

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

MARYLAND SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM

For projects starting February 1, 2026

Pre-proposals due January 27, 2025 at 5:00 PM

Full Proposals due June 2, 2025 at 5:00 PM

Program Synopsis

The Maryland Sea Grant College (MDSG) seeks proposals for its next funding cycle. MDSG is seeking two-year, single or multi-investigator pre-proposals at the \$100,000 per year level for research projects within Maryland's coasts and watersheds focused on three areas: 1) healthy coastal ecosystems; 2) sustainable fisheries and aquaculture; and 3) resilient communities and economies. Principal investigators should focus on outcomes that can be achieved in a 24-month period. We anticipate funding 4 projects at the \$100,000 per year level. 50% non-federal cost match is required for each proposal (\$1 match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding). MDSG is particularly interested in proposals that specifically connect **to the needs of communities, and/or environmental management and policy** and include an **engagement plan** for effectively translating information to the specific audiences affected by research findings. MDSG support is offered on an open, competitive basis. The full solicitation with instructions specific to the request for proposals (RFP) will be maintained at <https://www.mdsg.umd.edu/funding-opportunities>.

Proposal Preparation and Submission Instructions

- **Webinar to discuss expectations for RFP and outreach:** December 12, 2024 at 1:00 PM EST
- **Preliminary Proposal (Pre-proposal) Submission:** Required. Due January 27, 2025 at 5:00 PM EST via [eSeaGrant](#)
- **Full Proposal Submission:** June 2, 2025
- **Application Instructions:** This solicitation contains specific instructions on the format and content that must be adhered to in each proposal. Failure to follow the instructions outlined in the text below is grounds for rejection without review.

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Important Notes for Principal Investigators.

Principal investigators must provide a strong rationale for how their proposed research will affect policy and/or management decisions and how that information will be communicated beyond academia. Proposals should recognize the importance of MDSG and NSGO cross-cutting principles of diversity, partnerships and climate change for a common foundation on which we implement our strategic plan.

A “**Data Management and Sharing Plan**” will be required in the full proposal (but not the pre-proposal). This will be an important component of the proposal evaluation and selection process. PIs should consider data stewardship funding needs as they develop their proposals. For more information, visit www.mdsg.umd.edu/data-management-and-sharing.

All proposals recommended for funding at the full proposal stage must submit an Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire (AECQ) for review by NOAA as part of the acceptance process.

Pre-proposals and full proposals must be submitted to Maryland Sea Grant through eSeaGrant. Please consult the proposal submission guidance and eSeaGrant portal well in advance of the deadlines.

I. INTRODUCTION

Our Mission

Maryland Sea Grant fosters healthy coastal ecosystems, communities, and economies through science, education, outreach, and broad collaboration.

Sound policy decisions for Maryland's coasts and watersheds demand comprehensive scientific information and novel research to address a variety of challenges facing our coastal communities and ecosystems. For example, effective coastal resilience and adaptive management require a broad understanding of many complex issues including coastal ecosystem function, watershed processes, social consequences, and economic opportunities in coastal communities (rural, suburban, or urban). Resilience to climate change and natural hazards, ecosystem-based management, sustainable aquaculture and seafood safety, pollutant abatement, and multiple uses of coastal resources and spaces continue to challenge coastal communities. Scientific and policy discussions concerning these issues emphasize the need for strong research input to help restore and create sustainable Maryland coastal ecosystems. However, success also depends on linking research efforts with resource uses, economics, and human communities—from rural to suburban and urban areas.

Using laboratory studies, field investigations, models, and/or socio-environmental studies, Maryland Sea Grant seeks research proposals that provide scientific and socio-environmental information that can inform policy decisions for fisheries management and sustainable aquaculture, climate change adaptation, coastal community resilience, and ecosystem restoration in coastal systems in Maryland. Proposals must demonstrate:

- Connections between the proposed research and the research priorities highlighted in this RFP.
- Integration among scientific approaches, research outcomes, and dissemination plans.
- Direct connections with users beyond academia, such as resource managers, citizen scientists, communities, and/or informal and formal learners.

