



## 2024 COMPETITIVE GRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Maryland Sea Grant (MDSG) is pleased to announce the Maryland Sea Grant Competitive Graduate Research Fellowship. Students apply for a two-year Maryland Sea Grant fellowship that provides stipend, fringe benefits, and tuition remission and travel allowances. **Due Thursday, March 28 at 5 PM EDT.** To be eligible, graduate students must be enrolled in a graduate degree program at a Maryland or Washington, DC academic institution and engaged in research that is relevant to Maryland and the [MDSG Strategic Plan 2024-2027](#). In addition to financial support, these fellowships may provide access to additional professional development opportunities in science communication, the science-to-management process, and/or other relevant skills. As increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in coastal and marine science is an important programmatic priority for MDSG, we especially encourage applications from students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, individuals with disabilities, individuals from minority serving institutions, and individuals from economically or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. MDSG is administered by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science and funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the state of Maryland.

### CONTACTS

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact either the MDSG Associate Director, [Mike Allen](#), or Proposal and Reporting Coordinator, [Ana Sosa](#), to discuss their proposal ideas and for technical assistance.

Maryland Sea Grant College  
5825 University Research Ct. Ste 1350  
College Park, MD 20740  
301-405-7500  
[asosamor@mdsg.umd.edu](mailto:asosamor@mdsg.umd.edu)

## Maryland Sea Grant Competitive Graduate Research Fellowship

Maryland Sea Grant (MDSG) supports research, education, and outreach on current and future issues affecting the Chesapeake Bay and Maryland's coastal waters. One component of our overarching mission is to support graduate education that connects academic research to informing coastal and marine policy and decision making. Toward that goal, we offer this competitive graduate fellowship RFA to support students conducting research within Maryland's coasts and watersheds. We look to support student research that is socially relevant, particularly for groups traditionally underserved, and is at the intersection of science and applied outcomes. An applicant's research must be consistent with the [Maryland Sea Grant Strategic Plan](#) and address one of the MDSG focus areas: 1) Healthy Coastal Ecosystems; 2) Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture; and 3) Resilient Communities and Economies. Our current strategic plan especially emphasizes our commitment to work on issues relevant to coastal resilience and the local impacts of climate change, particularly work that may support underserved and under-resourced communities.

As part of this fellowship experience, successful candidates should be committed to expanding their engagement with groups beyond academia and have an interest in applying their research to informing management or policy. As a requirement of the fellowship, fellows must choose and work with a professional mentor (i.e., extension staff, educator, resource manager, or other end-user) to ensure that their project design and research results are responsive to the needs of resource managers, policy makers, educators, industry, NGOs, or other stakeholders. Professional mentors should not be academic scientists.

Fellows will be selected based on their demonstrated and potential impact on science and society, their demonstrated interest in connecting research with user communities, the scientific and technical merit of their proposed research project, the relevance of the proposed research to this request for applications, and to [MDSG's mission](#). While all qualified graduate students should apply and will be fairly considered, MDSG is interested in increasing diversity in coastal and marine science, and thus we encourage applications from students who have been historically underrepresented in coastal or marine science. As funding for research costs is not associated with this fellowship, students working on coastal and marine research projects funded by non-Sea Grant sources are particularly encouraged to apply.

### AWARD INFORMATION

The two-year fellowship will provide a stipend (\$34,000), fringe benefits, tuition remission, and a \$2,000 travel allowance for the fellow. Fellows will be paid as graduate research assistants by Maryland Sea Grant, a University System of Maryland institution, following the same model and terms as our [Maryland Sea Grant Research Fellowships](#) program. Continued support after the first year will be contingent upon satisfactory performance by the Fellow and the availability of federal funds. The anticipated start date is the fall semester of 2024.

If your institution requires paying graduate students through its own payroll system, Maryland Sea Grant can provide an institutional award to cover only the \$34,000 stipend, fringe benefits, partial tuition remission, and travel allowance up to a total of \$55,000 per year. However, additional matching funds contribution may need to be negotiated with the institution to meet the 50% matching requirement above the first \$25,000 of the subaward. Typically, these awards would need to be made to the faculty advisor of the student. We will negotiate this arrangement with the institution of the selected students. No budget is required at the application stage.

