Delaware Sea Grant College Program
Graduate Student Research Request for Proposals
Funding Period February 1, 2028 through January 31, 2029

Letter of Intent Due Date: Friday, February 12, 2027, 3:00 p.m.
Full Proposal Due Date: Friday, April 23, 2027, 3:00 p.m.

Delaware Sea Grant is soliciting research proposals from currently enrolled graduate students for a one-year funding period that begins on February 1, 2028. In addition to the project budget (i.e., budgeted research costs), funded projects will also receive graduate student support, defined as a stipend, fringe benefits as required, 40% of tuition costs[1], and applicable indirect costs for the one-year period.

Proposed projects should address coastal challenges and opportunities that are important to the state of Delaware. Proposals from a broad range of disciplines regarding a range of topics that align with the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan are encouraged. The Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan specifically identifies research needs associated with adaptation to changing coastal conditions, exploration of the blue economy in Delaware, and ecosystem restoration. In addition to these needs, there are countless other opportunities to advance the objectives of Delaware Sea Grant through applied research. Researchers should carefully consider the priority issues and objectives presented in the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan to identify areas where applied research will help advance the organization's mission and vision.

Available Funding

Proposed projects may request up to $15,000 in research costs (includes indirect costs). Research costs may include: expendable supplies, equipment, travel, analytical costs, publication fees, conference fees, and other reasonable and justifiable costs related to the project. As noted above, in addition to the project budget (i.e., budgeted research costs), funded projects will also receive graduate student support for the one-year period.

Eligibility

This funding opportunity is available to current graduate students - either Master's, Ph.D., or professional degree (e.g., J.D.) - at a Delaware institution. Applicants may be working towards a degree in any discipline (e.g., science, engineering, social, behavioral, law, policy, or economic sciences), if they are engaged in rigorous inquiry and evidence-based research that is coastal- or marine-related and relevant to Delaware Sea Grant's mission and Strategic Plan. To be eligible for this funding opportunity, applicants must be in good standing at their academic institution.

To be eligible to submit a full proposal, applicants must submit a letter of intent. Letters of intent will be reviewed for relevance to the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan. Feedback will be

[1] Stipend, fringe benefits, and tuition costs will be based on those of the institution applying for graduate student support

provided to prospective applicants to guide development of the full proposal. Regardless of the feedback, all prospective applicants who submit a letter of intent are welcome to submit a full proposal.

Award Recipient Responsibilities

In addition to remaining in good academic standing and completing the funded scope of work, the following elements are required of students that receive Delaware Sea Grant graduate research funding:

- Submit semi-annual project updates in the Delaware Sea Grant reporting platform, eSeaGrant.
- Submit a final technical report that summarizes all of the work performed under the award (a template will be provided).
- Work with the Delaware Sea Grant Workforce Development Coordinator to develop and launch an individual professional development plan based on short- and long-term career goals.
- Collaborate with Delaware Sea Grant to publicize funded research activities and findings, including creating communications products and sharing story ideas. Funded students must independently create at least one product that demonstrates the project's value to Delawareans. This may include infographics, fact sheets, web story articles, or public presentations which will be determined in consultation with Delaware Sea Grant staff.
- Attend and participate in semi-annual Delaware Sea Grant Advisory Council meetings (two during the funding period). This may include presentation of study findings.
- Attend and participate in Delaware Sea Grant staff meetings (potentially up to six during the funding period) and other Delaware Sea Grant activities as applicable/requested. This may include community engagement activities or meetings with various interested parties. Delaware Sea Grant staff will work with funded students to ensure these requirements do not conflict with student schedules and are not overly burdensome.
- Participate in professional development trainings offered by Delaware Sea Grant (up to six during the funding period).
- All publications, theses, and dissertations produced as a result of Delaware Sea Grant funded research must be submitted to the Sea Grant Collection of the NOAA Central Library via Delaware Sea Grant. Delaware Sea Grant requires that all publications produced with program support (in total or partial) include acknowledgement of the NOAA award number provided by the Delaware Sea Grant.
- Share post-award milestones. Award recipients must remain in contact with Delaware Sea Grant after the conclusion of their funding to pass along information about graduation dates and career updates following graduation.

