

Michigan Sea Grant 2025 Request for Proposals for Integrated Assessments

Research Program Overview

Michigan Sea Grant (MISG) is inviting proposals for innovative research projects for the 2026–2028 funding period that begins on February 1, 2026. All MISG funds are awarded via a competitive process involving external peer review and external advisory panel recommendations.

Integrated Assessment Projects

Projects that use Integrated Assessment methods and/or extensive partner and community engagement to address important social and ecological issues affecting the Great Lakes. Funding up to \$110,000 per year. Note that MISG funding requires a 50% non-federal match – see below for more information. MISG has identified a set of priority topics listed below that are aligned with our [2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#).

Page 4: [Letter of Intent Guidelines](#) (Due: March 14, 5:00 PM ET)

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Information and Guidelines for Integrated Assessment Proposals

Michigan Sea Grant (MISG) will support Integrated Assessment (IA) projects that address important ecological and socioeconomic issues within the Great Lakes and that inform planning, policy, and natural resource management. Integrated Assessment researchers conduct a comprehensive analysis of relevant natural and social scientific information, working closely with partners and MISG Extension educators. IA projects place an emphasis on identifying and engaging with key community partners throughout the research process because this collaboration helps ensure the outputs and recommendations are usable and appropriate. Ultimately, the purpose of the assessment is to develop information, tools, and partnerships that will help decision-makers better address the focal issue.

MISG encourages proposals that 1) recruit and engage with students, staff, and collaborators from all Michigan communities; and 2) proposals that benefit all communities in Michigan’s coastal regions. Up to \$110,000 per year for two years (\$220,000 total) is available for these projects. Principal Investigators are required to provide a 50% non-federal match to MISG funding for each year of the project (see Non-Federal Match section below for more information).

Each IA project will follow a unique trajectory depending on the type and scope of the focal issue; however, most projects address the following components:

- **Define and refine the policy-relevant question around which the assessment is to be performed.** This often begins with identification of an issue by managers, community groups, or policy-makers that has defied typical and routine action. The focal IA question must be refined with stakeholder input.
- **Clarify the history, causes, and consequences of the issue.** Projects should help clarify aspects of the issue that are uncertain and are impeding action. A description of current conditions and historical trends can enhance understanding and provide a foundation for further analyses. To address the issue effectively, decision-makers will need to better understand the probable causes and environmental, social, and economic consequences of the issue.
- **Identify and evaluate potential options.** Projects should identify potential options for addressing the issue, including policies, management actions, or new initiatives that are politically, socially, and economically feasible. Integrated Assessments help partners compare and evaluate a suite of options, rather than recommending a single approach. Integrated Assessment projects often integrate the expertise of social and natural scientists and could include economic analyses and cost-benefit assessments during discussions about potential policy options.
- **Develop tools and information that can guide decisions and help implement potential options.** If appropriate, researchers should provide an assessment of certainty levels associated with their findings to help policy makers interpret analyses or identify future research needs.

Important Dates

- **March 14, 2025** – Letters of Intent (LOI) are due by 5 p.m. (EST). LOIs should be submitted through the application link provided on the [MISG website](#).
- **April 1 - May 27, 2025** – Questions about research RFP full proposals can be submitted to MSG-RFPinfo@umich.edu until 5 p.m. ET on May 27th. Responses will be posted on the MISG website as soon as possible after questions are received.
- **May 30, 2025** – Full research proposals are due by 5 p.m. ET. Full proposals should be submitted through the [MISG website](#).
- **September 2025** – Notification of final proposal funding decisions.
- **February 1, 2026** – Funding for new projects begins, pending federal appropriations.
- **February 1, 2026, through January 31, 2028** – Timeline for projects approved for funding.

Eligibility

Qualified researchers at universities and colleges, including community and Tribal colleges, located in Michigan are eligible to be Principal Investigators on MISG-funded projects. Lead scientists must have Principal Investigator standing at an accredited Michigan institution to be eligible for funding. However, project team members are not limited to researchers at these institutions. For example, project team members may include people from federal, state, Tribal, and local agencies; non-governmental

organizations and community groups; K-12 schools; and other organizations relevant to the project. Project team members may be at institutions outside of the state of Michigan, but PIs must be in Michigan. Note that federal collaborators cannot receive any funding. MISG encourages eligible applicants from all communities. Individuals currently serving as a member of the MISG Advisory Committee are ineligible to apply.

Questions and Informational Webinar

Questions related to Integrated Assessment proposals for this RFP, whether technical or content-related, should be submitted to MISG via email at MSG-RFPinfo@umich.edu. Responses to questions will be posted on the Michigan Sea Grant Research [website](#). MISG will also host a webinar during early February 2025 (TBD) to introduce the RFP process and answer any questions.

