****

**CONNECTICUT SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM**

**CALL FOR PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS**

**2022-2024 Omnibus Funding Cycle**

You are invited to submit preliminary proposals to the Connecticut Sea Grant College Program (CTSG) for the funding period of February 1, 2022 to January 31, 2024. Any investigator seeking support for this period must submit, as a single file, an electronic copy of their preliminary proposal by e-mail for receipt no later than **4:30 p.m. EST on Friday, February 26, 2021.** Specify “CTSG Research Proposal” in the subject line. The due date for full proposals is Monday, June 7, 2021. The first year of the funding period covered by this Call for Proposals begins on February 1, 2022.

Connecticut Sea Grant supports applied research, education, and outreach activities to achieve healthy coastal and marine ecosystems and consequent public benefits, focusing on Connecticut, Long Island Sound and its watershed. Applied projects with clear relevance to Connecticut’s marine and coastal resources will be given priority.

**Topic Areas**

CTSG seeks natural and social science proposals for coastal/marine research, outreach, and education of the highest quality and relevance within the thematic areas[[1]](#footnote-1) identified in the *Connecticut Sea Grant Strategic Plan for 2018-2023*, which can be accessed at: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2020/11/CTSG-strategic-plan-2018-2023-final_optimized.pdf>.

Based on these thematic areas, additional strategic guidelines and priorities of NOAA and the National Sea Grant College Program (reflected in their respective strategic plans), and input from our external advisory committees, CTSG solicits preliminary proposals to conduct applied research to develop knowledge and tools in the following topic areas:

**1. Coastal ecosystems and watersheds**

a. Changing coastal and marine ecosystems and effects on the services they provide

b. Coastal and marine habitat and species conservation, management and restoration

c. Watershed management, storm water management and low impact development measures that minimize impact on Long Island Sound

d. Water quality impacts on Long Island Sound and relevant mitigation measures

**2. Fisheries and aquaculture**

a. Management and changing environmental conditions related to fisheries, marine aquaculture or marine resources

b. Public health and socioeconomics related to fisheries, marine aquaculture or marine resources

**3. Resilient communities**

a. Resilience of coastal and watershed communities in the face of changing climatic conditions, ecosystem services and land use

b. Capacity of communities / stakeholders to prepare for and respond to coastal and watershed hazards of natural or human origin

c. Resilience of maritime economies (defined broadly, including recreational and commercial opportunities) tochanging socio-economic and environmental conditions

**4. Environmental literacy**

Educational research, assessment and evaluation strategies to develop and enhance the teaching and learning of ocean and coastal science content

***\*\*\*Please note that it is anticipated that additional federal funding will become available specifically for research projects focused on aquaculture and thus, we encourage research proposals focused on topical areas of relevance to marine aquaculture.***

CTSG seeks research projects that give serious consideration to the best means of sharing the results with a variety of audiences, including those outside the specific scientific discipline who may, nonetheless, be interested in the information. Community engagement and societal relevance are critical to CTSG. Therefore, it is required that proposals provide substantive evidence of the inclusion of an **effective outreach or education plan** that complements the research component. This outreach/education plan must be an integral part of the proposal development and not simply appended to an already completed proposal.

PIs are encouraged to provide details on how activities will contribute to the achievement of socially relevant outcomes. Such outcomes include, but are not limited to: full participation of women, persons with disabilities, and underrepresented minorities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); increased public scientific literacy and public engagement with science and technology; improved well-being of individuals in society; development of a diverse, globally competitive STEM workforce; and increased partnerships between academia, industry, and others.

The outreach or education component may involve collaborators whose expertise is in outreach or education or may be carried out by the principal investigators. Connecticut Sea Grant staff members are available to provide input or assistance as appropriate on this aspect of the proposal; see “Outreach and Education as an Effective Component of a Research Project” (<https://seagrant.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2020/11/integrate-updated-2020.pdf>). ).

While CTSG requires proposals to integrate research with education and/or outreach, **all proposals must incorporate a central research component, and demonstrate the ability to produce new knowledge and further the goals of the Connecticut Sea Grant Strategic Plan within the time-frame of the two-year granting period.** For the purposes of this RFP, research is defined as scientific endeavors with **explicit and testable hypotheses** that strive to answer “why” and “how” questions. **Research questions may be derived from either the natural or social sciences.** Within the scope of this RFP, proposals that focus primarily on describing or monitoring conditions and do not identify or test a specific hypothesis will not be considered. Education and outreach activities that do not incorporate original research will not be considered. If you are in doubt regarding the suitability of a research topic for CTSG funding, please contact Syma Ebbin, Research Coordinator, at the Sea Grant Office (see page 7).

