

Michigan Sea Grant Request for Pre-Proposals Questions and Answers

I. Graduate Student Research Fellowship

- 1. Could you provide more specific details about the non-federal match requirement for the Graduate Student Research Fellowship? I am confused at what funding is considered "federal." Am I correct in assuming that the fellowship at \$80k/year includes the match, so Sea Grant provides \$40k of those funds?**

Non-federal matching funds should be 50 percent of the requested amount — at least \$1 non-federal for every \$2 federal requested. For example, if you request \$80,000 from MSG (federal), you would need to document an additional non-federal match of \$40,000 from your home institution or policy sponsor (e.g., state funding, in-kind support). The \$80,000 per year from MSG does not include required matching funds.

For example, federally funded National Science Foundation funding would not qualify as non-federal, but state, private or foundation funding could qualify although applicants should check with their sponsors and get approval prior to listing them as match.

- 2. For the Graduate Student Research Fellowship, do I have to be enrolled at a Michigan institution at the time of the application, or would I only have to be enrolled at the time the fellowship actually starts?**

Students do not need to be enrolled in a Michigan institution to apply for funding (due May 29); however they do need to show that they have been accepted to a graduate program at an accredited Michigan university. This allows prospective students to apply for funding, with proof of enrollment provided prior to release of funds.

- 3. For the Graduate Student Research Fellowship, does the agency sponsor need to be someone from Sea Grant, or any governmental agency (e.g., NOAA, NASA, DoE)?**

Your agency sponsor should be from a Michigan or federal agency, not Michigan Sea Grant. Michigan Sea Grant staff are available to assist interested students in identifying an agency sponsor who conducts research in their area of interest; contact Catherine Riseng (criseng@umich.edu). Also, your academic advisor may be able to assist you in making connections.

- 4. For the Graduate Student Research Fellowship, is a budget required? If yes, how should it be submitted?**

Yes, a budget is required. The student should outline their proposed expenses (e.g., tuition, stipend, research expenses, travel, supplies, etc.) up to \$80,000 per year for two years. The budget should also indicate the source and allocation of the 50% non-federal match (e.g., \$40,000 non-federal match for a \$80,000 funding request from Sea Grant). We recognize that this was not clear in the RFP so have updated

the RFP to reflect the budget requirement for the fellowship and added a special note with a link to a budget form to the RFP page to alert other fellowship applicants.

5. For the Graduate Student Research Fellowship, can the student choose an agency sponsor without assistance from Sea Grant? Does the sponsor need to be based in Michigan?

Students can recruit their own agency sponsor. While the faculty advisor must be based at a Michigan institution, the agency sponsor does not have to be based in Michigan (e.g., EPA, NASA or other federal sponsor).

The RFP states that the proposed research should support "existing Great Lakes research programs at federal, tribal and state agencies." By "state agency" we do intend for the agency sponsor to come from a public agency (e.g., MDNR, MDEQ) versus a non-profit group (e.g., watershed council, Trout Unlimited).

6. Is it possible for a group of students working together on a master's project to apply for the MSG Research Fellowship funding? How would the 50% non-federal match work?

If the group research project is a strong match with the MSG Strategic Plan and supports an existing Great Lakes research program at a federal, tribal or state agency and the team has identified an agency sponsor and faculty advisor, the group could apply for funding through the MSG Research Fellowship competition. The application and budget need to identify the source of non-federal match; for example, if the team requests \$50,000 in support from MSG (federal funding) the applicant team would need to identify \$25,000 in non-federal match (e.g., faculty advisor salary, student scholarship).

7. For the agency sponsor, do I need to work with a public agency? Would an NGO or other type of institution be appropriate?

Yes, Fellows must work with an agency sponsor. The sponsor must submit one of the two letters of support as part of the application. The RFP states that the proposed research should support "existing Great Lakes research programs at federal, tribal and state agencies." By "state agency" we do intend for the agency sponsor to come from a public agency (e.g., MDNR, MDEQ) versus a non-profit group (e.g., watershed council, Trout Unlimited).

8. Can you assist with partnering applicants to agencies? My primary research interests are in conservation agriculture as a means to improving water quality.

In the future MSG will likely suggest policy contacts, however this year we request that students work with their academic advisors in identifying a potential agency sponsors. In this case, potential agency contacts include the USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality has an office of Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control.

9. Can you assist with partnering applicants to agencies? I am interested in using modeling to understand how land use and management in western Lake Erie basin would affect nutrient loading and thus water quality in Lake Erie.

In the future MSG will likely suggest policy contacts, however this year we request that students work with their academic advisors in identifying a potential agency sponsors. In this case, potential agency contacts include the USGS Great Lakes Science Center, USDA Natural Resources and Conservation Service and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

10. Is a Literature Cited section required to go along with the project narrative? If so, should I include it as the 3rd page?