2025 Integrated Assessment Priority Topics

Several topics have been identified as high priority for IA projects, listed in the Appendix at the end of this document. These topics align with focus areas of the [MISG 2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#). The specific priorities identified as 2025 Integrated Assessment topics were developed in partnership with federal, state, and local government agencies, Tribal representatives, and the MISG Advisory Committee, Management Team, and Extension educators. Each topic identifies a MISG Extension education staff and a policy contact; consultation with these contacts is encouraged as teams develop full proposals. Research investigators are also invited to develop their own unique Integrated Assessment research proposal that fits within one of the [2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#) Focus Areas for consideration. Additional material on Integrated Assessments, including a guide and example projects, can be found at the Michigan Sea Grant [website](#).

Developing an Alternate Integrated Assessment Topic

Research teams can propose an Integrated Assessment project for a topic not described in this RFP. When doing so, provide the following additional information:

- Explain why the issue is a challenge, how it relates to MISG's Strategic Plan, and why it is of interest to resource management agencies at the local, state, regional, Tribal, or federal level.
- Demonstrate that the topic is amenable to analysis based on existing data and information.
- Secure a letter of support from a policy sponsor who has the authority to make or influence management decisions relative to the problem identified. It is not necessary for sponsors to provide funding for the project, but they should be willing to work with the process for two or more years beginning during Winter 2026.

Letter of Intent Guidelines

Note that PIs are **required** to submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) to be eligible to submit a full proposal. LOIs not received by the deadline of March 14, 2025 at 5:00 PM EDT, will not be considered. Investigators must submit their LOI as a PDF through our [website](#). LOIs will not be peer reviewed and evaluated, but rather will be used to identify the number and topics of full proposals expected to be received to help plan the full proposal review process (e.g., identifying appropriate panelists). The LOIs should include the components listed below.

1) Cover Page that includes:

- Project title
- Principal investigator (PI)
- Title and position(s)
- Institution
- Postal mailing address
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Co-investigators and institutions
- Estimated total amount to be requested each year from MISG. This amount should include all direct and indirect costs such as supplies, travel, fringe benefits, student assistantships, etc., but does not need to be itemized until the full proposal is submitted.
- Estimated total amount of non-federal match expected to be provided each year by the PI (see Non-Federal Match section below for additional information).

2) Brief Project Narrative (1-2 pages) that includes:

- o Background – a brief description of the problem, issue, or topic to be addressed, including a list of potential partners. This may include:
 - Origin of the issue
 - Why the issue is a complicated, challenging problem
 - How the project engages with target communities
 - Who is or should be involved
 - Concise project objectives as they would appear in a full proposal

3) Project Approach (1-2 pages) – overview of how you intend to develop the project. It is not necessary to explain analytic methods in detail.

- Possible Solutions – options that could be considered, such as management actions, education, outreach programs, legislation, regulations, or other initiatives.
- Project Team and Collaborators – list of the project team and individual responsibilities. Outline steps taken to recruit a team including students, staff, and co-PIs from a variety of communities and groups in Michigan. Also, provide names and affiliations of all

persons and institutions you intend to recruit as collaborators. Note that it is not necessary at this time to contact or secure a commitment from these individuals and organizations.

- Data and Data Sets – funds for Integrated Assessments should primarily support analysis and communication of existing data, rather than collection of new data. However, stakeholder surveys, focus groups, observations, and interviews are permitted if used to support project goals. Please identify any existing data sets you plan to use, their owners, and how you intend to access the data. You may also indicate your knowledge of closely related projects, briefly identifying those projects and their PIs. If you will generate new data, you will be required by NOAA regulations to submit a data management plan as part of your full proposal. The MISG data management plan can be found [here](#).
- 4) Office of Management and Budget-Approved Demographics Question (optional). In accordance with OMB SPD 15, the lead PI/Applicant should complete this online form. Submission of the requested information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award. Any individual not wishing to submit some or all the information should check the box provided for this purpose or skip the question. Upon receipt of the application, this form will be separated from the application. This form will not be duplicated, and it will not be a part of the review process. Data will be confidential. To answer these question, please use [this form](#).

