



Funding Source: Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant

Competition Name: Seed Grant Research Competition/Funding Opportunity

Announcement Type: Request for Proposals (RFP)

Release Date: June 17, 2026

The Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program (IISG) requests proposals for our seed grant research competition. The goal of this funding opportunity is to provide seed funding, or funding for pilot data or initial investigations, that will provide a basis for a larger, future proposal to another funding agency. Projects should be based in southern Lake Michigan and should support [IISG's 2024–27 Strategic Plan](#).

Timeline

June 17, 2026: Release RFP

July 2, 2026, 2:00pm EDT: Informational webinar

July 21, 2026, 11:00am EDT: Informational webinar

August 17, 2026, 11:59pm EDT: Full proposals due via eSeaGrant

December 1, 2026: Notification of funding

January 11, 2027: Final adjusted proposals due to IISG

February 1, 2027: Project start date

January 31, 2028: Project end date*

*Due to the timing of these awards within our funding cycle, we do not anticipate providing substantial no-cost extensions. Please plan accordingly.

Informational Webinar

The IISG will host two informational webinars to discuss this research funding opportunity, providing applicants the space to ask questions and get answers from IISG staff. [Register here](#) for one or both of these webinars. The registration link is also available at <https://iiseagrant.org/research/funding-opportunities/>.

Research Priorities

For this opportunity, IISG will accept proposals that address any of the goals in our [2024–27 Strategic Plan](#). In particular, IISG is interested in funding research initiatives that enhance sensing and monitoring capabilities in southern Lake Michigan.

Other research priorities include an improved understanding of winter processes/activity and nearshore habitats of Lake Michigan including but not limited to:

- Winter physical processes or biological activity in Lake Michigan
- The role of protected Lake Michigan harbors and nearshore areas as winter habitats for juvenile sportfish or other aquatic wildlife
- Distribution/activity of sensitive/threatened aquatic species in nearshore Lake Michigan environments
- Invasive aquatic plants in nearshore Lake Michigan environments
- Habitat in ravines and small tributaries and their use by nearshore Lake Michigan fish species

Eligibility

IISG is committed to inclusive excellence, and we encourage individuals from all disciplines to apply to this RFP. We encourage submissions by early career scientists and/or people who have partnered with, or plan to mentor, early career scientists. Although we prioritize Illinois- and Indiana-based researchers, researchers from other states are welcome to apply assuming they can demonstrate how their proposed work will benefit the mission of IISG and/or meet research priorities as described above. Principal investigators (PIs) may be from academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, commercial organizations, and/or tribal, state, or local governments. IISG staff members are not eligible for funding and should not be listed as Co-PIs.

Funding Levels

IISG anticipates providing a total of \$150,000 to fund three to six research projects. Project funding has two components:

1. IISG Funding – Researchers may request between \$10,000 and \$50,000 in IISG funds to support one year of research efforts. Amount of funding requested will not influence selection.
2. Match Funding – Applicants must provide a 50% non-federal match for all requested IISG funds (2:1). For example, a project requesting \$50,000 in IISG funds would require \$25,000 (50%) in non-federal matching funds.

Reporting Requirements

Recipients of seed grant funding will be required to submit an annual progress report. This report will be submitted electronically through eSeaGrant (<https://esg.iiseagrant.org/>). IISG will prompt recipients for the report and will provide additional instructions at least one month prior to the annual report due date. IISG will also contact each grant recipient in the future to obtain a list of publications resulting from this project.

How to apply

Full proposals must be submitted to IISG through eSeaGrant: <https://esg.iiseagrant.org/> by 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time, Monday, August 17, 2026. Late submissions will not be considered in the review process. Applicants will receive a confirmation email after successfully submitting a proposal. If applicants do not receive a confirmation email, they should contact Laura Esman (lesman@purdue.edu or 765.496.3135). Changes to full proposals are not possible after the submission deadline.

Full Proposal Application Components

Please include the following required documents in your full proposal application:

1. Project Summary that includes:
 - A cover page listing the project title and names, titles, affiliations, and contact information (email and phone number) or the PI and any Co-PIs. If there are many Co-PIs, the cover page can be more than one page.
 - A project abstract that outlines the objectives, methodology, and rationale for the project, and includes notable outcomes. The abstract is limited to one page.
2. Proposal narrative – Submit as PDF;
Required: 8-page maximum; Times New Roman, 12-point font or larger, 1-inch margins, single-spaced (References are not included in the 8-page limit). The proposal narrative should include the following components:
 - Project background – summarize the problem, need, or opportunity to be addressed and evaluate existing knowledge and any previous work pertaining to this problem or opportunity.
 - Objectives – Provide a list of clearly defined objectives.
 - Details, Methodology, and Approach – Provide an explanation of the methods you will use to address your objectives. Explicitly explain how this project will be conducted. The proposals will be reviewed by both technical experts and more general experts and should include sufficient information for evaluation per criteria outlined below.

