



Frequently Asked Questions

What is Amazon Catalyst?

Amazon Catalyst is a collaboration with select universities and professional organizations. Amazon Catalyst's mission is to seek out and fund bold and innovative projects proposed by members of the ECS community. Amazon Catalyst is NOT a fund to support basic research. Rather, it is a project fund. Proposals submitted for funding by Amazon Catalyst must address a visible problem in the world and present a practical solution to that problem.

Why is Amazon building the Catalyst program?

The purpose of the Amazon Catalyst program is to learn more about problems that people see in the world, to support early stage ideas that address these problems, to integrate and engage with academic and professional communities, and to develop ecosystems of innovation.

What differentiates Amazon Catalyst from other programs led by technology companies?

Companies have engaged in collaborations for many years. These collaborations have typically centered on technology companies funding technology research for the technology needs of today. However, Amazon Catalyst is different. We are less interested in research and more interested in **impact**. What are the problems that you see today that are not being addressed? What are the "pain points" that frustrate you or others? What do you want to do to solve these problems? We aim to fund bold, disruptive ideas at the conceptual stage to enable the first steps of validation.

How do I apply for an Amazon Catalyst grant?

[Follow these submission instructions.](#)

When are applications accepted? Until 2359h PDT, July 2, 2018

What types of ideas are you looking for?

The world has a lot of problems. Some can be complex while others can be simpler but still impact large numbers of people. We're looking for solutions to problems that you have personally encountered or you see experienced by others. Preference for funding will be given to big, super-creative projects that specify milestones that can be achieved in the time frame and budget of a grant. No prior data is needed. Early stage projects are fine.

What types of ideas are you NOT looking for?

Proposals that do not describe a solution to a real problem that real people have, will not make good projects for Amazon Catalyst at ECS grants. Basic research projects whose end goal is a published paper or collecting additional knowledge on a well-know, well-documented problem are also not appropriate for the program. Try to avoid copycat business models (e.g., an ad-supported social network), ideas that



have limited potential to scale (e.g., a restaurant), or ideas with limited benefit to society (e.g., a new, addictive, mobile game). This is going to be a lot of work, so make it worth it! Grants will not be awarded to fund incremental research (e.g., our next step in the five-year program is to do...), or to simply keep the lab running, so to speak. There are other ways to do that.

Do ideas have to be related to Amazon or Amazon's business?

No. Projects do not need to have any connection with Amazon or with Amazon's businesses so take the Amazon Catalyst at ECS program as an opportunity to dream big about whatever it is that is your passion!

How much money is an Amazon Catalyst grant?

The amount of funding that is awarded to selected applicants is variable: it is based on the nature of the project and the work required to test the proof-of-concept. All grantees will share from a pool of \$100,000.

How long do I have to carry out a project?

The timeframe to complete will vary from project to project and will be established at the time of the award. To give you a ballpark figure, typical projects will take between 3-12 months to complete, and there will be progress reports required at 3 and 6 months.

Do I have to sign a contract if I am awarded an Amazon Catalyst grant?

Yes. As a condition of accepting an Amazon Catalyst at ECS grant, you and members of your team (if applicable) will be required to sign a Grant Agreement describing the grant and associated terms.

What's a "press release" and why are you asking me to write one?

A press release is a public announcement issued to the news media for the purpose of letting the public know about newsworthy developments in an organization. Creating a hypothetical press release helps you clarify your thinking, provides a high-level overview of your project, and explains who would benefit and how they would benefit. It's a very helpful exercise!

Write the press release from the perspective of a public relations department either from the university or from your group (which may be an organization or company), describing the successful completion of the project. When you write it, imagine that real people who care about the solution you propose are going to read it. Use as few words as possible, and choose words that a reader not educated in your topic would understand (avoid jargon or marketing buzzwords like simple, easy, fast, etc.). Put the most important information first - imagine that no one reads past the first paragraph. And of course, be sure to tell a compelling story. Here is a suggested outline to help you get going:

- Use a press heading: "<city> (NEWS WIRE) – <date of project completion> –"
- Describe your project
- Who will benefit and how they will benefit



- The opportunity or problem
- The approach or solution
- Quotes from people on your team that capture the value of the project
- Hypothetical testimonials from the people that would benefit from the project that reinforce why they care about your project
- How people can get started, get involved or learn more.

Do you have any examples of press releases I can use for guidance?

Sure. You can find examples of Amazon press releases [here](#). Here's an [article](#) about Amazon press releases, and here's an [article](#) on Amazon's Working Backward process.

You mention that projects should address big problems. What do you mean?

The problem around which your project is focused should be a large-impact, problem that is based on and cites data and statistics for support. It should not be a technical problem, or a "this does not yet exist" problem (just because something doesn't exist doesn't mean that it should be done!). For example, the problem should not be phrased as "X does not yet exist..." or "it is currently not possible to do X..." but rather, "X people die each year from tuberculosis worldwide" or "X people have their computer accounts hacked each year, costing the United States economy over \$X dollars..." Note that we do not require that the project proposed in the application completely solve the problem that we ask you to describe – it can be just the first step toward solving that problem.

