



Request for Applications

2027 - 2029 Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowships for the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

RFP Release: October 7, 2026

Applications Due: December 7, 2026

Checklist before getting started with an application:

- [Get to know the Davidson Fellowship](#), learn what prior fellows did
- [Explore the NERRS](#) and their [management needs](#); every fellowship project must address a reserve management need
- Learn about collaborative science, get inspired to integrate it into your approach
 - [Watch a 5-minute video](#), [read a few Stories of Collaborative Science](#) where NERRS staff explain their collaborative science and what it accomplishes
 - [Check out the Guide to Collaborative Science](#), especially the [mindset and principles](#)
- Reach out to the reserve with which you would like to work to learn more about the reserve and their needs - see [Applicant Tips for Reserve Outreach](#).

Tips for developing your application:

- Use what you learned from your conversation with the reserve about their need
- Treat the [evaluation criteria](#) as the rubric for developing your application
- Stick to what is feasible for a two-year fellowship and budget time for collaboration:
 - Include time for project refinement with the reserve at the project outset;
 - Be realistic about the number of data collection events based on the local field season;
 - Include time after data collection for data analysis and output development;
 - Ask questions that inform outputs throughout the project and build in time for review after they are developed; don't save this step for the very end.
- Keep in mind, the project you propose will be refined with reserve input if selected for funding. For the application, focus on demonstrating an understanding of the reserve need, being clear about how the research and outputs respond to that need, and providing a collaborative approach for working with the reserve.

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Overview

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Research Fellowship (Davidson Fellowship) is a two-year program that provides the opportunity for students to conduct collaborative research at one of the 30 reserves within the [National Estuarine Research Reserve System](#) (NERRS).

The University of Michigan Water Center (Water Center) is working closely with NOAA to support the selection and implementation of the fourth cohort of the Davidson Fellowship. In partnership with NOAA, the Water Center is soliciting applications for the 2027-2029 cohort of NOAA Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellows.

Through a two-year research project focused on a [reserve management need](#), fellows advance understanding about coastal and estuarine health and resilience to inform future coastal management decisions. They learn about the practice of collaborative science, a hallmark of the NERRS, and find ways to embody its principles in their projects. The Davidson Fellowship also provides students the opportunity to participate in professional development, receive mentoring to support professional growth, and create a strong network with other fellows and professionals.

Fellows develop and conduct research projects with a host reserve specified in the application. The approach requires engagement with reserve staff to inform project development and through project completion. Each fellow is assigned a reserve mentor and is expected to spend time on-site at the reserve. Fellows work closely with their reserve mentor and faculty advisor to conduct their research. Projects may employ a variety of academic disciplines, spanning the range of natural and/or social sciences. Cross-discipline approaches are welcome.

Prior fellows have brought a rich and varied set of backgrounds and experiences that have enriched the learning objectives of the Davidson Fellowship. The program expects that this fourth cohort of fellows will represent a similar diversity of research interests, methodologies, and backgrounds. Learn more about prior fellows and their work by visiting the [fellowship website under Meet the Fellows](#), browsing prior issues of the [fellowship newsletter](#), or [watching presentations by former fellows](#).

Funding Amount

One fellow will be selected for each of the 30 reserves for a two-year duration. Each fellow may request up to \$60,000 per year (\$120,000 total) for a 24-month project period. Funding is subject to the availability of annual federal appropriations. Awards will be made to the fellow's graduate institution through a subaward agreement with the University of Michigan. Funds will be awarded on a competitive basis.

Funding in year two is contingent upon the availability of funds from Congress and satisfactory performance determined by the University of Michigan in partnership with NOAA.



Eligibility for Funding

To be eligible, fellows must be citizens or permanent residents of U.S. states or territories, and admitted to or enrolled full-time in a master's or doctoral program at a U.S. accredited university. A prospective fellow may submit a signed letter from the institution indicating provisional acceptance to a graduate degree program conditional on obtaining financial support, such as this fellowship.

Federal agencies and employees shall not receive funds under this solicitation but may serve as project partners. Examples might include, but are not limited to, participating in an advisory capacity or providing facilities for research.

NERRS staff are ineligible to submit an application for a fellowship.

Each application must designate a fiduciary institution and a fiscal lead¹ that would receive and manage the subaward. In most cases, the faculty advisor will serve as the fiscal lead.

Application Process

Applicants should review the process outlined in this solicitation and follow directions to submit an application using the timeline provided below.