Non-Federal Match

The LOI may document the source of a 50% non-federal match for each year of the project; note that all full proposals will require this information. For example, if the PI requests \$60,000 in a year, at least \$30,000 in non-federal match must be provided during that year for a total of \$90,000 put toward the project in that year. Potential sources of the match include foregone faculty and staff salary and fringe benefits (e.g., student mentoring, technical support of project); equipment; ship time; office or laboratory space; and third-party matching funds or gifts. Researchers are encouraged to work with their institution's business office and MISG to ensure that proposed sources of matching funds follow the federal cost policy for eligible match prior to submitting a full proposal.

Full Proposal Guidelines

When developing topics for Integrated Assessment projects, MISG identified one or more policy, community, or management contacts (in addition to the Extension educator contacts) for each topic included in our RFP. Research teams are encouraged to discuss their focal issue and project approach with the contact(s) identified in the RFP. The contact(s) potentially support the proposal development process in several ways:

- Serve as a contact for the research teams submitting a full proposal, providing further explanation of the issue, the policy context, and the key players as needed.
- Offer feedback about the full proposal to ensure that the proposal is strong and targets the needs of the state or area.
- Help the research team engage partners and identify resources that could support the project.
- Provide guidance about how to best package and share the project results.
- Serve as an advisor or collaborator for the research team during their project, attending project meetings as relevant, reviewing documents, and providing guidance. Some policy contacts (or their staff) become involved in the analytical or outreach components of the project.

Because the policy contact may have helped develop the topic descriptions in the RFP, conflict of interest guidelines prevent MISG funds for this project from supporting project activities in the policy contact's government unit or organization.

The collaborative process is an essential component of an Integrated Assessment. To identify or refine proposed outreach opportunities, research teams should discuss their focal issue and project approach with the Communications and Extension contact(s) noted under the RFP topic or those listed below.

Michigan Sea Grant will seek expert review of the proposal's overall approach to outreach and partner engagement. The participation of partners, including local, Tribal, and state decision makers, natural resource managers, community groups, and other intended users of the assessment, can improve the research team's understanding of the issue, ensure that the project is useful and relevant, and promote application and implementation. MISG encourages proposals that 1) recruit and engage with students, staff, and co-PIs from all communities and 2) proposals that directly engage and benefit all communities in Michigan's coastal regions. We encourage research teams to talk with MISG outreach staff and relevant state, Tribal, and local government personnel:

- For an initial discussion of outreach needs, please contact Heather Triezenberg, Extension Program Leader, at vanden64@msu.edu
- To discuss communication ideas, please contact Elizabeth Striano, MISG Communication Program Leader, at estriano@umich.edu

Full Proposal Preparation

The proposal narrative should be a maximum of 10 pages, including elements 3-6 below. The title page, non-technical summary, list of potential peer reviewers, references, current and pending support, bios, budgets, data sharing plan, NEPA questionnaire, and letters of support **do not** count toward the page limit. Please use 1-inch margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. See details below.

- 1) Cover Page that includes:
 - Project title
 - Principal investigator (PI)
 - Title and position(s)
 - Institution
 - Postal mailing address
 - Email address
 - Telephone number
 - Co-investigators and institutions
 - Non-technical summary: Provide a 200-word summary suitable for a general audience that describes the proposed IA and why it is important.

- 2) Peer Reviewers – at least three potential reviewers for the proposal from institutions other than those represented by the project team and outside the State of Michigan. Include name, institution, phone number, and email address. These reviewers will be included in the pool of experts that MISG may contact for reviews.

- 3) Problem Statement – Describe the issue your project will address, demonstrating an understanding of the context and underlying causes. Identify previous and ongoing attempts to address this problem, and the technical and non-technical barriers that hinder an effective response. Indicate the geographic focus of your assessment and the type of potential options that will be considered, e.g., management actions, legislation, regulations, education/outreach programs, or other initiatives.

- 4) Objectives – describe the objectives of this project and convey what you will attempt to accomplish with the project. Do not describe how you will conduct the assessment.

- 5) Project Approach – describe each stage of the project and how it links to the objectives. If your proposal relies on developing new methods, give the reviewers ample information about the starting point for those new methods and how they will evolve over the course of the project. Indicate how you will access or generate the needed data and information for the technical analysis. Be sure to identify specific methods and tools (e.g., models, special analytical approaches, etc.) to be used. Make it clear how the proposed methods are appropriate and how they will succeed. What are the expected outcomes and deliverables? What is the project timeline?

- 6) Partner Engagement Process – a detailed overview of the partner or community engagement process. Research teams are encouraged to discuss their outreach plans with MISG’s outreach specialists and the policy contact identified in the RFP. Questions to consider include:
 - What roles will partners or communities fill?
 - Who will be involved?
 - How will you determine that all the correct entities are engaged?
 - What specific methods will you use to engage partners or communities?
 - How will you maintain partner or community involvement?
 - How will the engagement process be integrated with technical aspects of the project?
 - How does the project engage with target communities?