**Duration and Funding**

Proposed activities may be one or two years in duration. In exceptional cases, and with specific justifications, a no-cost extension may be granted for activities that extend beyond two years, but initial funding is limited to the period between February 2022 and January 2024 and project methodologies should be developed with this time frame in mind. Proposal budgets should not exceed $75,000 per year ($150,000 total), including both direct and indirect costs. Multi-disciplinary research projects, as well as lower budget proposals are welcome, and proposed scopes of work and benefits will be assessed against funding levels requested. CTSG typically receives 18-30 preliminary proposals. We encourage approximately two times the number of full proposals we anticipate being able to fund with expected resources. For this cycle, CTSG expects to be able to fund approximately 4-5 proposals. In addition, it is anticipated that additional federal funding will become available for research projects specifically focused on aquaculture and thus, we encourage research proposals focused on topical areas of relevance to marine aquaculture.

**Eligibility**

Sea Grant support is awarded on a competitive basis and is available to researchers at all non-profit academic institutions, research laboratories, and extension/outreach facilities in Connecticut. The PI must be based at a Connecticut institution, although collaborators do not have to be located within Connecticut.

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Sea Grant champions diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by recruiting, retaining and preparing a diverse workforce, and proactively engaging and serving the diverse populations of coastal communities. Sea Grant is committed to building inclusive research, extension, communication and education programs that serve people with unique backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives and ways of thinking. We encourage applicants of all ages, races, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, cultures, religions, citizenship types, marital statuses, education levels, job classifications, veteran status types, income, and socioeconomic status types to apply for this competitive research opportunity.

CTSG encourages applicants to recruit and engage with students and fellows from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities and individuals from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds that have inhibited their ability to pursue a career in STEM.

CTSG encourages applicants to clearly identify how this research will have broader societal impacts on the coastal community including stakeholders from underrepresented or underserved communities.

**PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

A preliminary proposal, while not as detailed as a full proposal, should clearly outline the project objectives, rationale, and methodology, the potential benefits to be gained from the research, and the qualifications of the investigators who would perform the work. It is critically important in the pre-proposal to clearly and explicitly articulate how the proposed work addresses CTSG strategic priorities identified in this document and in the CTSG Strategic Plan. Proposals involving multiple investigators are welcome. Proposals requesting funding that is complementary to that sought from other sponsors are also welcome; in this case, other funding sources and amounts should be disclosed, and complementarity (rather than duplication) explained.

A preliminary proposal should consist of a single file, which includes:

1. a preliminary proposal cover sheet;
2. a three-page project description;
3. a reference list; and
4. a budget outline (not a detailed budget) for each year.

No appendices or other attachments are permitted.

**The preliminary proposal cover sheet should include:**

1. For each of the principal investigators, co-principal investigators, and associate investigators, provide:
2. names,
3. affiliations,
4. contact information (telephone and email),
5. a brief project title,
6. total (requested and match) project budget including direct and indirect costs broken out by year.

**The preliminary proposal project description** must not exceed three (3) single-spaced pages, including minimum 1-inch margins and 12-point font. The project description must include the following subsections:

1. hypothesis and objectives;
2. rationale and significance;
3. alignment with the topics outlined in the RFP and revised CTSG 2018-2023 Strategic Plan;
4. methodological approach;
5. expected outputs;
6. outreach and/or educational component(s), including any details on how COVID might alter these plans or how they could be adapted to work under COVID constraints;
7. anticipated broader societal impacts on the coastal community, especially how the project will impact underrepresented or underserved communities or members of these communities.

With respect to section 3 above, **relevance to CTSG’s priorities and thematic areas listed on pages 1 and 2 of this RFP must be explicit**. In this section, note the specific RFP topic identifier(s) (include number and letter) as well as specific relevance to objectives within the CTSG Strategic Plan. Illustrations and tables, if included, must be of legible size, and are *included* in the page limitation. References cited may be included as a separate section and are *not included* within the stated page limits.