By submitting a proposal, applicants agree to these terms upon receipt of funding. Failure to comply with these responsibilities may lead to the termination of funding.

About Delaware Sea Grant

Delaware Sea Grant was established in 1976 to foster the wise use, conservation, and

management of Delaware's coastal resources through an integrated program in research, extension, education, and outreach. Delaware Sea Grant staff lead hands-on projects, deliver workshops and trainings, develop balanced written assessments, and provide one-on-one consultations regarding a range of issues pertaining to resilient communities and economies, healthy coastal ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, environmental literacy, and workforce development. Delaware Sea Grant also leverages federal and state funding to provide financial support to external partners for innovative research, community and economic development, and conservation projects. Benefits of this work are provided to a broad suite of coastal residents, communities, elected officials, businesses, and organizations. Delaware Sea Grant is a member of a national network of 34 Sea Grant programs that are located in coastal and Great Lakes states and U.S. territories. Delaware Sea Grant operates under the guidelines of the National Sea Grant College Program, which is part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Functional Work Areas

Operations of Delaware Sea Grant are guided by a Strategic Plan, which is an integrated response to the research, extension, education, and outreach needs identified within Delaware. The Strategic Plan details research and extension priorities and future directions organized by functional work areas. Each functional work area has associated goals, priority issues, and objectives. Applicants must indicate in their letter of intent and full proposals which priority issues and objectives their work will address.

Application Process

The proposal process involves two main steps:

1. Submit a letter of intent by 3 p.m. ET **Friday, February 12, 2027**
2. Submit a full proposal by 3 p.m. ET **Friday, April 23, 2027**

Letter of Intent Requirements and Review

***Letter of Intent*:** Letters of intent are required; to be eligible to submit a full proposal, applicants must submit a letter of intent. Before submitting a letter of intent, prospective applicants are required to schedule a meeting with the Associate Director of Delaware Sea Grant to discuss the proposal process and relevance and utility of the proposed research. This meeting should be scheduled by contacting Christian Hauser (hauser@udel.edu) via email.

The letter of intent process, including this meeting, is designed to ensure funded projects are relevant to Sea Grant's mission and Strategic Plan, and to give applicants feedback about anticipated funding success. Letters of intent should present a succinct but sufficiently detailed synopsis of the project in order to evaluate its relevance. Encouragement of full proposal submission is not a guarantee of funding.

Submission: Letters of intent must be submitted by email to Christian Hauser (hauser@udel.edu) by **3 p.m. ET Friday, February 12, 2027.**

***Style and Format*:** Minimum font size 12 pt. Minimum margin size one inch. Letters of intent

should be single-spaced.

***Content and Organization*:** Letters of intent must include the following sections (1-3) in the order listed.

(1) Title Page: Maximum 1 page. This page must include, in the following order:

- Name, affiliation, graduate program and degree sought, and contact information of the applicant
- Name, affiliation, and contact information of the applicant's primary academic advisor (if the applicant has an academic advisor)
- Project title
- Applicable Delaware Sea Grant functional work area(s)
- Total amount requested from Delaware Sea Grant and anticipated match funds
    - Applicants should work with their advisor's grant administrator to develop a budget
    - If you don't have an advisor, or your advisor doesn't have a grant administrator, contact Lori Hans, Delaware Sea Grant Fiscal Officer (lhans@udel.edu) for budgetary assistance at least two weeks prior to the letter of intent deadline

(2) Letter of Intent (main body of text): The letter of intent must be no more than 3 pages in length. It must contain the following sections:

Research Objectives: Describe what is being proposed, what the research will accomplish or determine, and how the project will improve understanding. *Recommended length: 1 page.*

Relevance to Delaware Sea Grant: Describe how this research addresses priority issues and objectives outlined in the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan. Indicate specific end users who will benefit from this research (e.g., resource managers, education professionals, community officials, private sector businesses) and how they will benefit. Be specific. Who needs the information that will be generated from the research and why? What change in behavior, management, or policy will result from the research? Has the need for this research been communicated and if so, by whom? *Recommended length: 1 page.*

Sharing Project Results: Describe how research findings will be shared with the organizations and people that need and will benefit from the information that was generated. This can be as simple as a one-page fact sheet for regulators, or a one-on-one meeting with a specific end-user. This should be concise and should focus on sharing findings with a specific, identified target audience. *Recommended length: ¾ page.*

(3) References: List any relevant scientific or technical references included in the letter of intent text. References do not count against page length totals.

