

PUERTO RICO SEA GRANT RESEARCH COMPETITION AND REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) AND GUIDELINES

Overview

The University of Puerto Rico Sea Grant College Program is requesting preliminary proposals for the 2024-2026 funding cycle. Puerto Rico Sea Grant supports a multidisciplinary, integrated program of applied research, outreach, and education to increase citizens' understanding and responsible use of Puerto Rico's and United States Virgin Islands' coastal and marine resources. Information generated by Puerto Rico Sea Grant-funded research reaches stakeholders through Puerto Rico Sea Grant extension, education, and communications activities in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Island region and via the national network.

Our region of primary interest is the Archipelago of Puerto Rico and that of the United States Virgin Islands. Priority research areas were identified through information drawn from focus groups, interviews, and a survey of resource users, managers, and scientists. This consultation process led to our extended 2024-2027 Strategic Plan, adapted to tend to the evolving needs based on the current socioeconomic, environmental context, including the recent earthquakes and coronavirus pandemic threats. The current plan can be downloaded from www.seagrantpr.org/communications-and-publications/reports/.

Priorities for Research Projects

For the 2024-2026 research cycle all proposed work must be in alignment with at least one of the four focus areas identified on the current 2024-2027 Strategic Plan: *Healthy Ecosystems and Habitats, Resilient Communities and Economies, Education and Workforce Development, and Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture*. This plan provides a broad foundation for economic growth and opportunity by focusing on key priorities established by the Department of Commerce specifically to equip our employees with the tools and knowledge needed to accomplish Puerto Rico Sea Grant's mission of protecting our environment and helping businesses and communities adapt to a changing planet.

On this cycle, we highly encourage proposals that address the linkages between: 1) aquaculture and sustainability, 2) Sargasso removal and disposal, and 3) gentrification and climate change impacts. Please also note that proposals not related to these high priority themes will also be considered. However, given the Archipelago's unique vulnerability to external economic cycles and the consequences of climate related environmental changes, we are prioritizing our support in favor of research projects that:

- Identify projects and site areas particularly well suited for the establishment of new locally run aquaculture business by minimizing potential environmental impacts, conflicts with other ocean and coastal uses, and synergy with shore-side communities and their economies.
- Develop effective tools and policy responses to mitigate and adapt to seasonal Sargasso beachings.

- Increase understanding on how gentrification affects climate change adaptation locally, as well as effects on environmental goods and services, human health and socioeconomic activities.

In addition, we also highly encourage APPLIED, innovative, collaborative, integrated approaches that involve community partners. This is not to say that an interdisciplinary community supported approach is sufficient in itself. Rather, to solve the challenges we face, we must differentiate between basic and applied research by developing applicable solutions aimed at specific resource user problems. The goal is to ensure that research findings generate solutions that can be shared by our extension agents, educators and communication specialists in support of the sustainable use of our coastal and marine resources.

Finally, our biennial RFP process begins with an announcement of funds being made available and distributed electronically by email, on our webpage and other appropriate media. The schedule for the current RFP is indicated in the Key Dates section below. The funding announcement requests from researchers the submittal of a letter of intent (LOI). In response to this interest, Puerto Rico Sea Grant will petition comments from peers. The highest-ranking letters of intent will be encouraged to submit full proposals. Investigators that are not encouraged to submit a full proposal can still submit it if they so desire, however, the chances of being funded are very limited.

Essential Proposal Criteria

All investigators need to consider the following criteria when submitting their letter of intent and meet these criteria when developing the full proposal. Any proposal received that does not meet these criteria will not be reviewed. An explanation will be sent immediately to the PI concerning any such decision.

1. Letter of intent narrative must not exceed three pages (8 ½" x 11") with 1" margins and Font 11 in Times New Roman style and should address the following points:
 - *Title:* Provide the title for your proposed work
 - *Rationale:* Provide a well-developed rationale that stresses why this is an important problem that has regional implications. What Sea Grant focus area(s) will this project address?
 - *Goals and Objectives:* Provide explicit, testable hypotheses with goals and objectives.
 - *Methodology:* Provide a brief but clear description of your research protocol.
 - *Expected Outcomes:* Describe specific stakeholders who will benefit from the results of this study and how they will benefit. Those with continuing projects should also include progress in this section.
 - *Value to graduate and/or undergraduate education:* Briefly describe how graduate and or undergraduate students will be involved in the proposed work.
 - *Literature Cited:* Literature Cited is not included in the 3-page limit.
2. All materials required in the letter of intent and full proposal must be received by Puerto Rico Sea Grant on or before the due date indicated in the RFP announcement.