Investigators must submit by e-mail an electronic copy of each preliminary proposal. Electronic files *must* be a single file in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format and *must* be sent by e-mail to SeagrantResearch@uconn.edu for receipt no later than 4:30 p.m. EST on Friday, February 26, 2021. You must specify “CTSG Research Proposal” in the subject line. *Preliminary proposals that are not received by the 4:30 p.m. EST deadline will be returned without review,* ***without exceptions****.*  Hard copy and faxed submissions will not be accepted. Submissions that do not include all of this information will NOT be reviewed or encouraged to submit a full a proposal. Any PI that submits a pre-proposal before the deadline can submit a full proposal. Though non-encouraged proposal submissions are accepted, they historically have had a low chance of success. Unless otherwise required by your institution, we do not require that University (or institutional) sponsored programs offices formally approve preliminary proposals prior to submission.

Only those prospective principal investigators with the highest-ranked preliminary proposals will be encouraged to submit full proposals. Comments relating to the evaluation of each pre-proposal will be disseminated to each principal investigator by April 23, 2021. The deadline for full proposals is Monday, June 7, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. EDT.

Sea Grant is a mandatory matching funds program, which requires that at least 50% of the aggregate federal dollars received be matched by state or private funds. CTSG therefore requires that proposals include at least a 50% match, i.e. $1 in non-federal match for every $2 requested. CTSG also encourages the submission of proposals which make efficient use of requested funds through leveraging with partner organizations and optimal use of new and existing data. **PIs should work closely with the fiscal or business office at their home institution to determine what is allowable as match.**

**PRE-PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

All pre-proposals meeting the specified requirements will be evaluated by an Independent Pre-Proposal Review Panel convened by CTSG. Pre-proposals will be reviewed and ranked by the Panel for their:

1. significance and relevance to CTSG’s strategic priorities and thematic areas listed on pages 1 & 2 of this RFP (40%). Note that this criterion is weighted more indicating its higher importance in decision-making in the evaluation and ranking of pre-proposals.
2. approach, including clarity of hypotheses, research questions and conceptual framing, novelty or originality of the proposed project, adequacy/feasibility of the methodologies as outlined (20%);
3. appropriateness and potential impact of the outreach/education component (20%);
4. broader societal impacts on the coastal community especially focused on stakeholders from underrepresented or underserved communities (20%).

Each Pre-Proposal Review Panel member will rate each of the criteria on a 5-point scale: Very Low (1), Low (2), Moderate (3), High (4), Very High (5). A rating of “High” or “Very High” indicates preliminary proposals that should be encouraged to go forward to the full proposal stage. “Low” or “Very Low” indicates preliminary proposals that should not be encouraged to go forward to the full proposal stage. These assessment scores will be summed into an indicator of Overall Priority. These Overall Priority scores will be averaged over all members of the Panel and pre-proposals will be ranked. Decisions to encourage or not encourage a full proposal are based on the review scores of the Independent Pre-Proposal Review Panel.

Based on this ranking, CTSG will encourage the highest ranked pre-proposals to move forward to the full proposal stage. However, all investigators who submit a pre-proposal that conforms to the deadline have the right to submit a full proposal if desired. CTSG recognizes that development of full proposal applications can be a significant time investment on the part of the prospective PI. Decisions to encourage or not encourage are based on expected funding levels and are designed to minimize extra work for potential applicants. Approximately two times as many proposals as available funding will be encouraged to move forward to the full proposal stage. Preproposals that are not encouraged typically have a low probability of success at the full proposal stage. Comments from the screening process will be sent to all applicants who submitted a preproposal.

CTSG will manage actual or perceived conflicts of interest by having peer reviewers and Review Panel members review and sign a Conflict of Interest (COI) Statement and if a conflict is found to exist, conflicted reviewers will recuse themselves from assessing that proposal and note their recusal on the COI statement.

**NOAA DATA SHARING REQUIREMENT (for all NOAA funded research projects)**

NOAA regulations require that all environmental data and information collected and/or created 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.