Letter of Intent Review: Letters of Intent will be reviewed by Delaware Sea Grant College Program management, Marine Advisory Service staff, and/or members of the Delaware Sea

Grant Advisory Council for relevance to the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan and anticipated benefit to Delawareans.

Qualitative feedback will be shared verbally with prospective researchers to guide development of full proposals and to ensure that the value of proposed research to user groups is maximized. Regardless of the feedback, all prospective investigators that submitted a letter of intent are eligible to submit a full proposal.

Full Proposal Requirements and Review

***Full Proposal*:** Prior to submitting a full proposal, applicants are required to participate in a second meeting with the Associate Director of Delaware Sea Grant to discuss feedback from the letter of intent review process. Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider this feedback as they develop full proposals.

Full Proposal Submission: Please adhere to the following guidelines to ensure full consideration during Delaware Sea Grant full proposal review process. Submissions will be through an online portal, eSeaGrant. After submitting a letter of intent, applicants will be granted access to the Delaware Sea Grant proposal and reporting system and will receive an automated welcome email with login information. Full proposal submissions will be due via this portal by **3:00 p.m., Friday, April 23, 2027**. Full proposals will be reviewed for adherence to the guidelines provided in the RFP prior to technical review.

Please note, applicant submitting proposals that involve the use of human test subjects must state so clearly in their application. These proposed research activities require approval of the applicant's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before such research can proceed. Applicants are responsible for obtaining IRB approval from their institution or appropriate entity and providing that documentation to NOAA once the approval is obtained and prior to any NOAA-funded human subject testing. Proposals intending to use human test subjects should specify clearly in the timeline approximately when IRB approval will be obtained and when the testing is expected to occur.

Consistent with NOAA Administrative Order 216-128 Artificial Intelligence in NOAA, Delaware Sea Grant will permit applicants to use Generative Super Intelligence tools to assist with drafting and editing proposals, with the following baseline standards:

- The principal investigator and submitting institution maintain full accountability for the accuracy, objectivity, and scientific integrity of all submitted materials.
- Applicants must independently verify all facts, data, citations, and literature references produced by Super Intelligence tools.
- Applicants must transparently disclose within their proposal narrative whenever Generative Super Intelligence is used to substantially draft, develop, or synthesize content (beyond routine administrative aids like spell-check or autocomplete).

***Style and Format*:** Minimum font size 12 pt. Minimum margin size one inch. Proposals should be single-spaced.

***Content and Organization*:** Proposal submissions must include the following sections in the order listed.

(1) Title Page: Maximum 1 page.

- Name, affiliation, graduate program and degree sought, and contact information of the applicant
- Name, affiliation, and contact information of the applicant's primary academic advisor (if the applicant has an academic advisor)
- Project title
- Total amount requested from Delaware Sea Grant
- Applicable Delaware Sea Grant functional work area(s)

(2) Abstract: The abstract must contain a summary of the proposed project suitably written for dissemination to a non-scientific audience. It should be a self-contained document that identifies the investigator and project title. The body of the abstract (maximum 250 words) should include a brief description of the project, the overall goals of the project, methods to be employed and anticipated impacts of the project (i.e., benefits, outcomes). This document must not include any proprietary or sensitive information as Delaware Sea Grant will make it available to the public upon announcement of awards.

(3) The Proposal (main body of text): Full proposal text (the main body of text) may not exceed 10 pages. The proposal should contain the following categories:

Introduction and Research Objectives: Introduce the topic and describe the problem or opportunity of interest. What are the research questions addressed in this proposal? Summarize the research goals and objectives of the project: what is being proposed, what will the research accomplish or determine, and how will the project improve understanding. For hypothesis-driven research projects, list hypotheses to be tested here. Project objectives should be verifiable upon the project's completion. Ensure the descriptions are consistent with the required Project Milestone Chart as described below.

