

Guelph Institute for Environmental Research

FAQs

What is it?

The Guelph Institute for Environmental Research is an interdisciplinary research institute that spans all seven Colleges.

What will it do?

The Guelph Institute for Environmental Research will:

- (1) Stimulate interdisciplinary research and a sense of community among U of G researchers;
- (2) Showcase our strengths in environmental research to national and international audiences;
- (3) Demonstrate institutional commitment to environmental research, to the outside world; and
- (4) Provide a common identity, *additional* to existing departmental and collegiate identities, for researchers working in this field.

Why an institute?

With 225 faculty members spanning all seven colleges, the University of Guelph has a critical mass of researchers studying many different aspects of the environment. However, because that critical mass is dispersed across the breadth of the University, Guelph's reputation in the field is perhaps less than it might be. *In order to gain international recognition and support research that is both important for society and a strength of the University of Guelph, the Provost has approved a base-budget to support a research institute.* The institute will raise Guelph's national and international profile in environmental research, by showcasing our strengths and stimulating interdisciplinary research in this field. The institute represents a commitment to identifying new arenas of research and provides institutional recognition that the really important contributions are often to be found at interdisciplinary boundaries.

What activities will the institute support?

The core business of the institute is supporting interdisciplinary thematic working groups that will research and highlight contemporary topics in environmental research (see below). The institute will support a new Thematic Working Group every second year. In addition, the institute will provide small grants every year to support workshops, meetings, travel, speakers, and modest direct research costs. The institute will also hold an annual conference that showcases our work to a variety of stakeholders.

What is a Thematic Working Group?

The core business of the GIER is running interdisciplinary thematic working groups (TWG). A TWG is led by at least two University of Guelph Faculty members from two different colleges. Typical TWGs would also have the participation of at least one external expert in the discipline, a postdoc, and two PhD students. TWGs select a broad topic of interest to industry, NGOs, policy-makers, and/or the public.

In collaboration with the selected academic visitor(s),¹ the TWG theme leaders, postdoc and graduate students will use case-studies, meta-analyses, systematic literature reviews, pre-existing (Big) data and/or other approaches. They may also collect novel data, construct conceptual, mathematical, or machine learning models, or engage in other collaborative research activities to address the question(s) posed by the working group. TWGs follow a five-year cycle, with one TWG starting every other year, and one ending every other year (once steady-state is reached). Each year the GIER would host a conference, the highlight of which would feature the work of the completing TWG, but would also include reports of progress and discussion from every active TWG, and ideally will be attended by all members of the GIER as well as external audiences.

An annual meeting?

The activities of this annual meeting comprise:

- Annual reports from each active TWG
- Wrap-up symposium from a TWG completing its work that year
- External keynote speakers, mainly, but not exclusively, associated with the completing TWG symposium
- Short presentations by University of Guelph Faculty and graduate students on their research, public engagement, or work in the policy arena
- Annual report from the Executive Director

The highlight of the annual meeting would be the Hammond Lecture, a currently modestly endowed annual lecture organized by the School of Environmental Sciences.

What about non-thematic working group research costs?

A research fund of \$100,000 per year² will be available, to which *individual* researchers may apply to support: exceptional graduate students, postdocs, workshops, conferences, guest speakers, or small grants that support the direct cost of research. This fund may also be used to support collaborative group grant proposal development.

How will the Institute be governed?

The Institute will have an Executive Director and a Governance Committee. The Governance Committee (GC) will comprise one faculty member from each college and two members external to the university (perhaps from government, NGO, or academic). The GC will be responsible for the strategic direction of the Institute, the Institute budget, for selecting the thematic working group from each biennial competition, and for awarding small grant funding from the Institute. The Executive Director functions as the chief operating officer and spokesperson for the Institute. The Executive Director is responsible for day-to-day management of the Institute budget, supervision of on-going thematic working groups, communications, promotion, and periodic strategic planning. The Executive Director represents, champions, and promotes the work of the Institute internally and externally.

¹ These 'academic visitors' might be faculty members at another institution (perhaps on sabbatical leave), or one or more participants from NGOs, governmental organizations, industry, etc. Beside benefiting the TWG directly, and the broader Guelph research community indirectly by their presence and interactions, academic visitors also get the opportunity to come to know Guelph and its research community, and thereby Guelph's reputation spreads nationally and internationally.

² The exact amount of money available for allocation in any given year depends on the level of funding allocated to each TWG during that period.