



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

LAF Case Study Investigation Program

Application Instructions: Project Proposal for Firms

The Landscape Architecture Foundation (LAF) is pleased to announce the call for Project Proposals for the 2026 *Case Study Investigation Program* (CSI).

This document provides background information and instructions on the materials needed for a firm to propose one or two projects for study during the 2026 CSI program, which runs from February 2 to August 3, 2026.

The full set of application materials must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT on November 1, 2025.

For more information about CSI, visit: <http://www.lafoundation.org/csi>. Please contact LAF Senior Program Manager Megan Barnes (mbarnes@lafoundation.org) with questions.

Case Study Investigation: Firms and Projects

Case Study Investigation supports designers in assessing and documenting the performance of exemplary landscape projects. Through CSI, select practitioners work with LAF-funded faculty-student research teams to produce [Case Study Briefs](#) for the *Landscape Performance Series*. This online database of over 200 case studies is used by designers, students, researchers, policymakers, and advocates to find precedents and make the case for sustainable landscape solutions.

CONTENTS

- Overview
- Program Goals
- Benefits of Participation
- Firm Expectations
- Projects
- Eligibility
- Selection Process
- Application Process
- Application Contents



OVERVIEW

The *Case Study Investigation* (CSI) program is a unique research collaboration and training program for faculty, students, and practitioners. Through CSI, LAF funded faculty-student research teams work with leading practitioners to document the impacts of exemplary, high-performing landscape projects. Teams develop methods to quantify the environmental, social, and economic benefits of built projects and produce Case Study Briefs for LAF's [Landscape Performance Series](#).

Faculty and design firms apply to CSI in partnership to produce a case study of a specific built landscape project.* Each research team is led by a faculty CSI Research Fellow and supported by a student Research Assistant. The academic team interfaces with a firm liaison, who provides information about the project goals, design, design and construction process, and intended performance. Clients, site managers, and other project stakeholders may also contribute data and insights.

The CSI program runs annually from February to August. During the spring, faculty-student teams work with firm liaisons to develop the research plan and case study narrative. Site visits and field data collection are primarily conducted during the summer. The academic teams use this information to craft the performance benefits and document the project in the online [Case Study Brief](#) format. Throughout this process, LAF provides training, iterative feedback, and opportunities for interaction among teams. Final case studies undergo a peer review process and are published to the *Landscape Performance Series* in the fall and winter.

**LAF may be able to assist in matching prospective CSI Research Fellows with prospective firms/projects based on geographic proximity, common interests, and relevant expertise. Prospective applicants wishing to be matched should contact LAF well in advance of the application deadline to discuss.*

PROGRAM GOALS

The CSI program is highly collaborative and helps to bridge the gap between research and design practice. By investing in this research, LAF is generating much-needed information and precedents to evaluate performance, demonstrate value, and make the case for sustainable landscape solutions. The *Landscape Performance Series* database of over 200 case studies is used by designers, students, researchers, journalists, policymakers, and advocates.

Because resources (including time, expertise, and funding) are often limited for performance evaluation, the CSI program seeks to identify valid, defensible, and replicable metrics and methods that can be used within a short timeframe by non-experts with limited resources. This makes the 6-month CSI program an ideal testing ground for new methods.

As a training program, CSI is an important impetus in moving the landscape architecture discipline toward designing every project with specific performance objectives, documenting project goals and design intent, routinely collecting performance data, and integrating landscape performance in design education.



BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

For designers, CSI is a unique opportunity to document and showcase exemplary work, expand capacity to capture performance information, build relationships with academic researchers, and support an unparalleled professional development experience for students. It also allows firms to demonstrate leadership in performance-based design and strengthen relationships with clients and other project stakeholders.

FIRM EXPECTATIONS

Participation in CSI requires ongoing involvement and commitment from the design firm, particularly the Firm Liaison who serves as the point person for the CSI academic team. The liaison must be responsive and engaged with the research team throughout the CSI program. Specifically, the Firm Liaison is expected to:

- Provide key project information including goals and design intent, site features, challenges, lessons learned, photos, and illustrative plans/drawings
- Provide access or serve as the liaison between the academic team and key project personnel such as firm leadership, colleagues, clients, collaborators, and other project stakeholders
- Assist the research team in identifying potential performance benefits and methods to quantify them
- Participate in CSI program webinars

Firms devote an average of 20-35 staff hours to the CSI program between February and August. The exact time commitment depends on availability of information and previous work done to document the project.

PROJECTS

Proposed projects should have the potential to generate a range of quantified environmental, social, and economic performance benefits. They should reflect innovation in design, materials, policy, partnerships, and/or process for the given project type and geographic region. Projects that yield the most successful case studies have compelling benefits and a compelling narrative that shares not only successes but also challenges, failures, and lessons learned.

CSI research teams are more readily able to produce a set of comprehensive benefits when project goals and design intent have been clearly articulated, baseline information has been collected, and aspects of performance have been modeled during the design process (such as stormwater management) or tracked through operations (such as site use/attendance).