There is no official requirement to include a literature cited section, but if included it will not count against the narrative page limit.

11. While he works for the University of Michigan's Cooperative Institute for Limnology and Ecosystems Research (CILER), Dr. Johengen does work directly with GLERL and completes Great Lakes research with a federal agency. Would Dr. Johengen be eligible to be an agency mentor/sponsor for the fellowship?

Yes, Dr. Johengen would be an acceptable academic advisor as CILER is a NOAA (federal) organization.

12. In the online application, for "Step 1. Please provide your contact information," are these fields for the student or the advisor?

Yes, Step 1 contact information is for the student applicant. Step 2 includes fields for the academic advisor and agency sponsor.

13. Indirect costs do not appear to be expressly addressed by the RFP. Are indirect costs allowable on the fellowship support? If not, are they allowed to be calculated on cost shared items (e.g. faculty time)?

Indirect costs are required on the Fellowship as part of Michigan Sea Grant's requirements from NOAA. However, students may be able to waive the indirect costs. Check with your university to see if they have a policy to waive the indirect costs for students' fellowships. Typically the university then applies those waived costs to the match.

14. Regarding calculating and waiving the indirect costs on the fellowship, I am concerned because our approved rate agreement with the sponsor agency does not allow us to calculate indirects on Fellowships. If I understand correctly, you are expecting to see indirect costs calculated on the requested funds, but waived as shown as cost share. If my university were to present a budget that did not calculate indirects (0 applicable Facilities and Administrative rate, 0 requested) and therefore did not show indirects as cost share, BUT showed the 50% required cost share coming from whatever other sources, such as travel, advisor salary, etc, would our proposal be reviewed negatively?

Applicants are not required to include indirect costs – the indirect cost rate is determined by the university and might be required on their end. We only suggest that if applicants must include indirect costs, that they could be used as match. An applicant does not have to include indirect cost but does have to include the 50% match.

15. I have developed an itemized supply list for each year of the proposed research project. Is it possible/acceptable for us to include this itemized table in our budget justification, as an attachment?

It is ok, but not necessary to include an itemized budget for supplies. If you include an itemized budget, it can be an attachment to the provided budget justification form, one of the sheets in the [Budget Form 90-4](#) spreadsheet.

16. Does the application process require identification of a designated signer or contact information for my University to approve potential dissemination of funds, or would this step come later?

A support letter from your university, including contact information for financial transactions, will be requested from the awarded student after their proposal is selected for award.

17. Could teaching assistantship funds from my university count toward the requirement for matching funds?

Yes, as long as the teaching funds are from the university's general fund account, these funds can count toward the non-federal match requirement.

18. Can the agency sponsor submit a collated letter reflecting support from two or three agencies since the proposed work will aid multiple agencies?

Submitting a collated letter of support including endorsements from two or three agencies is acceptable since the student in this scenario would be working with multiple agencies; the student will not be penalized nor rewarded for this, but the letters will inform the scope of proposed work.

19. When documenting the 50% non-federal match, is a letter of committal required, or shall we just submit a description of the match source?

A description is sufficient at this phase. We do not require the non-federal match letter of commitment at this point. However, if the proposal is selected we will then require such a letter.

Core Research and Integrated Assessment

1. What are my options for generating non-federal match? Can work done in advance of the project start date be used as match?

PIs do not need to specify the source of matching contributions at the pre-proposal stage. Full proposals will need to demonstrate how the requested Sea Grant funds will be matched by non-federal contributions at a 2:1 rate (a 50% match). Additional matching contributions will make full proposals more competitive. Matching contributions can be generated in a variety of ways, however, the match must be spent or applied between the project start and end dates designated in the grant application (2/1/2016-1/31/2018).

A few examples of non-federal match:

- Funds from related non-federal grants, community foundations or local partners can be used to support research or outreach related to the Integrated Assessment, Fellowships, or Core Research.
- University researchers can dedicate an extra month or two per year on project activities and use a portion of their existing salary as non-federal match.
- Collaborators may donate a certain number of hours to the project, e.g., attending advisory committee meetings, leading an outreach effort, or conducting some amount of analysis or mapping work. The value of their time can be quantified and included as match.
- Universities or other partner organizations can dedicate equipment, analysis tools or other supplies that have a quantifiable value, e.g., use of a GIS lab or printing expenses.
- Universities can contribute tuition, stipend or hourly support for graduate or undergraduate students working on the project.

To be eligible, matching contributions must be: non-Federal (U.S.) in origin (federally appropriated or managed funds are ineligible); dedicated specifically for the project; applied only to the Integrated Assessment, Fellowship, or Core Research project and not used as match for other projects. Letters of support must accompany the full proposal specifying any matching contributions from partner organizations.