PIs should engage and collaborate with extension specialists, end users, and other outreach specialists to develop a comprehensive engagement plan for the proposal.

Maryland Sea Grant has a special interest in proposals that are novel or exploratory; have a clear connection to management, policy, and stakeholders; link social and natural sciences research; and/or directly address issues relevant to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in our communities. We also encourage proposals for aquaculture research projects and coastal resilience projects that partner with underserved communities.

II. MARYLAND STRATEGIC RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Maryland Sea Grant is soliciting single or multi-investigator research proposals in the three focus areas highlighted in our 2024-2027 Strategic Plan. This strategic plan highlights the MDSG principles of **diversity, partnerships and climate change** as the leading priorities driving Maryland Sea Grant's programming and projects. PIs considering applying for funding through this opportunity should read and carefully consider Maryland Sea Grant's 2024-2027 Strategic Plan. Consistent with this plan, we seek proposals to co-produce science with partners to address issues facing historically underserved and underresourced coastal communities in Maryland.

Focus Area: Healthy Coastal Ecosystems

Promoting the sustainability of the Chesapeake and coastal bays and their watersheds requires science-based decisions about how and when conservation and restoration efforts can be most effective. To address conservation, restoration, and resilience of ecosystems, Maryland Sea Grant seeks proposals leading to actionable science that improves ecosystem-based decision making to address the complex socio-environmental issues in our watersheds, bays, coastal and marine waters. Maryland Sea Grant priorities include ecosystem processes; ecosystem responses to climate change; natural and anthropogenic drivers of ecosystem change; mitigation and adaptation to the effects of climate change; water quality; and contaminants. We invite proposals that address one or more of the following:

- How changing coastal, estuarine, and watershed conditions (e.g., temperature, salinity, precipitation, wind, waves, tidal flooding, nutrients, sediments, contaminants, sea level rise, extreme events) affect biodiversity, habitats, and ecosystem function and services on multiple spatial and temporal scales
- Ecosystem responses to human-driven stressors (e.g., climate change, energy development, water quality, marine debris, contaminants, coastal development, restoration, and management actions)
- How restoration efforts affect or are affected by changes in coastal and estuarine conditions
- Effectiveness of restoration, conservation, expansion, and other resiliency practices to prevent and/or reduce loading of nutrients, sediments, and other pollutants within the watershed
- Social, economic, and environmental research; synthesis; and statistical analysis to understand ecosystem change over time and to advance science-based management

Focus Area: Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture

An in-depth research foundation is critical for achieving profitable and sustainable aquaculture and wild fisheries in Maryland. Aquaculture, coupled with new techniques and tools in engineering and biotechnology, may expand the types of species produced and generate new consumer options, catalyzing economic development, job creation,

and a more diverse workforce. Improving species management processes and decisions, especially in response to changing environmental conditions, is essential for restoring and sustaining wild harvest fisheries. Equally important is developing understanding of the needs of multiple audiences with differing views and priorities to build support for effective ecosystem-based fisheries management strategies. Technologies to improve seafood products and enhance the industry's ability to deliver a safe and satisfying product are also important to ensure the economically sustainable use of Maryland's natural resources. We invite proposals that address one or more of the following:

- Sustainable recreational and commercial fisheries and aquaculture and their effects on ecosystem function and restoration
- Natural and social science research and models informing sustainable fisheries targets, economics, and ecosystem-based fisheries management
- Research and technology development in support of safe aquaculture and seafood production methods
- Sustainable aquaculture within Maryland, the Chesapeake Bay, and the coastal bays, including such research topics as multi-user conflicts, environmental impacts of and influences on aquaculture, optimization of aquaculture systems, and waterfront infrastructure and resilience.

Focus Area: Resilient Communities and Economies

The urgent need to adapt to the effects of climate change presents unprecedented challenges for communities and local governments throughout the Chesapeake and coastal bays and their watersheds. Changing climate requires comprehensive planning and adaptation across the region. Increased precipitation and accelerating rates of sea-level rise, both anticipated consequences of climate change, require well-informed communities who understand these issues and are engaged in strategic decision making to respond effectively. Further, inclusion of under-resourced communities historically excluded from information and community resiliency assistance must remain a priority for programming.