We anticipate there will be funding available for up to three fellowships. If additional funding becomes available, Maryland Sea Grant reserves the ability to issue additional fellowship awards from the applicant pool.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

The program will be open to graduate students enrolled in or admitted to a full-time graduate or professional degree program at a Maryland or Washington, DC, academic institution. Students may be working toward any master's or doctoral degree, as long as their research is relevant to the mission and strategic plan of MDSG and has an emphasis on Chesapeake or Maryland coastal bays and their watersheds.

*While all qualified graduate students should apply and will be fairly considered, MDSG is interested in increasing diversity in coastal and marine science, and thus we encourage applications from students who have been historically underrepresented in coastal or marine science.*

## **REQUIREMENTS**

Graduate students who are selected will be required to:

- Select and work with a professional mentor who is an extension, education, or communication staff person or an end-user of research results (e.g., state or federal agency professional, K-12 teacher, industry partner) to ensure that results are communicated and translated to end-users;
- Provide annual and final progress reports to MDSG, as well as electronic copies of derived publications and their thesis or dissertation;
- Participate in MDSG-sponsored professional development activities, anticipated to be 1-3 activities;
- Contribute one entry per semester to the MDSG student blog, *Fellowship Experiences*;
- Acknowledge MDSG support in all relevant scientific presentations and publications.

At a minimum, the fellow is required to meet with their professional mentor periodically (no less than three times/year) to reflect upon their research design, activities, and plans. They should provide guidance on issues associated with communicating the information to non-experts, advancing the information to managers or policy makers, promoting adoption of the innovation or technology, or other application of results. In some situations, professional mentors may serve on a student's academic committee. The exact role of the mentor is determined and defined by the applicants, in conjunction with their primary advisor. This mentor's role in the student's education should be discussed in the project narrative.

A professional mentor could be from the public, private, or non-profit sector. While we encourage students to explore opportunities to work with Maryland Sea Grant educators, communicators, or Extension faculty within the University of Maryland Extension program as outreach mentors, it is not required. They should be individuals in a professional situation that requires the application of scientific information and research—particularly the information, data, and findings coming from the applicant's research project—to a pressing management or policy decision. Ideally, the mentor would directly involve the student in policy discussions and development on an issue closely tied to the student's research. *The mentor should not be an academic scientist.* Maryland Sea Grant can assist prospective fellows in identifying potential mentors during the application period.

## NAVIGATING THE SUBMISSION PORTAL: ESEAGRANT

You must submit your proposal online at <https://eseagrants.mdsq.umd.edu>. Login to the proposal online submission system with your credentials. Fill out the registration information to create an account, if necessary.

If you forget your password in the future, use the password retrieval function from the landing page. Maryland Sea Grant will not have access to your password.

Click “Add Proposal” under the “2024 MDSG Competitive Graduate Research Fellowship” selection and enter a title to start a new submission. When you later return to eSeaGrant, this proposal will be listed under the Fellowship Applications list as proposal 01. Click on the title to continue.

Navigate to different sections for the proposal using the tabs along the left. Each tab is required and includes a brief description of the file to be uploaded. You must follow the instructions outlined in the application description for each section.

Submit your completed application on the “Submission Preview” tab no later than the deadline.

### APPLICATION FORMAT, GUIDELINES AND ENTRY IN ESEAGRANT

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: STUDENT APPLICANT

Complete the requested information for student applicant in the appropriate form.

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: FACULTY MENTOR AND PROFESSIONAL MENTOR

Complete the requested information for student’s primary advisor and professional mentor. Click the “Add additional Mentor” button to complete the second form.

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: PROJECT DESCRIPTION UPLOAD

Enter the title of your proposal and then upload the proposal narrative file (PDF only).