2. Does the Core Research competition support social science proposals?

Yes, a social science research proposal would be considered if it addresses the focal areas of the Michigan Sea Grant Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan focuses generally on critical issues relative to the Great Lakes coastal and ecosystem resources and ecosystem services. If a pre-proposal addressed ecosystem services and one or more of the aspects of the MSG strategic plan, that should meet the RFP goals. The applicant should describe how the research will be directly linked to the Strategic Plan and address a critical issue relative to the Great Lakes ecosystem.

3. Can Sea Grant help with the outreach component on an Integrated Assessment? How do we go about involving Sea Grant without any conflict of interest?

IA teams are encouraged to talk to Sea Grant staff and policy contacts while preparing pre-proposals. Depending on time and interest, Sea Grant specialists could assist with helping the team identify

stakeholder groups and input on approach to outreach and dissemination of results at the pre-proposal stage. Policy contacts can help to clarify the issue and identify state and target area needs.

Once invited to submit a full proposal, researchers can contact Heather Triezenberg (vanden64@msu.edu) to discuss outreach plans and Stephanie Ariganello (stephaa@umich.edu) to discuss communication plans.

During the full proposal development stage (April 10 - May 29) there will typically only be one research team focusing on each IA topic and a set of Core Research proposals selected during the pre-proposal review. A panel of experts from outside Michigan will evaluate the proposals and determine which are funded to avoid bias.

4. Should PIs include letters of support from local, state or federal agency professionals who work on a Core Research or an Integrated Assessment topic?

Researchers do not need to include letters of support with their pre-proposals, but they could be included with full proposals. It is Michigan Sea Grant's responsibility to ensure that the RFP and selection process do not favor individual researchers.

5. What happens after the Integrated Assessment and Core Research pre-proposal deadline (March 6)?

Michigan Sea Grant research staff review the pre-proposals to make sure that each meets the RFP requirements. For IAs, MSG first determines if the proposal follows the Integrated Assessment approach. If we receive more than one pre-proposal about a particular IA topic, state agency personnel will review and rate each pre-proposal. Typically, only one team will be invited to submit a full proposal about each topic. For Core Research proposals the first step is to determine if the proposal addresses core issues of the MSG Strategic Plan and addresses an issue relevant to Great Lakes ecosystems and ecosystems services. Pre-proposals that meet these criteria will be evaluated by MSG and academic and agency researchers in that field.

6. Can an individual from a for-profit institution, such as a consulting firm, be a Co-PI on an IA proposals?

Personnel from a consulting firm, non-profit, state agency or municipality can be a Co-PI on an IA proposal, as long as the lead PI is from a Michigan university and plans to be actively involved.

7. Should applicants provide a budget for year 1 and year 2 of a two-year Integrated Assessment or Core Research project?

For the pre-proposal (due March 6) applicants do not need to submit a detailed budget. Applicants should indicate the total amount requested and the amount of match anticipated for the complete project. If invited to submit a full proposal, a detailed year 1 and year 2 budget will be required (due May 29). MI Sea Grant's fiscal officer, Elyse Larsen (elarsen@umich.edu), will be available to answer specific questions about completing the standard budget form.

8. What does an Integrated Assessment look like?

The Michigan Sea Grant website contains information that describes a typical Integrated Assessment (www.miseagrant.umich.edu/research/approach/) and well as information about past projects (www.miseagrant.umich.edu/research/past-projects/).

9. I am interested in community resilience and would like to contact researchers with expertise in that area. Can Sea Grant help?

Michigan Sea Grant staff and, for Integrated Assessment projects, the policy and extension contacts listed in Appendix A of the RFP are available to facilitate introductions between researchers for this and all relevant research topics.

Also, explore the "Research" portion of our website (www.miseagrant.umich.edu/research) for information on past and current projects and investigators.

10. For the Core Research RFP, would MSG be interested in research on the accumulation of anthropogenic fine particles (such as microplastic particles, engineered nanoparticles) in the Great Lakes aquatic ecosystem?

Yes, a research proposal would be considered if it addresses a focal area of the Michigan Sea Grant Strategic Plan. The applicant should describe how the research will be directly linked to the Strategic Plan and address a critical issue relative to the Great Lakes ecosystem.

11. Do we need to include the cost sharing approval letters with the proposal for the Michigan Sea Grant Core Research projects? The announcement states that only three letters of support may be included and I need to know if the cost sharing approval letters are included in the supporting documentation section.

We do not require the non-federal match letter of commitment at this point. However, if the proposal is selected we will then require such a letter.

Updated May 29, 2015