Relevance to the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan and the Needs of Delawareans: Describe how this research addresses priority issues and objectives outlined in the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan. Indicate specific end users who will benefit from this research (e.g., resource managers, education professionals, community officials, private sector businesses) and how they will benefit. Be specific. Who needs the information that will be generated from the research and why? What change in behavior, management, or policy will result from the research? Has the need for this research been communicated and if so, by whom?

Project Details: Describe how the project will be carried out, including methodology, relevant partners and their role, and any equipment or facilities requirements that are currently available and/or need to be acquired to perform the research.

Sharing Project Results: Describe how research findings will be shared with the organizations

and people that need and will benefit from the information that was generated. This can be as simple as a one-page fact sheet for regulators, or a one-on-one meeting with a specific end-user. Describe project deliverables and anticipated outcomes. This should be concise and should focus on how findings will be shared with a specific, identified target audience.

(4) References: List any relevant scientific or technical references included in the proposal text.

(5) Project Budget: Use Sea Grant Budget Form 90-4, which can be found at: https://seagrant.noaa.gov/insideseagrant/Implementation[2]. The initiation date for new projects in this proposal cycle will be February 1, 2028. Award maximums are set at $15,000. Please note that costs associated with scientific publications (e.g., color printing fees, online publication) should be included in the project budget. Please include in the budget any estimates for vessel usage (R/V, time, number of cruises, etc.).

- Applicants should work with their advisor's grant administrator to develop a budget
- If you don't have an advisor, or your advisor doesn't have a grant administrator, contact Lori Hans, Delaware Sea Grant Fiscal Officer (lhans@udel.edu) for budgetary assistance at least two weeks prior to the full proposal deadline

Graduate Tuition and Stipend: Do not include funds for graduate student support (neither stipend, 40% of tuition costs, nor applicable indirect costs) in the project budget.

(6) Budget Justification: Please refer to the instructions and sample budget justification located on the Delaware Sea Grant website. Justification should be presented in the same order as noted on the Sea Grant Budget Form 90-4.

- Applicants should work with their advisor's grant administrator to develop a budget justification
- If you don't have an advisor, or your advisor doesn't have a grant administrator, contact Lori Hans, Delaware Sea Grant Fiscal Officer (lhans@udel.edu) for budget justification assistance at least two weeks prior to the full proposal deadline

(7) Curriculum Vitae (CV): Maximum three pages. The applicant's CV should contain the following distinct sections after the applicant's name:

- Education
- Experience
- Professional Activities
- Publications

(8) Graduate Transcripts:

This funding opportunity is available to current graduate students - either Master's, Ph.D., or professional degree (e.g., J.D.) - at a Delaware institution. Applicants may be working towards a

[2] Please download: 90-4 Budget Form (Excel file) under Forms and Templates

degree in any discipline (e.g., science, engineering, social, behavioral, law, policy, or economic sciences), if they are engaged in rigorous inquiry and evidence-based research that is coastal- or marine-related and relevant to Delaware Sea Grant's mission and Strategic Plan. To be eligible for this funding opportunity, applicants must be in good standing at their academic institution. To confirm eligibility, a current graduate student transcript is required. An unofficial transcript is sufficient.

(9) Project Milestone Chart: See template located on our website (Project Milestone Chart).

(10) Letter of Support: A letter of support from the applicant's primary faculty advisory is required. To maintain confidentiality, the letter of support should be sent directly to Christian Hauser via email (hauser@udel.edu). Letters of support should detail the following:

- Self-motivation
- Academic and professional performance
- Leadership skills and interest
- Skills and interest in collaboration and teamwork
- How the applicant would benefit from engaging with Delaware Sea Grant during their graduate program
- Anything else Delaware Sea Grant should know about the applicant

(11) Non-binding list of competent reviewers: Applicants are required to submit a non-binding list containing at least 10 competent reviewers. Please note that Delaware Sea Grant is under no obligation to use any of the reviewers submitted by the respective applicants for funding, and all reviewers are screened for conflicts of interest with all proposed researchers. Include the name and contact information for each suggested reviewer.