**Adherence to the format requirements is mandatory.** Font size can be no smaller than 12 point (Arial preferred) and margins must be 1 inch on standard 8.5x11 inch paper throughout the document. The project description file must include the following components in this sequence:

- Cover Sheet
- Career and Research Interest Statement (1-page maximum)
- Project Description (5-page maximum)
- Literature Cited
- Timeline and Tasks (1-page maximum)
- Academic CV/Biosketch (2-page maximum)
- Data Management Plan
- Proof of acceptance (letter or current transcript)

- A. *Cover Sheet (1-page maximum)*: This should clearly indicate “Maryland Sea Grant Competitive Graduate Research Fellowship Application” as well as include the title of the proposed project; detailed contact information for the applicant, their faculty advisor, and the professional mentor; degree being sought; the primary Sea Grant focus area; and any signatures required by your institution to submit the application.
- B. *Career and Research Interest Statement (1-page maximum)*: The statement should discuss your personal and educational journey to this point and how these experiences inform your current educational goals and professional career plans. Include in your narrative reflections on such questions as: What are your educational or career goals?

What motivates your academic and research interests? What impact do you hope to have on science and society? How do your goals connect to marine or coastal science; sustainability; diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility (DEIJA); and/or other issues relevant to the Maryland Sea Grant mission? How can Sea Grant and this fellowship contribute to these goals? (You do not need to address all of these questions or individually list them.)

- C. **Project Description (5-page maximum, including figures, tables, and other graphics):** The narrative should describe the background and rationale, objectives, general approach and methods, anticipated results, broader impacts, and research team and partners. It is intended to be a brief summary of the proposed research project but should include sufficient detail to evaluate the appropriateness and feasibility of the approach, and the alignment of the project with MDSG's strategic plan.
- Abstract.** Provide an up to 300-word abstract describing the objectives, rationale, methodology, and anticipated outcomes of the research.
  - Introduction / Background / Objectives.** Why is the project needed? Provide the need for the research project, background information, and how the proposed project addresses a specific MDSG mission and strategic plan focus (e.g., reference the strategic plan priority that the research will address). What is the objective, purpose, or hypothesis of the proposed project?
  - General Approach and Methods.** How will the project be accomplished? Describe the methods, approaches, and techniques that will be used to meet the objectives. Describe the role of the applicant and any other individuals contributing to the approach (including the professional mentor).
  - Anticipated Results.** What will be accomplished? Describe the results to be achieved by the project, how these results relate to current knowledge of the proposal topic, and of what use the results will be for specific audiences or end-users.
  - Broader Impacts.** Connect the research to the broader impacts it will have beyond the academic community. Include a brief description of the outreach, education or dissemination strategies to be used. This strategy should go beyond traditional dissemination (e.g., presentations and peer-reviewed literature) to reach end-users directly (e.g., training, workshops, meetings, development of appropriate outreach products for non-scientific audiences, work with K-12 students and teachers, develop training manuals for end-users, work with or impacts on under-served communities). **The participation of the professional mentor should be explicitly described. Applicants are strongly encouraged to work with their mentors to develop their outreach strategy.** More detail about sharing your outreach beyond academic venues is available <https://www.mdsq.umd.edu/share-your-research>.
- D. **Literature Cited:** Document all references cited in your proposal.
- E. **Timeline and Tasks (1-page maximum):** The schedule should show, in table form by month, the milestones and tasks to be achieved (e.g., field work, data analysis, work/meetings with outreach mentor, development of outreach products) and the anticipated dates for achieving those tasks. An example table is available on our website: <http://www.mdsq.umd.edu/proposal-forms-and-worksheets>. *This section does not count toward your 5-page limit.*
- F. **Academic CV/Biosketch (2-page maximum):** Provide a two-page (maximum) curriculum vita for the student. Students may include presentations.
- G. **Data Management Plan:** Proposers must complete a Data Management Plan for making environmental data and results accessible and interpretable within two years of collection. You may use the "Sea Grant Data Management Plan Form" from our forms page (<https://www.mdsq.umd.edu/proposal-forms-and-worksheets>). Additional

instructions are provided on the form. Storing data on local servers or external drives without public access or noting that data will be available “upon request to the PI” are no longer sufficient options. Note you will be required to list data sets created and how to access them when reporting on your project. For additional guidance, see our “Data Management and Sharing” page: <https://www.mdsg.umd.edu/data-management-and-sharing>.