- Anticipated outcomes and results – What are the expected outcomes and results related to this project and how will these outcomes/results serve as a foundation for further funded research?
 - Project timeline – provide a timeline for accomplishing the proposed work. The timeline should cover the entire duration of the project. Please remember that we do not anticipate providing a substantial no-cost extension.
 - References – there is no required format for references and they are not included in the 8-page limit for the narrative.
3. Data Management Plan – submit as PDF; Maximum of 2 pages, 12 point font.
- The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration requires that all environmental data (see full definition [here](#)) from funded projects be verified and made accessible, free of charge, or at no more than the cost of reproduction, within two years of completion of the project. To be considered for Sea Grant funds, researchers should outline how their data will be shared and maintained in perpetuity. The Data Management Plan should be a written narrative that briefly describes the parameters of the project. The contents of the Data Management Plan (or absence thereof), and past performance regarding such plans, will be considered as part of proposal review.
 - A typical data management plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be collected or created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; procedures for providing access, data, and security; the approximate total volume of data to be collected; the type of collection method (e.g., aircraft, ship, satellite); and a point of contact for questions about the data covered by the plan. Applicants may choose to rely on their home institution's tools for ensuring data stewardship and preservation and may refer to those in their plan. If a project does not generate environmental data, note this in the Project Summary (item 1).
4. 90-4 Budget Form and Budget Narrative – Funding will be provided for up to one year beginning February 1, 2027, or the date of the award, and projects should be completed by January 31, 2028. Investigators can request between \$10,000 and \$50,000 total.
- All applicants must demonstrate 50% in non-federal match for the overall project. Examples of what can be used as match include academic year salary and volunteer time, but specifics of what can be claimed varies by institution. Pls should work closely with your sponsored programs at your home institution to determine what is allowable as match.

- Investigators should also budget for the negotiated federal indirect cost rates for your home institution. The full list of budget categories can be found on the 90-4 form. Investigators must use the Excel version of the 90-4 form.
5. Biosketch – include a 2 to 3-page biosketch or CV for the PI and any Co-PIs. NSF or NIH format is acceptable but not required.
 6. Current and Pending Document – include current and pending funding for the PI and any Co-PIs.
 7. Letter of Financial Commitment – submit as PDF; provide a letter signed by the PI’s institutional authority committing to the required non-federal match.
 8. Potential Panel Reviewer Information – Please include name, title, institution affiliation, email address, and any potential Conflicts of Interest for 3 potential panel reviewers that are outside of Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant.
 9. Letters of Support (optional)

Upon recommendation for funding, applicants will be required to submit an environmental compliance questionnaire and copies of associated permits, if applicable.

Forms and additional guidance for all components can be found at:

<https://iiseagrant.org/research/funding-opportunities/templates-and-guidance-for-proposal-submissions/>. If you have questions, please contact Laura Esman, IISG Research & Reporting Coordinator, lesman@purdue.edu or 765.496.3135.

Application Review

Application materials will be reviewed by a panel with significant external input. Each application will have at least three panelists review and evaluate application materials and provide written comments based on:

Criteria	Weighting	Description
Relevance/need	30%	Will the proposed project address a valid and significant need relevant to Lake Michigan?
Approach	30%	Are the proposed methods appropriate for completing this project? Can the project be completed within the timeframe?
Outcomes	30%	Are the anticipated results likely to provide seed data, lead to leveraged funding, be transferable?
Budget	10%	Are the requested funds appropriate for the proposed work?

Each reviewer uses a five-point rating system to provide an overall summary score for each application package as described below.

A	5 points	Excellent	Exhibits outstanding quality and relevance
B	4 points	Very Good	Above average quality and relevance
C	3 points	Good	Routine/average quality and relevance
D	2 points	Fair	Marginal quality and relevance
E	1 point	Poor	Major deficiencies, not relevant

Funding recommendations

Final proposal scores and ranking will be based on written comments and rankings from the external panel and panel discussions. During the panel discussion, panelists will ultimately come to consensus on whether proposed projects are fundable, or not, as written. Final funding decisions are ultimately made at the discretion of the IISG director and are based on all panel reviews and rankings, as well as the availability of funding, and balance across the portfolio (such as institutions, focus areas, and topics) which may result in out-of-rank proposals selected for funding.

Contact information:

We encourage you to discuss potential proposal ideas with us. If you have questions, please contact Laura Esman (lesman@purdue.edu or 765.496.3135) or Stuart Carlton (carltons@purdue.edu).