Please note, students from institutions outside the University of Delaware are responsible for routing the proposal through their institution's research administration and for obtaining all required institutional endorsements prior to submission. If you have questions about proposal preparation or the required forms, contact Lori Hans via e-mail at lhans@udel.edu. Specific questions related to the technical review of research should be directed to Christian Hauser via e-mail at hauser@udel.edu.

Full Proposal Review Process: Each proposal will be reviewed by three experts in the field of proposed study who are knowledgeable about coastal needs and issues in Delaware. Review criteria are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Review Criteria

Category	Relative Weight	Criteria
Merit	10%	Have the investigators identified an important question or compelling research topic? How will the work contribute to the field of study?
Relevance to the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan and Stakeholder Needs	20%	Will the research address the needs, goals, and objectives outlined within the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan? Does the proposal describe how the project is relevant to specific needs of Delawareans? Has a clear connection been made between the proposed research and possible community, policy, management, education outcomes, or industrial applications?
Research Objectives	20%	Are the hypotheses, research questions, and objectives clearly developed? Is it good science?
Methods	20%	Are research activities and methodology appropriate and feasible? Is the timeline as described reasonable? For Interdisciplinary Research Projects, is there an appropriate level of coordination between disciplines? How will results of interdisciplinary projects be integrated to achieve results?
Sharing Project Results	20%	Have the investigators presented a well-developed plan for how research findings will be shared with the organizations and people that need or will benefit from the information that will be generated? Is the audience appropriate for the focus of the research?
Letter of Support	5%	Does the letter of support indicate that the applicant is self-motivated, and has put in effort both academically and professionally? Does it demonstrate that the student takes advantage of leadership opportunities? Do they strive to collaborate with others? Does the letter of support identify how the applicant would benefit from engagement with Delaware Sea Grant?
Budget	5%	Is the budget reasonable and cost effective? Are more cost-effective alternatives available? Are travel costs (particularly requests for international travel) reasonable and appropriate?

Each category will be rated as:

- Excellent (5 points)
- Very Good (4 points)
- Good (3 points)
- Fair (2 points)
- Poor (1 point)

Scores for each category will be combined with the category weights to provide an overall weighted rating.

Full Proposal Selection Criteria:

Weighted ratings from the review will be used to rank the proposals. Proposals for funding will be selected from those ranked highest at the discretion of the Delaware Sea Grant Director to address needs, gaps, and priorities of the Delaware Sea Grant program as outlined in the Delaware Sea Grant Strategic Plan.

Proposals that are recommended for funding by the Director will be forwarded to the National Sea Grant Office for final funding approval, which is contingent upon available federal funds. Recommendation by Delaware Sea Grant for funding does not guarantee final approval or funding by the National Sea Grant Office. Upon submission of full proposals, applicants agree to accept the decision of the National Sea Grant Office as final. Applicants will be notified of their selection status upon approval from the National Sea Grant Office.

Post-Selection Deliverables

If tentatively selected for funding by Delaware Sea Grant, investigators will have two weeks to submit a

1. Project summary using the National Sea Grant Office Form 90-2
2. Abbreviated National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Environmental Compliance Questionnaire
3. Delaware Sea Grant is required by NOAA to ensure that all environmental data collected with Delaware Sea Grant support are made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users, free of charge or at minimal cost, in a timely manner (typically no later than two years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy or by security requirements. Funded student researchers are required to report environmental data and respond to requests for data sharing. Applicants therefore must provide a data management plan, of no more than two pages in length, to specify plans for making environmental data available and interpretable within two years of collection in compliance with NOAA's Data Sharing Directive for Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Contracts.

These documents are required for final approval by the National Sea Grant Office. Failure to provide these forms within the timeframe indicated above will result in projects being removed from consideration. Form 90-2 (under PIER Information in the following link) and the Abbreviated NOAA Environmental Compliance Questionnaire can be found here: https://seagrant.noaa.gov/insideseagrant/Implementation[3].

[3] Please download: 90-2 PDF Worksheet (Fillable PDF) and Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire (Word document)