- 7) Data and Data Sharing – funds for IA projects usually support analysis and communication of existing data rather than collection of new data. However, new data, including surveys, focus groups, observations, interviews, and model output, may be collected if essential to support the goals of the project. Please identify any existing data sets you plan to use, their sources, and how you intend to access the data. You may also indicate your knowledge of closely related projects, briefly identifying those projects and their PIs. Note that all proposal PIs will be required to fill out a MISG Data Management Plan form located [here](#), as stipulated by NOAA regulations. IRB approval may also be needed from the PI’s institution.

- 8) NEPA Environmental Compliance Questionnaire – all funded projects are required to complete the NEPA Environmental Compliance Questionnaire. This questionnaire is used by NOAA to collect information about proposed activities for NEPA and other environmental compliance requirements associated with the proposed project. All questions must be addressed; if a question is not applicable to your proposed activity, please explain why the requested information is not relevant. The PI must complete this form located on our [website](#). Additional guidance can be provided upon request if needed.

- 9) Project Timeline – a timeline of the project stages, including the partner engagement process. Identify project tasks, team leader, and support for each element.

- 10) Overview of IA Team – how the PI’s previous accomplishments are relevant both to leading a multidisciplinary team and to this specific project. Indicate why the IA team is appropriate for this project and whether individuals, sub-units or the entire team have worked (together or separately) on similar projects. Specify the roles and responsibilities of each team member, including who will be involved in day-to-day project activities. Identify steps taken to recruit a team including students, staff, and co-PIs from all relevant communities.

- 11) References – information on those cited in the proposal body.

- 12) Qualifications – curriculum vitae or bios of PI and co-PIs. Each CV should be no more than two pages and should include relevant publications.
- 13) Ongoing Support – current and pending support of principal investigator and co-investigators. Indicate if any projects are complementary to the proposed project.
- 14) Supporting Documentation – at least one letter of endorsement from a representative of the appropriate management or policy agency and/or end-user. Additional letters indicating partner willingness to participate and contribute are valuable.
- 15) NOAA Budget Form – a detailed budget and budget justification using the 90-4 form available on the proposal submission web page. The Excel-based form includes tabs for annual expenses, a summary of expenses, and a budget justification. Submit the budget as a separate Excel file when submitting your application. The 90-4 budget form can be found on our [website](#).
- 16) Office of Management and Budget-approved Demographics Question (optional) – In accordance with OMB SPD 15, the lead PI/Applicant should complete this online form. Submission of the requested information is voluntary and is not a precondition of award. Any individual not wishing to submit some or all the information should check the box provided for this purpose or skip the question. Upon receipt of the application, this form will be separated from the application. This form will not be duplicated, and it will not be a part of the review process. Data will be confidential. To answer these question, please use [this form](#).

Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals must comply with all submission instructions and proposal guidelines to be considered for funding, and PIs must have submitted a LOI. Each compliant, full proposal will be peer-reviewed in writing by three experts in the field of the proposed project from outside of Michigan, then discussed by a review panel of experts. The panel might include one of the peer review writers. Peer reviewers will provide both written comments and a proposal rating using the criteria below.

All written peer reviews will be provided to the review panel, which will review the proposals and provide advice on funding priorities to the MISG management team. Review panelists will read all of the proposals (or a subset of proposals if too many) and each reviewer will be prepared to lead a panel discussion of one or more proposals depending on the total number of proposals being reviewed. The panelists will discuss each proposal, evaluate the relevance of the project to the [MISG 2024-2027 Strategic Plan](#) and research goals, and assess if the project is fundable. The outcome of the panel review will be a final score for the project, an assessment of the fundability, and funding priority recommendations. Funding decisions are made by the MISG Management Team and incorporate all reviews and rankings as well as availability of funding, prior award performance of applicants, balance across institutions, focus areas, and programmatic needs, objectives, and priorities. As identified above, projects are encouraged that will benefit all communities, and projects that address the priority topics

identified in the RFP. All recommendations must be approved by the NOAA National Sea Grant Office prior to a research grant being awarded.

Applicants should directly and explicitly address the following criteria within their proposal. Each submittal will be rated under a point system with a total of 100 points possible. Applicants will be evaluated based on the quality and extent to which they address the criteria; failure to provide applicable information in the proposal will affect the score.