3. The Principal Investigator must have documented expertise in the specific area of proposed research.
4. The proposal must clearly indicate that the Principal Investigator works with an industry or agency partner or other shareholder and that the research will be used to address some coastal marine issue. In order to develop a research project that is applied and relevant to a priority identified in the Puerto Rico Sea Grant Strategic Plan, it is advantageous to include evidence supplied in the form of a support letter from the partner explaining how the research will ultimately be used. If possible, have the shareholder participate as a co-investigator as this helps ensure utility.
5. Though not a requirement, a project which includes full or partial funding for at least one student who is being mentored by the Principal Investigator and who is actively contributing to the project as part of a thesis, dissertation, or undergraduate research, will be given preference.
6. For research proposed by investigators affiliated with institutions from outside the Puerto Rico/ US Virgin Islands region, only those who propose work with professional colleagues or students from this region will be accepted.
7. The proposed research must clearly address one or more of the priorities identified in the Puerto Rico Sea Grant Strategic Plan.

General Proposal Information

- Full Proposals must have a duration of two years and focus on applied coastal marine research.
- This is an open competition for any Principal Investigator at any of the universities, agencies, non-profits or private corporations in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands or from the US mainland and who have confirmed regional partners.
- Proposals must be strong in scientific or professional merit and rationale.
- The maximum Puerto Rico Sea Grant award is \$140,000 for two years (assuming the current federal appropriation), with no more than \$70,000 in each individual budget year. Up to six (5) research projects are expected to be selected for funding.
- A 50% non-federal dollar match is required – i.e., \$70,000 match if \$140,000 of federal funds are requested.
- We intend to fund approximately 5 research projects. Projects of the highest scientific merit and strongest stakeholder participation will be selected. A review panel of experts from outside and of Puerto Rico will determine which projects will be funded.

Key dates

2023

February 3	Due date for Letters of Intent by 4:30PM AST
February 24	Encourage Full Proposals
April 28	Full Proposals Due by 4:30PM AST
July 28	Notifications of results will be sent to investigators

2024

February 1 New projects start

Applying for Funding

This section describes the steps to apply for Puerto Rico Sea Grant funding for two-year applied research projects beginning in February 1, 2024. It provides an overview of the Puerto Rico Sea Grant proposal and review process, defines priority areas, and presents guidelines for the preparation of the full proposal.

Sea Grant Funding Cycle

Puerto Rico Sea Grant research projects are normally funded for two years. The effective date for the projects proposed will be February 1, 2024 to January 31, 2026.

Eligibility

Any Principal Investigator who submitted a research letter of intent and meets the previously described essential criteria is eligible to apply. Funded projects will be selected based on the degree to which they address Puerto Rico Sea Grant's stated priorities, their scientific merits and active participation by a stakeholder in the private sector, a government agency, or a coastal community.

Principal Investigators may be employees of universities, agencies, non-profits or private corporations. Since Puerto Rico Sea Grant is a college program by nature, an important criterion is support of students. Investigators may participate, during a given RFP, in just ONE Puerto Rico Sea Grant full proposal.

Principal investigators not affiliated with any campus of the University of Puerto Rico must include an additional form to enable Puerto Rico Sea Grant and the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez to determine whether the institution is considered high risk and whether it can be accepted as a recipient of Puerto Rico Sea Grant funds (see Appendix D).

Elements of the proposal package

The following represent elements of a full Research Proposal.

1. Signed Title Page

Investigators and the responsible university research or grants office must endorse this document. Each institution is expected to use their own version.

2. 90-2 Project Summary Form

See Appendix A. This form must be included in the proposal package and it should be limited to one page.

3. 90-4 Budget Summary Form

See Appendix B. The maximum two-year award that Puerto Rico Sea Grant will provide is \$140,000, with a maximum of \$70,000 in each budget year. For each Sea Grant dollar, a 50% matching fund commitment is required (i.e., if you request \$70,000 of federal dollars, you must have \$35,000 of non-federal match). Matching funds are required and must be carefully considered from the beginning (in your LOI). A 90-4 form must be included in the proposal package for each year of funding plus a 90-4 form for the total budget requested (year 1, year 2, and total). Any sub-awards must be detailed in the proposal and additional budget and budget justification forms must be included for the sub-awardee institution.

“Sub-award means an award provided by a pass-through entity to a sub-recipient for the sub-recipient to carry out part of a Federal award received by the pass-through entity. It does not include payments to a contractor or payments to an individual that is a beneficiary of a Federal program. A sub-award may be provided through any form of legal agreement, including an agreement that the pass-through entity considers a contract.” 2 CFR 200, Subpart A, § 200.92. Amount of effort in the Budget Summary Form must be expressed as number of individuals and number of months (full-time equivalents), not as a percentage. This column must include a total for each line in the salaries section, accounting for both the federal and match portions of the budget for each line.