To comply with this requirement, in the full proposal stage, the Principal Investigator must complete the Sea Grant Data Management Form (<http://seagrant.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2017/04/Full-Proposal-DMP-Form.docx> to complete your DMP)

which includes the data management plan and describes how the project’s data and metadata will be made available to others. Deposition of data in standard data archives (e.g., by discipline), in university archives, or in scientific publications are potential options. The proposed plan will be reviewed for compliance with NOAA requirements. If funds are needed for data QA/QC, archiving or curation, they may be included in the project pre-proposal and full proposal budgets. **For the Preliminary Proposal, the Principal Investigator must simply agree in writing that they intend to follow these NOAA data sharing requirements.**

**ABBREVIATED NEPA ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE QUESTIONNAIRE:** Funded development projects that include a research component entailing fieldwork, labwork, modeling work, or socioeconomics work (basically all research projects) are required to complete the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Compliance Questionnaire and submit any required permits or information regarding the status of forthcoming permits. **If your project is selected for funding**, you must fully complete and submit this form to the CTSG Research Coordinator for review of NEPA compliance: <https://seagrant.noaa.gov/Portals/1/Forms/NSGO%20Abbreviated%20Environmental%20Compliance%20Questionnaire_updated_11_18.docx>. In addition, prior to research commencing all required state and federal permits (including IRB, IACUC, collecting permits, etc.) must be submitted to this Sea Grant office.

**NOTE ON THE SUBMISSION OF FULL PROPOSALS**

Regardless of whether an applicant was encouraged to submit a full proposal, prospective PIs are strongly recommended to consider and address any comments as they craft their full proposal application. Instructions for full proposal submission will be made available when full proposals are encouraged on or before April 23, 2021.

Please be aware that CTSG is required to submit all final proposals electronically through the Grants.gov system. Hence, it is important that investigators follow forthcoming full proposal guidelines carefully and be prepared to submit proposals electronically to CTSG in the required format. The deadline for submission of full proposals is **Monday, June 7, 2021 at 4:30 p.m. EDT**.

Because proposals cannot be changed once selected for inclusion in the CTSG Omnibus (e.g., for funding), **CTSG requires that all full proposals be reviewed and approved by the appropriate University (or institutional) sponsored programs office prior to submission to our office.** If you have questions regarding this requirement, please contact Syma Ebbin, Research Coordinator (see page 10).

**FULL PROPOSAL EVALUATION**

All full proposals will be peer reviewed by at least three experts in the field (external peer reviews). Proposals will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. **Scientific and technical merit:**
	* Clarity and attainability of the objectives detailed in the project description;
	* Adequacy of the proposed methodology to test hypotheses and accomplish stated objectives, including the soundness of the technical approach, scientific design, methods, and data interpretation;
2. **Significance** of the problem, or rationale and importance of the work, as well as relevance to CTSG priorities identified in this RFP;
3. **Technical capacity** of the applicant to successfully carry out the proposed project taking into account such factors as the applicant’s:
	* Past performance in successfully completing projects of similar size, scope, and relevance to the proposed project,
	* PI expertise/qualifications, PI knowledge, and resources to successfully achieve the goals of the project.
4. **Integration/Inclusion** of effective outreach and/or education targeting appropriate audiences.
5. **Broader Societal Benefits** on the coastal community especially focused on stakeholders from underrepresented or underserved communities.
6. **Expected Outputs and Outcomes:**
	* Adequacy of the applicant’s description of outputs and outcomes, which must be well-defined, relevant and results oriented.
7. **Appropriate and Cost-effective Budget:**
	* Adequacy of the proposed budget to accomplish objectives and of the budget justification in explaining the need for resources,
	* The proposed scope of work and benefits will be assessed against funding levels requested.
8. **Data Management Plan**
	* Adequacy of the Data Management Plan to meet NOAA data sharing requirements.

Connecticut Sea Grant will provide the opportunity for PIs to read and respond to the (anonymized) peer reviews prior to the Independent Technical Review Panel meeting. On or around August 6, 2021, PIs will be provided with copies of blinded proposal peer reviews and offered the opportunity to respond with up to three pages of rebuttal. These responses are due by 4:30 PM via email on August 16, 2021. If you will not be in the office during this time period, please ensure that you leave instructions with the Sea Grant Office regarding where to direct blinded peer reviews, so that you may respond appropriately. Rebuttals are encouraged but not required.