- 1) Problem Statement – 5 points
To what extent does the proposal explain the context, underlying issues, and potential options related to the focal issue?
- 2) Project Approach – 30 points
 - Technical Aspects – 15 points
How well does the proposal explain the data sources and analytical methods involved in the technical aspects of the assessment?
 - Collaborative Process – 15 points
To what extent does the list of potential decision-makers, intended users, and relevant partners reflect a holistic understanding of the defined problem? To what extent does the proposal describe appropriate methods for collaboration related to each stage of the project?
- 3) Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualifications – 20 points
To what extent do the PI and project team members possess the skills, experience, and qualifications to execute the proposed activities? How suitable is the PI to lead a multidisciplinary assessment process, and will they be involved in day-to-day project activities? To what extent have individuals or the team addressed similar issues or taken a similar approach to addressing natural resource problems? How well defined are roles within the team?
- 4) Synergy – 15 points
To what extent will the research team leverage complementary projects, existing data sources, and the time and support of partners or government units? Does the proposal include letters of support demonstrating significant interest from partners or collaborators?
- 5) Feasibility – 30 points
 - Practicality – 15 points
How feasible is the approach given the available data, expertise of the team, and proposed methods? How realistic is the timeline in terms of completing the proposed work and activities? Is the budget appropriate for the work proposed?
 - Potential Impact – 15 points
To what extent will the project address the technical and non-technical barriers to effective

resolution of the issue? How likely is the project to influence policy, planning, natural resource management, or other types of decision-making?

About the Michigan Sea Grant Research Program

Michigan Sea Grant-supported projects address issues affecting the Great Lakes and Michigan's coastal areas, and include Integrated Assessments and basic research. The goals are to develop information, create tools, and build partnerships that will improve decision-making for particularly challenging coastal issues in the state and to fulfill critical research needs for the Great Lakes and coastal systems. For more information, please see: www.michiganseagrant.org/research

About Michigan Sea Grant

Michigan Sea Grant helps to foster economic growth and protect Michigan's coastal, Great Lakes resources through research, education and outreach. Please see www.michiganseagrant.org for more information.

APPENDIX: PRIORITY TOPICS FOR MISG 2025 RFP

Focus Area: Environmental Literacy and Workforce Development

Pathways and barriers, in K-12 schools and for all Michigan communities, to environmental careers/green jobs

Policy contact: Laura Florence: lfloren1@emich.edu. MISG contact: Brandon Schroeder: schroe45@msu.edu

What are the most effective pathways from K-12 educational opportunities to environmental careers?
How could a pathway to credentials and certifications in K-12 schools and for individuals in all Michigan communities be created and sustainably funded?

Focus Area: Resilient Communities and Economies

1. Western Lake Erie Basin water monitoring

Policy contact: Michelle Selzer: SelzerM@michigan.gov

- Goal: Water resources are enhanced, sustained, and protected to meet existing and emerging needs of the communities and economies that depend on them.
- Action: Use engagement and information exchange to advance the understanding of how actions impact water quality, quantity, and availability.
- Desired Outcomes:
 - Community members understand watershed and coastal functions and the ecosystem services they provide, understand how their actions will impact water resources, and are able to make informed decisions.

Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) Project Idea: To assess water quality and quantity datasets for long and short-term changes in hydrology as well as nutrient loads and concentrations with a focus on soluble reactive phosphorus (SRP), total phosphorus, and nitrogen. Michigan's Western Lake Erie Basin (WLEB) water monitoring network includes the Heidelberg station on the River Raisin, multiple USGS gage stations, and the Alliance for the Great Lakes' WLEB Expanded Water Quality Monitoring Program stations. Ideally, this project will assess how storm events have changed over time and how hydrology versus agricultural practices have changed nutrient delivery to Lake Erie. This work could also include examining trends in the data to understand watershed-scale responses to future climate scenarios, which would benefit other efforts such as MDARD's WLEB Program and the new Regenerative Agriculture Program. In addition, this assessment could include a closer examination of the changes in watershed characteristics referenced with the other water quality efforts identified in the state of Michigan's Lake Erie Domestic Action Plan. Project outcomes, for example, could provide help inform a decision on whether to set March – July SRP targets for the River Raisin Watershed and Michigan's portion of the Upper Maumee River Watershed, which are thought to be low in these watersheds, and identify uncertainties leading to recommendations for future work.

2. Non-monetary valuation of Great Lakes resources

Policy contact: Emily Shaw, eshaw@kbic-nsn.gov. MISG contact: Elliot Nelson, elliotne@msu.edu

How can the state of Michigan best understand the non-monetary valuation of Great Lakes resources? Research in this area can pertain to ecosystem services, cultural studies, Indigenous Ways of Knowing/TEK, policy/intergovernmental relations, and more.