Expectations for applicants to engage with reserves during the application process are as follows:

- Prior to proposal development, applicants should review the list of [reserve management needs](#), identify reserve(s) whose needs align with their interests, and reach out to the reserve point of contact. The purpose of the outreach is for the applicant to learn more about the need and how their research interests might intersect with those of the reserve, as opposed to discussing the specifics of a project idea. The conversation may also be helpful for better understanding how the reserve approaches collaborative science, reserve facilities, and research equipment. See [Applicant Tips for Reserve Outreach](#).
- Information learned from the reserve is critical for the applicant to discuss with their faculty advisor and develop a proposal for a project. Projects should directly relate to the reserve need and support the applicant's graduate course of study.
- Please note that **reserve points of contact and staff may not co-develop or review a proposal prior to submission.**

¹ The fiscal lead manages the grant subaward and will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed. The fiscal lead must be employed at the fiduciary institution that will receive the grant contract.



Key Dates

Date	Activity
October - December 2026	Applicants review reserve needs, engage with reserve staff to better understand their needs, and develop a proposal. See Applicant Tips for Reserve Outreach
November 2, 2026 at 2pm EST	Webinar: Davidson Fellowship Opportunity Overview and Question & Answer Session Register for the webinar
December 7, 2026 by 11:59pm EST	Applications due
April 2027	Award notifications
August 1, 2027	Anticipated fellowship start date

Supporting Documents

Additional information about the fellowship may be found at <https://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/research/davidson-fellowship.html>

All supporting documents of this Request for Applications and access to the online application form can be found at <https://graham.umich.edu/application-request/33730>



About the Davidson Fellowship

The Davidson Fellowship provides graduate students with the unique opportunity to learn about and conduct collaborative science with reserves. Through a two-year research project focused on a [reserve management need](#), fellows advance understanding about coastal and estuarine health and resilience to inform future management decisions. They also learn about the practice of collaborative science, a hallmark of the NERRS, and find ways to embody its principles in their projects.

Program outcomes include:

- High quality collaborative research with reserves that advances understanding of coastal and estuarine health and resilience to inform future management decisions; and
- A growing and diverse cadre of next-generation leaders in coastal and estuarine science and management with a strong network that continues into their careers.

About the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

The NERRS is a network of 30 coastal sites designated to protect and study estuarine systems in collaboration with and in service to surrounding communities. Established through the Coastal Zone Management Act, this partnership program between NOAA and the coastal states supports ecosystem health and the interconnectedness of people and the environment.

Reserves represent diverse ecosystem types and provide habitats for a wide range of ecologically, culturally, and commercially important species. Each reserve conducts long-term research and monitoring. Reserves engage with surrounding communities to understand their needs, and also to provide data, information, and education opportunities to local communities to support science-based decision making and stewardship. Research in the reserves addresses critical gaps in knowledge about estuarine systems, ecological processes, socioeconomics, and related areas. As part of a national system, the reserves are also uniquely positioned to address research questions and management issues of national significance. [Learn more about the NERRS.](#)

About Collaborative Science

Collaborative science is a knowledge co-creation process that informs natural resource management decisions by involving communities, scientists, managers, and others to advance understanding in a manner that none of them working alone could accomplish. In the NERRS, collaborative science starts with the articulation of a reserve management need defined by the socio-ecological system. Project ideas emerge with the input of those who defined the need. Collaborative science requires tailoring to context and engagement with those intended to use the information and products that are



produced.² The reserves excel at the practice of collaborative science and have pioneered many techniques that make it successful. [Learn more about collaborative science](#). [Watch a 5-minute video](#) and [read Stories of Collaborative Science](#) to hear NERRS staff explain their collaborative science and what it accomplishes.

How the Fellowship Uniquely Advances Graduate Students' Experiences

The Davidson Fellowship provides a unique experience to work with the NERRS to conduct research, learn about and apply collaborative science principles, receive mentorship and professional skill building training, participate in learning webinars as well as networking opportunities with coastal professionals, and share research with a variety of audiences.

- **Conduct collaborative research:** Fellows have the opportunity to work closely with reserve staff, partners, and academic institutions with similar goals to complete a project that helps fulfill their degree requirements while benefiting the reserves and the field of coastal and estuarine resource management. Fellows work with the reserves, which serve as living laboratories and ideal sites for research and long-term monitoring.
- **Learn about and apply collaborative science principles:** Fellows learn about why the approach is used by reserves and apply collaborative science principles in their work. The University of Michigan Water Center hosts the NERRS Science Collaborative Program. The NERRS Science Collaborative's primary goal is to support the co-development and application of relevant and usable knowledge that addresses critical coastal management issues identified by the NERRS. Fellows benefit from engagement with this program through collaborative science training and access to professionals in supporting collaborative science.
- **Place-based mentorship:** Fellows receive local mentorship from a NERRS staff member who works with them to support their research, help make connections to reserve partners, and provide local, place-based context.
- **Professional development:** Fellows participate in training opportunities, e.g., project design, collaborative science, facilitation, and communication, for their professional growth, and create a strong network with other fellows and professionals. Fellows have the opportunity to identify and receive training on specific skills that support their professional development.