PIs are encouraged to consider multi-disciplinary natural and social science research that focuses on understanding critical decision points in community and land use planning that affect coastal and watershed ecosystem resilience and consider the socioeconomic consequences of how communities may respond to climate change (e.g., restoration, mitigation, and adaptation strategies). We invite proposals that address one or more of the following:

- Co-production approaches that help coastal communities become more resilient to the effects of climate change and extreme events, with priority for underresourced and highly vulnerable communities.
- Technologies and research-based strategies for sustainable and resilient communities, focusing on clean energy, shoreline erosion, coastal flooding, habitat loss, working waterfronts, green infrastructure, or extreme events

- Socio-environmental research to understand and help coastal communities become more resilient including integration of green design and climate science.
- Tools and strategies to engage with communities and decision makers regarding the risks from climate change and other hazards
- Socioeconomic value and ecological consequences of water resources management options (e.g. water quality, water quantity)
- Natural and social science research, including modeling, to understand the effects of landscape changes (e.g. wetland loss, inundation, saltwater intrusion) on ecosystems and coastal communities

III. AWARD AND ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Award Information

We anticipate supporting four research projects at about \$100,000 per year for February 1, 2026 to January 31, 2028. Projects are contingent on availability of federal funds. Maryland Sea Grant requires 50% **non-federal** cost share for each proposal (\$1 match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding). Full federally negotiated indirect cost rates are allowable. Note that pre-proposal budget estimates are expected to be realistic; a substantial increase in the final budget request will be viewed negatively and will likely result in rejection or budget cuts.

Successful full proposals are forwarded to the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) for official funding approval and review of NEPA compliance. Inclusion of a proposal in MDSG's proposal package to the NSGO does not guarantee final approval or funding.

As an addition to the core proposal competition, PIs may submit an addendum to participate in the [Maryland Sea Grant Research Fellowship Program](#) (MDSGRF) to support one graduate student for two years. Graduate fellowships should *add to* the proposal rather than complete the proposed scope of work. PIs are expected to meet their grant obligations fully regardless of whether they receive support for a fellowship.

B. Eligibility Information

Principal Investigators (PIs) must be affiliated with an academic institution or research laboratory in Maryland or the District of Columbia. Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs) on projects can be from institutions outside of Maryland or the District of Columbia. Non-academic or research institution partners may serve as Co-PIs (e.g., not-for-profit, state or federal agency, industry, or community partners). Single investigators and multiple investigator research teams from different institutions are encouraged to apply. Maryland Sea Grant extension specialists are welcome to serve as Co-PIs or senior personnel. Maryland Sea Grant encourages participation from the broad science and social science research community within Maryland and the District of Columbia and invites participation by investigators new to the Maryland Sea Grant RFP process.

As increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in coastal and marine science research is an important programmatic priority for MDSG, we especially welcome and encourage proposals from investigators at minority serving institutions. We encourage principal investigators to engage students and fellows from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, and individuals from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds that have hindered their ability to pursue a career in STEM.

IV. SCHEDULE AND SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

A. Preliminary and Full Proposal Schedule

Request for Proposals issued	December 5, 2024
Pre-proposals due	January 27, 2025
Pre-proposals reviewed, PIs notified	Late March 2025
Guidelines for full proposals available	Late March 2025
Full proposals due	June 2, 2025
Final proposal selection, PIs notified	Late August 2025
Omnibus proposal to NOAA	October 2025
Funding cycle	February 1, 2024 to January 31, 2026

B. Pre-proposal Submission Instructions

You must submit your pre-proposal online at <https://eseagrant.mdsq.umd.edu>. **The deadline is January 27, 2025 at 5:00 PM EST. The system will shut down automatically at the deadline, locking out late submissions. Pre-proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted.**

To submit a pre-proposal through our online system, you must do the following:

- Login to the proposal online submission system by following the link above. Fill out the registration information to create an account, if necessary.
- Click “Add Proposal” and enter a title to start a new submission.
- Complete the “Start Here”, “Principal Investigator”, and “Co-Principal Investigators” tabs.
- Upload the proposal narrative on the “Narrative Upload” form.
- Press the submit button on the “Submission Preview” tab.

