



**CONNECTICUT SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM  
CALL FOR PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS  
2026-2028 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, 2026 to January 31, 2028. For the 2026-2028 omnibus cycle, CTSG is soliciting proposals in two competition categories, the 1) Biennial Omnibus Research Competition and 2) new Exploratory Research Competition. Any investigator seeking funding support under either competition 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 14, 2025**. Specify “Biennial Omnibus Research Proposal” or “Exploratory Research Proposal” in the subject line. The due date for full proposals is Wednesday, May 21, 2025. The first year of the funding period covered by this Call for Proposals begins on February 1, 2026.

Connecticut Sea Grant supports applied research, education, and outreach (extension and communications) 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 focus areas identified in the *Connecticut Sea Grant Strategic Plan for 2024-2027*, which can be accessed at: [https://seagrants.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2022/12/CTSG.Strategic.Plan\\_.2024-27.final\\_.pdf](https://seagrants.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2022/12/CTSG.Strategic.Plan_.2024-27.final_.pdf).

Based on these focus 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 Senior Advisory Board, CTSG solicits preliminary proposals to conduct applied research to develop knowledge and tools in the following topical areas:

**1. Sustainable Aquaculture and Fisheries**

- a. Economic, environmental and cultural benefits of aquaculture, fisheries and other coastal natural resources

- b. Sustainable management of natural resources to support aquaculture and fisheries
- c. Causes of changing environmental conditions and effects on aquaculture and fisheries businesses
- d. New resources, tools, and technologies to support growth in aquaculture and fisheries production, harvesting and processing

## **2. Healthy Coastal Ecosystems**

- a. Economic and ecological value of ecosystem resources and services (to inform decision making)
- b. Conservation, management and restoration of coastal and marine habitats, species and ecosystem services
- c. Drivers of change in coastal and marine ecosystems and impacts on the services they provide
- d. Impacts to water quality of the Long Island Sound and relevant mitigation measures (e.g., low impact development, stormwater management and watershed management)

## **3. Resilient Communities and Economies**

- a. Sustainability and social equity within coastal economic sectors, including the blue economy and impacts and benefits of offshore renewable energy
- b. Climate-aware management of community infrastructure and business practices
- c. Causes of changing conditions, hazards and related impacts, including socioeconomic considerations, relevant to community resilience in the face of a changing climate
- d. Nature-based approaches to adapting coastal communities to sustainable growth

## **4. Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development**

- a. Educational research to better understand and implement multiple ways of learning, knowing and understanding into teaching opportunities

***\*\*\*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 or benefit from 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 the proposed work and outreach/education 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 personnel 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://seagrants.media.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1985/2024/12/integrate-updated-2025.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 10).

### **Competition Categories, Duration and Funding**

For the 2026-2028 omnibus cycle, CTSG is soliciting proposals in two competition categories. In addition to the Biennial Omnibus Research Competition which has been held in past years, a new Exploratory Research Competition is being launched this cycle. The Exploratory Research Competition aims to provide seed funding to explore new avenues of research, to support pilot projects launched to ground truth methodological approaches, and to act as a springboard to allow investigators to leverage their initial findings into mature proposals aimed at larger funding opportunities.

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 2026 and January 2028 and project methodologies should be developed with this time-frame in mind.

Proposals submitted under the Biennial Omnibus Research Competition category should include budgets that do not exceed \$85,000 per year (\$170,000 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.

Proposals submitted under the Exploratory Research Competition category should include budgets that do not exceed a total amount of \$80,000 including both direct and indirect costs and may span either one or two years total.

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 5-10 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. CTSG encourages applicants to clearly identify how this research will have broader societal impacts on coastal communities.

### **PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL GUIDELINES**

A preliminary proposal is required of any investigator seeking support under either the Biennial Omnibus Research Competition or Exploratory Research Competition. 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 a:

1. preliminary proposal cover sheet;
2. three-page project description;
3. reference list.

No appendices or other attachments are permitted.