All full proposals will also be evaluated by an Independent Technical Review Panel. Proposals will be evaluated by the Panel, in addition to the criteria above, on the basis of their:

1. **Scientific and technical merit (including outputs, outcomes, and research team qualifications) (30%)**
2. **Significance** **(20%)**
3. Integration/Inclusion of **effective outreach and/or education** targeting appropriate audiences **(20%)**
4. **Broader societal impacts** on the coastal community especially focused on stakeholders from underrepresented or underserved communities **(20%)**
5. **Appropriate and Cost-effective Budget (10%)**

All applications that meet the eligibility and minimum requirements will be evaluated and scored by a panel of independent reviewers, who are federal or non-federal experts, each having expertise in a separate area so that the panel, as a whole, covers the spectrum of activities covered by the applications received. A panel of reviewers will read and provide comments on the applications using the evaluation criteria provided above. The panel will then meet to discuss the applications. After discussing a particular application, each panelist, with the benefit of the panel deliberations, will score the application, and a summary of their comments will be compiled. Each Full Proposal Review Panel member will rate each of these criteria on a 5-point scale: Very Low (1), Low (2), Moderate (3), High (4), Very High (5).

“Low” or “Very Low” indicates proposals that should not be recommended for funding consideration. A rating of “High” or “Very High” indicates proposals that should be recommended for funding consideration. These assessment scores will be summed into an indicator of Overall Priority score. These Overall Priority scores will be averaged over all members of the Panel and the proposals will be ranked. The Full Proposal Technical Review Panel will also discuss and determine whether, regardless of ranking and available funding, proposed projects are fundable, or not, as written. The panel will give no consensus advice. Sea Grant staff that serve as ex officio members of the Full Proposal Review Panel (Director, Associate Director, Research Coordinator) will neither vote nor score applications as part of the review process.

The CTSG Management Team will recommend applications for funding in the rank order unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following selection factors: 1. Availability of funding; 2. While CTSG will consider multiple pre-proposals from the same lead PI in a given competition, no more than one proposal from a given lead PI will be funded in a given competition; 3. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by other programs; 4. Applicant's prior award performance. In its letter of intent, CTSG will convey whether, regardless of ranking and available funding, the proposed projects are fundable, or not, as written.

**Proposal Review Timeline:**

**February 26, 2021 Preproposal submission deadline**

**April 23, 2021 Encouragement to submit full proposals sent to PIs**

**June 7, 2021 Full proposal submission deadline**

**August 6, 2021 Blinded peer reviews sent to PIs for feedback**

**August 16, 2021 PI rebuttal letter submission deadline**

**October 1, 2021 Notification of funding decision sent to PIs**

**October 12, 2021 Final adjusted proposals due in program office**

**February 1, 2022 Project initiation (subject to the availability of funds)**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**See** [**https://seagrant.uconn.edu/funding/grants/**](https://seagrant.uconn.edu/funding/grants/)**, or contact:**

**Questions regarding eligibility or submission requirements may be directed to:**

Dr. Syma A. Ebbin, Research Coordinator

Connecticut Sea Grant College Program

The University of Connecticut

1080 Shennecossett Road

Groton, CT 06340-6048

E-mail: syma.ebbin@uconn.edu

Please note that due to Covid-19 pandemic precautions, I am working remotely for the foreseeable future and do not have access to my office phone. Please correspond with me by email and we can connect by phone call, WebEx or other virtual meeting platform, as appropriate.

**RELATED FUNDING SOURCES**

**Researcher Listserv**

To learn more about research funding opportunities, subscribe to CTSG’s Researcher’s listserv. Information on subscribing is available at <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/funding/join-the-listservs/> or contact Syma Ebbin, Research Coordinator.

**Development Projects**

Requests for smaller awards, typically less than $5,000, can be made at any time via the CTSG development fund. Contact the CTSG office for further details or see <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/funding/development-project-funding/>.

**National Strategic Investment Initiatives**

Calls based on Sea Grant National Strategic Investment initiatives will be announced as they become available.

**Other Funding Opportunities**

Other funding sources for activities addressing Connecticut coastal and marine resources include small and large grants from the EPA Long Island Sound Study (<http://www.longislandsoundstudy.net/>).

**Fellowship Opportunities**

Announcements regarding fellowship opportunities such as the John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowships are distributed via our CTSG Researcher Listserv as they become available.

For more information on existing fellowships, refer to: <https://seagrant.uconn.edu/funding/fellowships/>.

1. Please note that the Strategic Plan recognizes that some topics (e.g. water quality, socio-economic value) extend across the focus areas, and are therefore considered cross-cutting. These cross-cutting topics are explicitly included in the research priorities for this request for proposals. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)