Upon submission, PIs will receive an email confirmation and the system will label your proposal “submitted” on the “Submission Preview” tab. PIs are encouraged to keep a copy of the email confirmation for their records.

V. PRE-PROPOSAL PREPARATION INSTRUCTIONS

Pre-proposals should present a succinct but sufficiently detailed synopsis of the project in order to evaluate its relevance to the Maryland Sea Grant Strategic Plan, its technical

feasibility, and the PIs' qualifications. Pre-proposals are not letters of intent and will be evaluated rigorously in a highly competitive process. Pre-proposals should include a description of the problem (question(s) to be addressed), rationale for the research, methodologies and tools to be used in the effort, and benefits likely to be derived from the anticipated results. **PIs must follow the instructions regarding pre-proposal components as explained in this document or risk pre-proposal rejection.**

A. Formatting for Uploaded Components

For general text, use 12-point or greater Arial font. Captions and labels may be smaller but should be legible. **Use single spacing**, left justified only, and one hard return between paragraphs. All margins should be 1 inch. The project narrative of the pre-proposal should be typed continuously (that is, do not start a new page for each new section). The *References* and *Engagement Plan* should each start on new pages and are not included in the 3-page single-spaced limit required for the project narrative. The first page of the project narrative should be numbered 1, and numbering should continue throughout the narrative. Please save the completed pre-proposal as a PDF to upload to eSeaGrant.

B. Explanation of Pre-Proposal Components Submitted through eSeaGrant

eSEAGRANT TAB: START HERE

Provide your proposal title and any keywords. The dates of your project should be 2-1-2026 to 1-31-2028. On this tab, you can also add a collaborator—someone who has access to your submission—by clicking on the “Manage Collaborators” button. This person must already be registered for an eSeaGrant account.

eSEAGRANT TAB: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

Complete the requested information for the principal investigator and each co-principal investigator in the appropriate eSeaGrant form. You may only have one PI, but you may have multiple Co-PIs.

eSEAGRANT TAB: NARRATIVE UPLOAD

Indicate the competition focus and upload the proposal narrative file (PDF only).

Each pre-proposal narrative file must include the following components in this sequence:

- Cover page
- Project description (major headings), Limited to 3 pages, single-spaced:
 - Abstract
 - Project Background
 - Project Objectives
 - Project Details
 - Anticipated Outcomes and Results
 - Budget Estimate

- References
- Engagement plan, Limited to 1 page, single-spaced
- Curriculum vitae, Limited to 2 pages per PI/Co-PI

Letters of support are not allowed at the pre-proposal stage but are allowed at the full proposal stage.

COVER PAGE

Include the primary focus area/cross-cutting topic, pre-proposal title and full contact information for the PIs/Co-PIs on the cover page. We do not require that pre-proposals be routed through institutional research administration or be signed, as no binding financial commitments are required. However, follow your home institution's guidance.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The main body of the pre-proposal (excluding references) is limited to **three pages of single-spaced text and graphics**. Write your pre-proposal using the headings in the sequence listed in this document and following the formatting instructions above.

Abstract: Briefly summarize the proposed project objectives, methodologies, and rationale clearly and concisely. Emphasize the importance, relevance, application, and value to Maryland Sea Grant constituents. **Limit the abstract to 300 words.**

Project Background: Indicate the specific problem addressed by the proposed effort and provide sufficient background information to allow a preliminary assessment of the relationship of the problem to the research questions posed in this RFP.

Project Objectives: State the objectives of the research effort as they would appear in a full proposal. Research hypotheses, if relevant, should be clearly stated.

Project Details: You need not explain methods in detail. However, readers should be able to make a preliminary determination of the appropriateness of the proposed approach, including statistical analyses, for achieving the stated objectives.