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

1. Name, affiliation and email address for all principal investigators, co-principal investigators, and associate investigators,
2. Project title,
3. 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 CTSG 2024-2027 Strategic Plan;
4. methodological approach;
5. expected outputs;
6. outreach and/or educational component(s),
7. anticipated broader societal impacts on the coastal community.

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 relevance to specific 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](mailto:SeagrantResearch@uconn.edu) for receipt no later than 4:30 p.m. EST on Friday, February 14, 2025. You must specify either "Biennial Omnibus Research Proposal" or "Exploratory 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 the required information will NOT be reviewed or encouraged to submit a full 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 March 26, 2025. The deadline for full proposals is Wednesday, May 21, 2025 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 non-federal 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: 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 (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.

**ABBREVIATED NEPA ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE QUESTIONNAIRE:** Funded 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\\_102022.docx](https://seagrant.noaa.gov/Portals/1/Forms/NSGO%20Abbreviated%20Environmental%20Compliance%20Questionnaire_102022.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.

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SURVEY:** The National Sea Grant Program has asked that the primary investigator associated with each pre-proposal complete an anonymous and voluntary demographic survey: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ChWkoLYN59C-Gh00JirT\\_RHCvXHF4fP9HIJl5UrLs7k/viewform?edit\\_requested=true](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1ChWkoLYN59C-Gh00JirT_RHCvXHF4fP9HIJl5UrLs7k/viewform?edit_requested=true)

**NOTE ON THE SUBMISSION OF FULL PROPOSALS**

Whether or not an applicant was encouraged to submit a full proposal, prospective PIs are

strongly recommended to consider and address any comments from the pre-proposal review as they craft their full proposal application. Instructions for full proposal submission will be made available when full proposals are encouraged on or before March 26, 2025.

Please be aware that CTSO 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 CTSO in the required format. The deadline for submission of full proposals is **Wednesday, May 21, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. EDT**.

Because proposals cannot be changed once selected for inclusion in the CTSO Omnibus (e.g., for funding), **CTSO 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 CTSO priority focus areas and objectives identified in this RFP and the current strategic plan;

**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.

**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 July 15, 2025, 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 July 28, 2025. 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 the following **evaluation criteria**:

### Category 1 Biennial Omnibus Research Competition:

1. **Scientific and technical merit** (including outputs, outcomes, and research team qualifications) **(45%)**
2. **Significance** (of the problem, or rationale and importance of the work, as well as relevance to CTSG priority objectives identified in the Strategic Plan and in this RFP) **(15%)**
3. Integration/Inclusion of **effective outreach and/or education** targeting appropriate audiences **(15%)**
4. **Broader societal impacts** on the coastal community **(15%)**
5. **Appropriate and Cost-effective Budget** **(10%)**

### Category 2 Exploratory Research Competition:

1. **Scientific and technical merit** (including outputs, outcomes, and research team qualifications) **(30%)**
2. **Significance** (of the problem, or rationale and importance of the work, as well as relevance to CTSG priority objectives identified in the Strategic Plan and in this RFP) **(30%)**
3. Integration/Inclusion of **effective outreach and/or education** targeting appropriate audiences **(15%)**
4. **Broader societal impacts** on the coastal community **(15%)**
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. The 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. Sea Grant personnel 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 criteria**: 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:**

<b>February 14, 2025</b>	<b>Preproposal submission deadline</b>
<b>March 26, 2025</b>	<b>Encouragement to submit full proposals sent to PIs</b>
<b>May 21, 2025</b>	<b>Full proposal submission deadline</b>
<b>July 15, 2025</b>	<b>Blinded peer reviews sent to PIs for feedback</b>
<b>July 28, 2025</b>	<b>PI rebuttal letter submission deadline</b>
<b>September 29, 2025</b>	<b>Notification of funding decision sent to PIs</b>
<b>February 1, 2026</b>	<b>Project initiation (subject to the availability of funds)</b>

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

See <https://seagrants.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](mailto:syma.ebbin@uconn.edu)

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-listserv/> 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 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, NOAA Coastal Management and Digital Coast, NMFS Population Dynamics and Marine Resource Economics 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/>.