee newsletter); and using Michigan Experts to identify collaborators for faculty with limited bandwidth (noting it is currently more STEM-oriented).

Recommendations

- Continue to request federal updates from the Vice President for Research at each committee meeting.
- Request more information on internal funding sources to remain abreast of relevant changes, new programs, etc. and, request information on other sources of research funding through foundations and corporate funds.
- Investigate ways to proactively seek feedback on research challenges to better advocate for faculty and voice their concerns and challenges to the administration.



- Request more information on data infrastructure needs, especially regarding the Great Lakes project.
- Further research on how faculty can leverage U-M's new partnership with Los Alamos to bolster their research, e.g. student funding, computer infrastructure, and other research opportunities. Proactively gather faculty feedback on research barriers across units.
- Improve transparency and communication around available internal funding opportunities.
- Explore mechanisms to support non-tenure track faculty with discretionary research funds.
- Invite program managers from both the National Science Foundation and National Institute of Health to provide insight into how to strategically adapt to recent changes in their offices.
- Develop initiatives to engage more with the Dearborn and Flint campuses.
- Discuss ways to better communications and cross-campus collaborations, especially smaller scale items (e.g. MIDAS).
- Develop an end of year deliverable that can be shared with SACUA, the Senate Assembly and Faculty Senate.
- Review the impact of changes to internal seed funding across schools and units

As a conclusion of the committee's work in the 2025-2026 academic year, the RAC members recommend the following topic for charges for 2026–2027:

1) Keep research faculty informed about federal changes

- Include a “federal updates” segment at every meeting focused on what changes mean for researchers (proposal strategy, compliance, reporting, risk, deadlines).

2) Improve transparency and communication about internal funding

- Provide regular updates on internal funding (new programs, changes, deadlines, eligibility, award size, review criteria).
- Share pathways to non-federal funding (foundations, corporate/industry, consortia), including who at U-M can help and how to engage.
- Recommend a more searchable, centralized view of internal opportunities (calendar + program inventory) with consistent program descriptions and examples.
- Clarify points of contact and expected timelines for decisions.
- Develop feasible options to provide discretionary research funds to research faculty (eligibility, accountability, sustainability).
- Propose pilots and potential sources of support.

3) Assess impacts of internal seed/bridge funding changes

- Review how changes to internal seed funding affect research faculty across schools/units and career stages.
- Recommend adjustments to improve equity, clarity, and effectiveness.
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4) Proactively collect research faculty concerns and represent those to administration



- Establish an organized mechanism to gather research faculty feedback across units.
- Regularly deliver synthesized themes, evidence, and prioritized recommendations to the administration.
- Track items over time (what was raised, actions taken, current status).

5) Provide actionable updates on data and HPC infrastructure

- Provide concrete information on Great Lakes 2 (timeline, access, allocation/pricing, onboarding/training, migration support).
- Provide concrete information on the **Los Alamos collaboration and planned HPC** (how faculty can leverage it now, student support, computing access, constraints, timeline, contacts).

6) Strengthen industry partnerships and provide practical pathways for research faculty

- Identify collaboration models that strengthen work between research faculty and industry partners (sponsored research, shared infrastructure, talent pathways, data access, IP/licensing approaches, co-designed agendas).
- Produce a “how-to at U-M” guide for research faculty: concrete steps, templates, and campus resources to initiate, formalize, and sustain partnerships.

Overall Summary of Committee Work

During 2025–26, the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) worked proactively and effectively to strengthen research support and elevate faculty priorities across the University of Michigan. RAC engaged regularly with OVPR, ITS, and government affairs to track rapid federal policy and funding shifts, grant terminations and indirect cost policy, address research security and international collaboration guidance, and advocate for clear communication, practical solutions. The committee advanced key improvements in research infrastructure (HPC, data storage, AI tools, cybersecurity), interdisciplinary (cross-campus) collaboration, and research-impact communications, while elevating emerging faculty concerns (e.g., CSCAR and BLOCK grants) and promoting fair recognition of diverse scholarly contributions in promotion criteria.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the valuable support and assistance of VP Arthur Lupia; Alena Stocking from the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR); Luke McCarthy, Eric Vandenberghe, Meaghan Blanchard from the Faculty Senate Office (FSO), and Jesse Capecehatro as SACUA Liaison.

The RAC members also appreciate the time and constructive dialogue shared between the committee and the invited quest speakers.