You mention that projects should focus on solutions. Can you clarify?

Your project should outline specific tasks toward an achievable goal, and should not be an academic study for the sake of learning. For example, if the problem being addressed is the impact of climate change on a specific population of people, the solution should not be to "study a specific population of people impacted by climate change," but rather, to "build a program to do X for people impacted by climate change." Likewise, if the problem being addressed is lung cancer, the solution should not be "to study a signal transduction pathway related to lung cancer," but rather to "synthesize a new drug for the treatment of lung cancer based on the X signal transduction pathway."

Why do you ask us about the "customer"? I'm not proposing a new product for Amazon!

Thinking about who benefits from one's work is an important task. If nobody benefits from the project, then one might question why you would even want to do it in the first place! Note that this is often a difficult question to answer. It is unlikely that *everyone* will care about your solution. More likely, it will be a specific person or group of people that have a vested interest in solving the problem. For example, if your solution is a new type of X-ray machine for medical imaging, the people that care the most about it may not be the patients that receive the X-rays, or the physicians that administer them, but rather, the hospital-based purchasers that are responsible for ordering new equipment and maintaining a high quality of care in the system.



Why do you ask us about why now is the right time to do this project? Is timing that important in innovation?

Sometimes a project describes a good solution but at the wrong time. We want you to think about why now is a good time to be pursuing this project. Have certain events brought an issue to the public's attention? Has a new technology enabled the project to work now that wasn't available in the past?

Do I need to provide a demo video / website / picture / etc.?

While visuals, videos, and websites are helpful, they are by no means required for being selected. For a grant, Visuals can be diagrams outlining the scope of a problem in the world, photos of a product, a timeline for completion, etc. A visual can be as simple as a sketch on a sheet of paper that you scan in. A video can be as simple as you standing in front of a white board explaining what you want to do.

How do I upload my demo video / website / picture / etc.?

Rather than have you upload, we prefer that you email us a link. For visuals, please include a link to a single PDF (.pdf) or PowerPoint presentation (.ppt) file. The file should be located in a publicly accessible online directory and should not exceed 10 MB in size. For videos, just include a link to a video-sharing site. For websites, just include a link to the website.

Where do I upload my business plan?

We don't care about a formal business plan. Answer the questions in the application, and you'll be set for consideration.

How will I be informed about the status of the application after submission?

We'll send you a confirmation email after submission and will keep you periodically updated about the status of your application until a decision has been made.

Is there a complete list of rules for the application process?

When available, those rules will be available here.

What is the evaluation process for Amazon Catalyst proposals?

Amazon Catalyst proposals are evaluated in a two-stage process:

The first stage is a screen of initial applications to ensure that they meet the criteria for a grant. Proposals in this stage will be evaluated on a variety of factors including (i) how well the proposal addresses a need faced by people, (ii) how well the proposal describes development of a product to address that need (the solution), (iii) the novelty and creativity of the solution, (iv) the scalability of the solution, (v) how well the proposal outlines specific tasks towards an achievable goal, (vi) the capability of the team in carrying out the specific tasks outlined, (vii) the readability of the application, and (viii) the potential of the project to capture the attention of the public.



Proposals that pass that stage of evaluation will be sent to the Amazon Catalyst at ECS Evaluation Committee for review and a vote. If offered a grant through the Catalyst program, awardees will be required to execute certain documentation, including a Grant Agreement describing the grant and associated terms.

How long will it take to hear back about my application?

We'll send you a confirmation email after submission, and will keep you periodically updated about the status of your application until a decision has been made. Proposal submission will close at 11:59 PM Pacific Time, July 2, 2018 and our goal is notify recipients by August 3, 2018.

Who sits on the evaluation committee?

The Amazon Catalyst at ECS Evaluation Committee comprises members from Amazon and ECS. Depending on the project, the evaluation process may seek additional insight from experts in specific technologies affiliated with Amazon or ECS. These additional experts will be sought for advice on ideas but will not be voting members of the Committee

If I'm passed over for a grant, will I receive any feedback on my application?

Unfortunately we are not able to provide feedback on unsuccessful grants.

Ok, now I have an Amazon Catalyst at ECS grant. What do I have to do?

Once awarded a grant, you are expected spend the time period of the grant working on the tasks proposed to test your proof-of-concept. You are not required to work full time on the project, but we do expect a high level of commitment. Periodically throughout the grant period and at the conclusion of the grant period, you will be expected to provide brief written reports to Amazon and ECS detailing your project and the progress achieved.

What can the funding be used for?

The funding can be used for any legal purpose required to carry out the objectives of the project. The funding can be used to buy equipment, to set up a website, to hire contractors, to rent space, etc. In this manner, the funding should be thought of as similar to seed capital in a startup company. In the application, we ask that you outline the key tasks of your project and how the Catalyst funding will be used to carry out those tasks. Having a well-thought-out plan for how the money will be spent will benefit your application considerably.

Whom do I contact if I have a question or suggestion about the application?

Please reach out to Shannon Reed (Shannon.Reed@electrochem.org) at ECS.