- H. *Proof of acceptance and enrollment in a graduate program:* This can either be an acceptance letter or a current transcript.

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: INVITE LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION WRITERS

Use this section to invite your referees to submit letters of recommendation. Click the "Request Document" button and enter each referee's name and email address. Enter the contact information for two letter of recommendation writers – your primary faculty advisor and professional mentor. **Do this well in advance.** This will send them an email to access eSeaGrant and submit their letter confidentially. Once letters have been submitted, you will be able to see this on the tab.

One letter of recommendation should come from your primary faculty advisor. The advisor's letter should describe the applicant's background and research potential, as well as describe the advisor's role in mentoring and supporting the applicant (advisor's contributions of expertise, academic training and resources (e.g., equipment, supplies, funding) to carry out the project.)

A second letter should come from the professional mentor indicating a commitment to mentorship and describing the role that the mentor will play in the fellow's academic research and outreach experience.

Only two letters will be accepted, so if more than one professional mentor is selected, a joint letter is preferred. If an applicant wants assistance identifying potential professional mentors, or would like to talk further about this expectation, they are encouraged to contact MDSG. Please enter the recommenders' contact information into eSeaGrant well in advance of the deadline to ensure your writers have time to submit.

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Fill out this optional form to help us better understand the applicant pool for this fellowship. Information will not be shared or used in the review process.

#### eSEAGRANT TAB: SUBMISSION PREVIEW

Review the data and filenames of your submission. Click the “Submit” button in the upper right corner to submit your proposal package. **You MUST click submit by the deadline or your proposal will not be considered, regardless of what you have already uploaded.**

#### **DEADLINE AND SUBMISSION PORTAL**

Applications must be submitted online by **Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 5:00 pm EDT** to MDSG's proposal system, eSeaGrant: <https://eseagrant.mdsg.umd.edu>. The submission system closes promptly and MDSG will not accept late proposals, so allow ample time to submit your proposal before the deadline. Confirmation of application receipt will be sent to the submitter by email only. Please contact Ana Sosa or Mike Allen if you do not receive confirmation shortly after submitting your proposal ([eseagrant@mdsg.umd.edu](mailto:eseagrant@mdsg.umd.edu)). Applicants are reminded to follow submission policies of their home institutions (e.g., obtaining review and signatures).

## **REVIEW PROCESS**

MDSG will assemble a peer-review panel composed of the faculty and professionals (e.g., extension staff, resource managers, private and non-profit sectors, and/or additional stakeholders) familiar with the coastal issues faced by Maryland, the region, and the nation. The panel's evaluation will be supported by external written reviews. At least three written reviews (including panelists) will be sought for each proposal. MDSG follows strict [conflict-of-interest policies](#).

Written application reviews will be scored based on the following criteria:

- Research Plan: Strength of the proposed plan of research (including the research plan; the applicant's organization, analytic, and writing skills) (30%)
- Research Impacts and Relevance: Potential research impact, relevance to the Maryland Sea Grant strategic plan, involvement of professional mentor, and impact on diverse stakeholders and communities (25%)
- Applicant Strengths: Demonstrated strengths and potential impact of the applicant to advance watershed, coastal and marine issues (including applicant's academic experiences, leadership and professional experience, education and career goals) (25%)
- Applicant Broader Impacts: Demonstrated or potential impact on others or society (including applicant's outreach and engagement efforts/plan, extracurricular and professional activities and service, and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility issues) (20%)

The panel will review fellowship applications and written reviews and recommend award recipients based on the criteria established for the fellowship. Each application will be scored as "Highly recommended (for funding)," "Recommended," or "Not recommended."

The Maryland Sea Grant director has final discretion to select the application(s) to fund based on panel ratings and comments, availability of funds, and specific programmatic priorities, which include having a diverse and inclusive portfolio of fellows across institutions, research topics, strategic focus areas, and program needs.

Notification of awards is expected by June 30, 2024.

## **OTHER AWARD INFORMATION**

Awardees chosen through this competition are required to provide a valid data management plan and complete an Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire prior to funding.