



optiMize

optiMize challenges students from all majors to turn their ideas into impact that can make the world more just and sustainable

The challenges of the twenty-first century require students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and perspectives to identify societal needs, take action, and innovate toward a positive future. At optiMize, we believe college is a time for students to develop their passions and their capacity to act on them, whether for climate solutions, public health, diversity and inclusion, education, social justice, poverty alleviation, or something else. optiMize encourages students to exercise their full range of curiosities, knowledge, creativity, and problem-solving ability while working in teams to build solutions to social challenges.

Since 2012, when optiMize was founded as a student organization, thousands of student-led projects have been incubated, combining entrepreneurship with goals for societal impact to make a difference in local and global communities. In 2015, academic leadership recognized the impact of our work and elevated optiMize from a student organization to a university program by integrating faculty, staff, and budget support into the structure.

optiMize is now the nation's largest co-curricular innovation and entrepreneurship program, annually engaging a diverse group of more than 1,000 students. optiMize's Social Innovation Challenge, a flagship initiative, is a multi-semester incubator that supports approximately 500 projects annually. The project groups presenting the most promising ideas participate in an intensive summer fellowship program to continue developing their businesses and nonprofits.

"The foundational skills provided by a liberal arts education—problem identification, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, research and experimentation, and communication—are fundamental to the overall success of social innovation and entrepreneurship, and no other institution in the nation is better equipped to lead in these efforts than the University of Michigan."

—JENI OLNEY, DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SOCIAL INNOVATION STUDENT SUPPORT

optiMize SUMMER FELLOWSHIP

Students come to optiMize with ideas and then work on plans to bring those ideas to the world. After completing the five-month optiMize Challenge—our incubator program that helps students develop their ideas through mentoring and a series of workshops—student teams pitch their projects, and optiMize Fellows are chosen. Supporting an optiMize Summer Fellowship empowers a student to focus on their project all summer without having to work a traditional summer job. Annual gifts of \$5,000 will fund one student’s experiences, or an endowed gift of \$125,000 will ensure a student’s participation each year in perpetuity.

optiMize PROJECT TEAM FELLOWSHIP

If selected for funding, each member of a team will receive a summer fellowship. Supporting a project team empowers an entire team of students to focus on their self-directed social impact project all summer. Gifts for team support are the most effective way to help optiMize meet our highest-priority need. An endowed gift of \$500,000 would establish a named award that would be presented annually to a project team. A one-time gift of \$10,000 will support an entire team’s summer fellowship.

eMerge LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

optiMize programs are organized by a dynamic partnership between a student organization and university staff. The eMerge Leadership Development Program is an intensive eight-month paid internship from August through April for the optiMize student leadership who are immersed in professional skill-building, time management, event planning and facilitation, budgeting, leadership, and communication skills to effectively and efficiently manage all aspects of the optiMize program for more than 500 student participants. An endowed gift of \$250,000 will create a named fund for this crucial program.



“optiMize played an indispensable role in bolstering the launch and sustainability of Refugee Garden Initiatives (RGI). The wealth of contacts, resources, education, and skills they’ve provided has been instrumental in shaping our vision for RGI. Through my journey with optiMize, I’ve honed my leadership skills and become a more effective advocate for our cause. This experience has truly been life-changing, affording me the opportunity of a lifetime to be an entrepreneur.”

*—Phimmasonne Owens, A.B. '22
Transfer student and optiMize fellow,
founder of Refugee Garden Initiatives, a
nonprofit empowering refugees through
land, food, and storytelling. Refugee
Garden Initiatives was featured in a PBS
NewsHour article, and Phimmasonne was
the keynote speaker for President Biden’s
2023 White House Task Force on
Immigration held in Dearborn, Michigan.*



TRANSFER BRIDGES SCHOLARSHIPS

In collaboration with partners across the college, Transfer Bridges helps community college students successfully prepare to transfer to Michigan and make the most of their time here. optiMize Transfer Bridges supports those students who are interested in social innovation, with dedicated programming that enhances their ability to focus on their goals. This funding enables them to forgo working a part-time job while at U-M and allows them the time they need to develop a self-directed social impact project. Annual gifts of \$6,000 support one student, and an endowed gift of \$135,000 will establish a named award for a new student each year.

SOCIAL INNOVATION PROGRAM SUPPORT

SOCIAL INNOVATION CHALLENGE WORKSHOP SERIES

When students have access to experienced leaders, they hear firsthand how to navigate challenges as they build relationships and gain perspective. The Social Innovation Challenge Workshop Series brings top change-makers to campus to lead action-based workshops for hundreds of optiMize students. Gifts provide needed funds to host guest speakers and workshop leaders, provide session materials, and create an engaging structure for our students. An endowed gift of \$500,000 can be recognized by naming the annual series of workshops. Annually, gifts of \$20,000 are needed to support this core program. An endowed gift of \$1M would support administration of the Social Innovation Challenge, including the Workshop Series.

optiMize STRATEGIC FUND

All donations to the optiMize Strategic Fund directly support optiMize programming and student fellows, allowing them to work full-time for the summer to bring their projects to life. Gifts of all sizes are needed to support areas of greatest need each year and ensure funds are available for students so their projects can make the greatest impact.

WAYS TO FUND YOUR GIFT

Your gifts of cash, pledges, or appreciated securities change lives. Wills, estate, and planned gifts allow you to create a lasting legacy that will enable the best and brightest minds to experience a liberal arts education, solve problems in a changing world, and yield ideas and innovations that will make a difference in Michigan and around the globe.

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