Anticipated Outcomes and Results: Briefly explain the anticipated results and potential implications of those results in relation to Maryland Sea Grant priorities.

Budget Estimate: This pre-proposal budget estimate is a non-binding statement of your total funding request. Please provide in this section of the pre-proposal only your estimate of the dollar amount of your total funding request with a statement acknowledging your understanding that a 50% non-federal match on the total funding request is required. Please remember that your total budget estimate should include any indirect costs required by your institution. Substantial (>10%) deviations from the pre-proposal budget estimate at the full proposal stage are discouraged without prior consultation with MDSG. Further, Maryland Sea Grant recognizes that this pre-proposal budget estimate is not a commitment on behalf of your institution.

Please note here if you plan to participate in the separately funded competition to add a [Maryland Sea Grant Research Fellow](#) to your project.

REFERENCES

List references on a separate page. Reference pages are not included in the three-page maximum for the project description.

ENGAGEMENT PLAN

The engagement plan should explicitly describe how the proposed research emphasis(es) will **link to policy, management decisions, and/or behavior change** and how the results of the study will be **translated** for end-users outside of scientific peers and across the region as appropriate. The section should include 1) who the audience is for engagement/involvement in the project, 2) how user needs integrate with the research project, 3) how PIs will connect or engage end-users in the project, 4) what products/activities will be developed for, used by, or shared with end-users, and 5) what budgetary support will be requested. The description should explain how the PI intends to inform and advise interested parties outside of academia about how the research findings could help inform specific policy and management actions. Outreach efforts may also include working with K-12 education and informal learner partners through specific lesson building and teacher training activities or community engagement or collaborating with the art community, if appropriate to the research project. Potential tools or technologies that may arise from this research and be applied to audiences outside of academia should be noted. A detailed discussion of project engagement is available at: <http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/share-your-research>. This section is limited to **one page**. A more detailed engagement plan (and engagement budget, if appropriate) is required for the full proposal.

Discussions with Maryland Sea Grant Extension and Outreach Program specialists or other end-user partners are encouraged in the EARLY stages of pre-proposal development. Investigators should contact the Maryland Sea Grant office to discuss potential outreach approach and audiences (including industry, policymakers, the broad researcher community, and the public) and take part in our webinar. Extension specialists and program staff may contribute to projects or direct you to other appropriate partners. A list of Maryland Sea Grant Extension specialists and staff can be found at: <https://www.mdsg.umd.edu/directory-a>.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Provide a 2-page curriculum vita for each PI and Co-PI. We recommend you use the National Science Foundation Biographical Sketch or SciENCv format.

eSEAGRANT TAB: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

It is required that these questions be asked, but your response is voluntary. Please answer the questions as the PI of the proposal for you as an individual (not the team).

eSEAGRANT TAB: SUBMISSION PREVIEW

Review the data and filenames of your submission. Click the “Submit” button in the upper right corner to submit your proposal package. **You MUST click submit by the**

deadline or your proposal will not be considered, regardless of what you have already uploaded.

VI. FULL PROPOSAL PREPARATION GUIDANCE

Investigators interested in submitting a full proposal will have electronic access to *Guidelines for Preparing the Full Proposal*, which contains information on content, format, and necessary forms for full proposals. The guidelines will be available to download in late March at: <http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/funding-opportunities>.

VII. PROPOSAL REVIEW PROCESS

A. Pre-proposal Review

Maryland Sea Grant will conduct an extensive review to determine those submissions best qualified to compete for inclusion in the Maryland Sea Grant College Omnibus funding request to NOAA. At least three written reviews will be solicited. Pre-proposals will be evaluated by:

- External electronic reviewers
- Maryland Sea Grant Extension faculty
- Maryland Sea Grant's Academic Advisory Committee (AAC, provides recommendations based on all evaluations)

After the review process is completed, Maryland Sea Grant will review the AAC recommendations to determine which proposals will be encouraged or discouraged for further development. MDSG will then contact all PIs to provide the recommendation and blinded copies of all reviews. All PIs who submitted pre-proposals, regardless of the recommendation, are welcome to submit a full proposal.