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

Additional consideration will be given to projects with a strong narrative, goals, and benefits related to: (1) climate change and resilience, (2) diversity, equity, and inclusion, and/or (3) biodiversity.

ELIGIBILITY

To participate in CSI, designers apply with a particular project to be studied. For design firms, the applicant must be the landscape architect of record for the project. Nonprofit organizations, government agencies, facilities departments, and other entities that engage landscape architects are also eligible, provided that they played a primary role in the design and implementation of the project.

Proposed projects must be built and operating/in use for at least one year by the time the CSI program begins in February. Completed phases of a multi-phase project are eligible, as are discrete, easily distinguished portions of a larger project. Projects completed more than 10 years ago are not recommended for CSI because landscape performance should be measured against the project's design goals and intent, and over time this information is often lost and/or the built project is modified.

SELECTION PROCESS

Each year, 5-8 research teams and 10-12 projects are selected for the CSI program through an open, competitive process.

Faculty and design firms apply to the CSI program in partnership, but submit separate applications. Faculty may apply to produce either one or two project case studies with the corresponding design firm(s). Design firms apply with one or more projects and may partner with different faculty members for different projects.

Teams are selected for participation in the CSI program based on their potential to generate high-quality, compelling case studies with a range of quantified environmental, social, and economic benefits. CSI Research Fellows and student Research Assistants are evaluated based on their experience and demonstrated interest in landscape performance evaluation. Projects and firms are evaluated based on the quality of the project and the availability of information to document performance. Additional consideration is given for projects that have a strong "Before/After" image pair that showcases the transformation of the site. Evaluators also consider the strength of the team relationship and commitment to the CSI process.

All applicants will be notified of a decision by mid-December.

APPLICATION PROCESS

LAF uses SlideRoom as its online application platform and will only accept applications submitted through this system. All application materials must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT on November 1.



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

Visit <http://lafoundation.slideroom.com> to use the system. Once you have created an account, scroll down to select the appropriate application type (Project Proposal), and click “Begin” to start the application process. You may save, edit, and review your work prior to submitting. An application fee of \$10 (USD) must be paid through SlideRoom when the application is submitted.

APPLICATION CONTENTS

Prospective CSI Research Fellows and design firms apply as a team, but submit separate applications. The CSI Research Fellow application requires the name of the proposed firm liaison(s) and project(s), and the Firm/Project Proposal requires the name of the proposed CSI Research Fellow. All submissions must adhere to guidelines and deadlines in order to be considered. Additional materials will not be reviewed.

Firm/Project Proposal: Required Materials

1. **Firm Information:** This section requests information about the design firm and the firm liaison, who will serve as the point person for the CSI academic team and the liaison for firm leadership, staff, and project stakeholders. It also requires basic information about the proposed faculty partner(s).
 - Firm name, range of services offered, mission, street address, and why the firm wants to participate in CSI
 - Firm Liaison name and contact information, role on submitted project(s), and why the liaison wants to participate in CSI
 - Communications contact name and information
2. **Project + Partner:** This section requires significant background information about the proposed project(s) for study and verifies understanding of LAF's Case Study Briefs. Because the CSI program is the primary mechanism to further investigate some of the content requested, this section asks for your ideas about what might be possible for your project, with placeholder numbers where applicable. You may wish to consult with your faculty partner to complete some of the below sections.
 - Basic project information including name, location, completion date
 - Name of proposed faculty partner and university and why the partner was selected
 - Additional project information including project awards and certifications, overview, why the project is a good fit for CSI, project design goals, sustainable features, and potential environmental, social, and economic benefits



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FOUNDATION

- Whether the project has strong narrative, goals, and benefits related to (1) climate change and resilience and/or diversity, equity, and inclusion; if so, specific description as to how the study of the project could produce strong case studies related to these themes
 - Whether there is any potential for client involvement in the CSI program and naming other project partners
 - Whether the project site has restricted access; if so, a letter from the client/site manager/individual pledging to allow the research team access is required
 - Whether the project site is ADA compliant
3. **Supervising Principal Form:** Upload a signed Supervising Principal Form confirming their awareness and support of the intent to participate in CSI. The form may be downloaded here: <https://www.lafoundation.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/CSI-2026-Supervising-Principal-Form.pdf>
4. **Letters of Support (optional but encouraged):** Upload any other letters of support from clients, site operators, managers, or other stakeholders. These may take any format desired; examples are not available. Please combine into a single PDF.
5. **Project Access Letter (only for sites with restricted access):** Required for restricted access sites only, and only those which the CSI researchers plan to access in person. Upload a letter from the client/site manager/individual in any format, pledging to permit the CSI researchers to access the site.
6. **Before/After Images:** Submit two images –
- One "Before" image of the site before the intervention
 - One "After" image of the site post-construction
 - Please do not submit more than two images for each proposed project, and do not submit collages. If needed, LAF staff will follow up with you for more images. If you are unsure about image selection, email mbarnes@lafoundation.org for advice.
 - If submitting two projects, please email the two required images for your second proposed project directly to mbarnes@lafoundation.org.