4. Budget Justification

See Appendix C. All items in the budget (federal requests and match contributions) must be justified. Pay special attention to the format required and the section Information that must be included in your budget justification in Appendix C.

5. Proposal Narrative Sections (15 pages including references)

The research proposal identifies a topic relevant to coastal and ocean needs of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands. It provides sufficient detail for reviewers to discern the technical and practical merits of the project. It describes the need for the research and explains how its findings can be applied to solve relevant issues affecting coastal and marine resource users. This can include new products, processes for industry; tools, policies, technologies and information for improved decision-making/ecosystem management. The proposal shall be written in English in a MS Word (.docx) format. The narrative section will have a 15-page limit in a typical research proposal format. A one-page CV or bio for each investigator must be included in this document. The page limit includes tables, figures and references, but does not include the standard forms (project summary, budget form and one-page CV's of investigators).

6. Data-sharing plan

NOAA Data Sharing Requirement (for all NOAA funded research projects).

Environmental data and information collected and/or created under NOAA grants and cooperative agreements must be 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. This requirement has two basic parts: (1) environmental data generated by a grant project must be made available after a reasonable period of exclusive use, and (2) the grant application must describe the plan to make the data available.

To comply with this requirement the Principal Investigator must include a brief data sharing plan that clearly outlines the means by which qualifying data will be made available if the proposal is selected for funding. For more information on data sharing plans please contact Dr. René Esteves at 787-832-3585; rene.esteves@upr.edu

7. Short one-page CV's or Bio's for each principal investigator or co-principal investigator.

8. Letters of Support.

9. Cost-sharing commitment(s) letter(s).

10. Principal investigators not affiliated with any campus of the University of Puerto Rico must include an additional form to enable Puerto Rico Sea Grant and the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez to determine whether the institution is considered high risk and whether it can be accepted as a recipient of Puerto Rico Sea Grant funds (see Appendix D).

11. Proposals that are selected and recommended for funding are required to have a completed Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire and copies of associated permits, if applicable.

12. Principal investigators must open the link bellow and fill out the requested demographic information for all individuals mentioned in the proposal.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdIjYevtFZD2cFT5e_6nsd_YNNbgOuu-i7UdcPVIDN5VndaVg/viewform

Review Criteria

In order for your Research Proposal to be considered for review, ALL criteria previously listed in this call for proposals must be met. Research Proposals that do not meet ALL of the criteria will be returned without a review and will not be considered in this biennial research competition. For full Research Proposals, Puerto Rico Sea Grant will obtain peer reviews from three experts outside and from the Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands region. Reviews will be evaluated by a technical review panel of broadly experienced out-of-state scientists recognized for both their disciplinary and program leadership experience.

Research Proposals must focus on the priorities identified in the Puerto Rico Sea Grant Strategic Plan. The full proposals are more comprehensive and detailed versions of the letters of intent that were reviewed in the first round of this funding cycle.

Three equally-weighted criteria will be used by reviewers and panel members to evaluate full proposals

A. Scientific Merit- the degree to which the proposed project is innovative and will advance the state of the science or discipline through rigorous state-of-the-art research

B. Users, Participants and Co-Sponsors- the degree to which users or potential users of the results

of the proposed project have been brought into the planning of the project, will be brought into the execution of the project, and will use results. Researchers must work with end-users to develop relevant proposals. Sea Grant is a college program and student participation in Sea Grant funded research is preferred.

C. Expected Results, Applications and Benefits- the degree to which the completed project is expected to create new commercial opportunities, improve technological and economic efficiency, promote environmental sustainability, or improve management decisions, in Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

The panel will consider reviews that rate proposals based on these criteria. Panel deliberations ensure that we fund only technically excellent and issue-oriented research that engages end-users and to ensure (where possible) that projects are distributed across multiple focus areas of our Strategic Plan.

Submitting the Research Proposal:

Proposals **MUST BE SUBMITTED BY EMAIL** to the Puerto Rico Sea Grant research coordinator.

You are allowed a maximum of 15 single-spaced pages for the project narrative including tables, figures and literature citations, but not counting budget forms, the explanation of NOAA data sharing and biodata forms. The proposal must be written in English. Use 11-point font, Times New Roman. Figures, images, mathematical notations and symbols, and tables must be embedded within the proposal narrative. **FULL PROPOSALS RECEIVED AFTER 4:30 PM AST ON April 15, 2023 WILL NOT BE CONSIDERED FOR REVIEW.**

All questions:

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