Pre-proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria. Extension reviews will be based on the Relevance and Impact-Outreach criteria only.

Research Plan (30%)

- *Scientific merit*: What is the scientific and technical feasibility of the study?
- *Objectives*: Are the scientific objectives clearly stated and justified? Will they lead to actionable science outcomes?
- *Methodology*: Are the methods appropriate to the scientific problem outlined?
- *Time Schedule*: Can the PI complete the project in the allotted time frame specifically set in this Request for Proposals?

Relevance to Sea Grant (30%)

- *Relevance*: Is the proposal relevant to the RFP and MDSG Strategic Plan? Does the project address one of MDSG's priority research areas and cross-cutting principles?

- *Appropriateness*: How appropriate is support from Sea Grant for this proposal relative to other sources of funding? Does the proposal leverage Sea Grant resources effectively through coordination and collaboration with other programs, funding sources, and collaborators?

Potential Impact and Outreach (30%)

- *Opportunities*: Does the project provide actionable science outcomes that can be applied over short- or long-term timeframes? Is a well-developed engagement plan proposed to translate the results of the study in collaboration with end-users outside of direct scientific peers to drive policy or behavior change? Is co-production of science with communities considered and enacted, if appropriate for the study? Are MDSG personnel been involved, if appropriate?
- *Potential Impact*: Does the research have a potential to impact public policy, management decisions, and/or behavior change? Does the proposed work contribute to broadening access to science or increasing diversity in the workforce (either for team members or stakeholders)?

Applicant(s) (10%)

- *Team approach*: Has the applicant assembled an effective collaborative or multidisciplinary team, if appropriate? Have end-user groups been involved in a co-production model, if appropriate?
- *Knowledge of the Field*: Does the applicant demonstrate a clear, well-grounded knowledge of the field of study? Are the appropriate references acknowledged?
- *Previous Contributions*: Based upon the brief CV provided, does the applicant appear to possess the background and technical foundation needed to complete the project? Does the applicant have experience working with diverse communities or other diverse audiences?

B. Full Proposal Review

After full proposals are received, they will be sent out for external electronic review. In addition, an extension review panel and a technical review panel will be convened. The technical panel will consist of researchers and faculty from diverse backgrounds with expertise in the disciplines represented by proposals under consideration. Based on the technical panel's review, external written reviews, and extension panel reviews, the technical panel will recommend a set of proposals for Maryland Sea Grant to consider for funding. The specific criteria for these reviews will be laid out in the full proposal guidelines.

Depending on funding constraints and reviewers' comments, Maryland Sea Grant may ask PIs to revise their proposed budgets and scope of work, for example, by considering modifications to a proposed study.

C. Selection Criteria

For both the pre- and full proposals, the Maryland Sea Grant leadership team will conduct a final review and consider the review panels' recommendations. The Sea Grant director has final discretion to select proposals to fund based on panel recommendations, technical reviews, availability of funds, and specific programmatic priorities, which include having a diverse and inclusive portfolio of awards across institutions, research topics, strategic focus areas, program needs, and investigators. Selected proposals will be submitted to the National Sea Grant Office for concurrence.

VIII. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Notification of the Award

Notification of the award is made to the submitting organization by Maryland Sea Grant. Organizations whose proposals are declined will be advised as promptly as possible.

B. Reporting Requirements

As part of all award agreements, Maryland Sea Grant and NOAA require mandatory semi-annual financial and progress reports and a final report to evaluate the project. Grant money may be withheld pending completion of reports as outlined in the project terms and award conditions.

IX. CONTACTS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For further information about this RFP, please contact:

Maryland Sea Grant College
5825 University Research Court, Suite 1350
College Park, MD 20740
(301) 405-7500

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The Maryland Sea Grant College is a partnership between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the University System of Maryland. We are administered by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science. To learn more about Maryland Sea Grant's mission, previously funded research, or other funding opportunities, visit <https://www.mdsg.umd.edu>.