

Funding Source: Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant
Competition Name: Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Graduate Student Scholars
Announcement Type: Request for Proposals (RFP)
Release Date: October 8, 2026

The Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant College Program (IISG) requests proposals for **our IISG Graduate Student Scholars** research competition. The IISG Scholars programs provide professional networking and development opportunities for faculty and graduate students from institutes of higher learning in Illinois and Indiana who wish to develop extension, education, or communication capacities related to their scholarly interests. The IISG Faculty Scholars Program remains on hiatus for 2027, but faculty with research ideas that could benefit the IISG mission are encouraged to contact IISG to discuss them.

Timeline

October 8, 2026: Release RFP
December 1, 2026, 11:59pm EDT: Full proposals due via IISG InfoReady Portal, https://iiseagrant.infoready4.com

December 2026-February 2027: Review of applications and notification of funding
June 1, 2027: Project start date
June 2027-May 2028: Participation in professional development activities for graduate student scholars
Early 2028: Graduate student scholars present project results to IISG and key partners
May 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.

Program Description

One of IISG's long-term goals is to help build a community of researchers and outreach professionals focused on critically important Lake Michigan issues. The IISG Scholars programs are designed to help build this community by introducing researchers to the issues and the people, organizations, and communities that are affected by them. In addition, the programs are intended to help graduate student scholars further the impact of their research, and faculty scholars develop innovative, fundable proposals for future work in the region. Past scholar projects can be viewed at https://iiseagrant.org/category/iisg-scholars/.

Work proposed as part of this award should further the IISG focus to empower southern Lake Michigan communities to secure a healthy environment and economy. Applicants are encouraged to review the IISG 2024–2027 Strategic Plan as they develop their materials. It may be acceptable to adapt research methods or results from other locations to the southern Lake Michigan region. For example, a research project conducted in southern Indiana could be expanded to include northwest Indiana and/or northeast Illinois; methods developed in another region could be applied to southern Lake Michigan and surrounding communities.

Eligibility

The applicant must be enrolled as a graduate student at an institute of higher learning in Illinois or Indiana at some point during the 2027–28 academic year. An applicant must have someone in their home department who is eligible and willing to serve as administrative lead on the project. It is preferable for administrative leads to not be Sea Grant staff members, although if this is not possible, a Sea Grant staff member can serve as administrative lead and the applicant is eligible for funding. Please contact Laura Esman (lesman@purdue.edu) with questions or concerns. Individuals who have received an IISG graduate student scholar grant in the past three years are not eligible for funding through this competition.

Funding Levels

IISG anticipates supporting 4-7 graduate student scholars, depending on available funds.

Graduate student applicants can request up to $12,000 to support research expenses, graduate student stipends, travel, or other activities that help expand the scholarly or societal impact of their research. **Matching funds are not required for graduate student applicants; however, indirect costs can be charged.**

Expectations of Graduate Student Scholars

During their scholar year, graduate student scholars are expected to:

1. Participate in at least four professional development sessions, including Introduction to Sea Grant, Effective Communication via Social Media, Integrating Research and Extension, and an elective session. Electives will vary among scholar cohorts but may include discussions about job opportunities outside of academia, books or journals, or grant writing. Activities will not be scheduled more than one per month and may be conducted virtually.

2. Present results to IISG and key parties, e.g., the external advisory committee and/or partner organizations, in early 2028 (exact date TBD). Presentations will likely occur in person in: Champaign-Urbana, Illinois; West Lafayette, Indiana; Chicago, Illinois; or northwest Indiana. The graduate student applicant should consider budgeting travel funds as part of the award to attend this event.

3. Provide an annual progress report in early 2028 that is submitted electronically through the IISG InfoReady Portal, https://iiseagrant.infoready4.com. 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.

Failure to participate in required activities may lead to forfeiture of funds.

How to apply

Full proposals must be submitted to IISG through the IISG InfoReady Portal: https://iiseagrant.infoready4.com by 11:59pm Eastern Daylight Time, Tuesday, December 1, 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.

Templates and guidance for the following components can be found at: https://iiseagrant.org/research/funding-opportunities/templates-and-guidance-for-proposal-submissions/.

Full Proposal Application Components
All applications must include components 1–7. Submit only materials listed below. Directions in this document supersede directions on the template page.

1. ***Front matter*** (complete online form). Include the project title, names, affiliations, and physical and email addresses of both the applicant and the administrative lead, total budget request, and a brief description of the objectives, methodology, and rationale behind the proposed project. The project title should describe the work to be completed, i.e., more than "2027 Scholars Application."

2. ***Statement of interest*** (3-page maximum). Statements of interest should consist of two sections, outlined below. Applicants should include sufficient detail that reviewers can evaluate using criteria listed at the end of this guidance. However, applicants should keep in mind that not all reviewers are subject experts in their field of study. Statements of interest that contain jargon or specialized language can be difficult to evaluate. The sections to be included are:

    a) A description of the activities that will be accomplished with award funds, including how these activities will allow the student to substantially improve their research and how these activities correspond to the IISG strategic plan. This section should include a brief rationale for the proposed work, descriptions of the research question(s) to be addressed, the study design, and how what is proposed differs from but is related to ongoing work (e.g., if the applicant is building on previous knowledge or partnerships; if there is a demonstrated need for the information to be generated through the proposed work).
    b) A description of why the applicant is interested in the IISG Scholars Program and how the program fits into the applicant's career goals. This section can take any format the applicant chooses.

3. ***Letter of Commitment*** (1 page). The intent of this opportunity is for the graduate student to be the driving force behind all project outcomes. However, funds will be sent to the graduate student's institution rather than the student directly; thus, each applicant must identify an administrative lead for their project who can accept funds on their behalf. The student's major professor may serve in this capacity, but this is not required, as long as someone is willing to serve as administrative lead. As noted above, it is preferable that Sea Grant staff members NOT serve as administrative leads, but this is allowed if there is no other option. A letter of commitment should come from the administrative lead and should confirm that the student is or will be enrolled at some point during the 2027–28 academic year and that the named person will support the student in their efforts. The letter of commitment is not a letter of recommendation, will not be evaluated, and will NOT be included in review materials. **Administrative leads should also ensure applicants adhere to application preparation policies of their home institution** (e.g., submitting through a pre-awards office of sponsored programs, including indirect costs in

the budget).

4. ***Budget requests*** (90-4 form plus separate budget narrative). **Budgets must have institutional approval before submission. Applicants and administrative leads should ensure that budgets are fully executed by their home institution before being submitted.** Funding will be provided for up to one year beginning June 1, 2027, or the date of the award, and projects should be completed by May 31, 2028. Graduate student scholar applicants can request up to $12,000. Applicants should use the Excel version of the 90-4 form on the template page. The full list of budget categories can be found on the 90-4 form. Applicants can request graduate student stipends, research material costs, fringe, travel, printing, publication, documentation costs, etc. The graduate student's home institution federally negotiated indirect cost rate *can* be charged as part of this award. If an institution will not charge indirect costs, the applicant should submit documentation from fiscal personnel (e.g., an email or letter stating that indirect costs will not be charged). Budgets should include travel to mandatory activities described above if other travel funds are not available. Budget documents should list the administrative lead as the principal investigator and the student as co-investigator. Applicants may submit one extra page that outlines additional facilities, equipment, or other key components of the student's work that will help complete the project but have no funding request. This will be used for review purposes only.

5. ***Applicant and Administrative Lead CVs*** (2–3 pages each). NSF or NIH format is acceptable, but not required. The student applicant's CV will be included in review materials, but the administrative lead's CV will NOT be included in review materials.

6. ***Data Management Plan*** (max. 2 pages). Under NOAA directives, environmental data generated through projects funded by IISG must be verified and shared within two years of the project's completion. The full definition of environmental data can be found at https:// iiseagrant.org/research/principal-investigator-resources/. If your project will not generate environmental data, state that in your application. If your project will generate environmental data, provide a plan for making the data accessible within 2 years of the completion of the project. Lack of an adequate data management plan may result in delayed distribution of funds.

7. ***Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire*** (as many pages as needed). Download and complete the template. This is intended to be a standalone document that is independent of the proposal narrative and applicants should ensure that relevant details from the proposal narrative are included in the Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire and

vice versa. Every box should have an answer, and the questionnaire should cover all activities proposed. Provide copies of permits, IRB approval, and/or other forms, as appropriate.

8. ***Purdue University Letter of Intent Form*** (1 page). List the administrative lead as the principal investigator. This is not required for applicants from Purdue University and Purdue University Northwest.

9. ***Purdue University Entity Profile*** (1 page). This is not required for applicants from Purdue University and Purdue University Northwest.

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 below (equally weighted when determining rating):

Criteria	Description
Project description	The proposed work is clearly described. Note that applicants need not have a history of work directly related to Lake Michigan to be considered.
Budget	Expenses listed in the proposed budget are appropriate and logical lines can be drawn between the requested support and completion of the graduate student's proposed work. The budget request need not encompass all anticipated charges, as it is expected that graduate students will be building on resources already available to them.
Academic strength	The applicant's previous academic and professional record is strong. It is appropriate to consider the stage of an applicant's career when providing this rating.
IISG relevance	On the whole, materials submitted suggest that the applicant will be able to develop information and/or products that fit with IISG's focus.
Research potential	On the whole, materials submitted suggest that the applicant's research will be substantially improved via this award.

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

Grade	Points	Rating	Description
A	4 pts	Excellent	A truly meritorious project
B	3 pts	Good	A project that clearly deserves support but to which minor improvements are recommended to achieve desired outcomes
C	2 pts	Adequate	A project that should be supported, assuming major reservations related to achieving desired outcomes can be addressed
D	1pt	Questionable	A project about which reservations are so serious that it should be supported only in exceptional circumstances

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 determine 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).