² Users are individuals or groups in a position to apply the information or tools being produced, evaluated, or transferred through a collaborative science project in a way that is of direct consequence to the ecological, social, or economic integrity of a reserve(s) and/or surrounding watershed(s). Examples of users include, but are not limited to, reserve staff, and public, private, and commercial interests, or non-governmental decision/policy makers, including Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities, landowners, regulators, resource managers, land use planners, leaders of impacted communities, and educators at all levels.



- **Build professional network and share research:** This program integrates opportunities and requirements for fellows to share their research with the NERRS and the broader coastal network for the application of their work. Fellows participate in the NERRS Biennial Meeting to learn about the System, receive training, and share their research. Fellows also identify another conference of their choice at which to present.

The same collaborative principles that apply to the partnership between NOAA and the coastal states also apply to the Davidson Fellowship. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management provides overall leadership and oversight of the fellowship and is responsible for key program activities including communications and fellow selection, development, and training. The University of Michigan Water Center provides expertise in facilitating and supporting collaborative science and is responsible for the application solicitation and review process and providing collaborative science training for fellows. Reserves work closely with fellows to deepen and expand their research experience. Together NOAA, the Water Center, and the reserves implement this fellowship program and provide support for fellows, preparing them as the next generation of coastal professionals.



About Davidson Fellowship Projects

Davidson Fellowship projects conduct new applied science in collaboration with reserves that results in data, tools, or other products that advance understanding about coastal and estuarine health and resilience and help to inform future decision making related to a [reserve management need](#). Projects can use natural and/or social science approaches and must have a well-defined research question that the project is designed to answer.

Outputs

Project outputs are specific products that are developed during or upon project completion. Outputs must address reserve management needs. Examples of project outputs include, but are not limited to the following:

- Specific, scientifically produced datasets and analyses;
- A synthesis of research findings;
- Evaluation of existing decision making information needs;
- User-driven communication products, such as factsheets, informational websites, technical reports, visuals, or interactive communication tools; and/or
- Specific products or tools that translate and/or apply information in a way that addresses the identified user's needs, e.g., decision support tools, implementation guides, management recommendations, curricula, and technical or non-technical reports.

At least one output **must** include a presentation at a professional conference of the fellow's choosing, likely in year two of the fellowship.

Outcomes

Project outcomes are the expected impacts of the project process and outputs. Examples of project outcomes include, but are not limited to the following:

- Advanced understanding and/or improved decision making related to a reserve management need;
- New science informing updates to management processes or reserve programs; and
- Enhanced programs that can better address a current management need based on new data, analyses, or tools.



Required Elements

All proposals must:

- 1) Address a reserve management need;
- 2) Apply the principles of collaborative science; and
- 3) Include required activities that support the professional development of the fellow.

1) Address a reserve management need

All proposals must address a current reserve management need. Annually, reserves articulate their management needs and they are compiled into a single document to capture the current needs of all reserves. The document provides descriptions of [reserve management needs](#) and a point of contact for each need.

Proposals must offer a clear and specific explanation of how the proposed work will inform and contribute to addressing a management need for the anticipated host reserve. Proposals may involve more than one reserve, e.g., a comparative study; however, a single reserve must serve as host and be specified in the application.

See [Applicant Tips for Reserve Outreach](#) for ideas about how to prepare for and get the most out of a conversation with reserve staff about their needs.

2) Apply the principles of collaborative science

The principles of collaborative science include the following:

- Responding to a reserve management need;
- Engaging with and building reciprocal relationships³ with reserve staff and other intended users;
- Tailoring research processes to context; and
- Creating relevant and usable products for intended users.

Because the Davidson Fellowship is meant to help address reserve needs, it is appropriate for fellows to think of the host reserve as a primary intended user. Fellows are also encouraged to consider who in addition to the reserve might be interested in or

³ In collaborative science projects, reciprocal relationships are exemplified by being non-extractive and by participants receiving the resources they need to participate in the work. All parties (researchers, partners, intended users) collaboratively identify roles and commit to an approach to working together. The project team bears the responsibility of ensuring everyone has the resources they need to participate, ensuring everyone benefits, and avoiding potential harms. Learn more: [Collaborative research to inform adaptive comanagement: a framework for the He'eia National Estuarine Research Reserve](#).



benefit from their research, i.e., what they might produce from their project research that could also have broader use and impacts beyond the reserve.

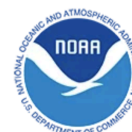
In this two-year graduate fellowship, applying the principles of collaborative science entails the following:

At the proposal development phase:

- Prior to proposal development, applicants should review the list of [reserve management needs](#), identify reserve(s) whose needs align with their interests, and reach out to the reserve point of contact. The purpose of the outreach is for the applicant to learn more about the need and how their research interests might intersect with those of the reserve, as opposed to discussing the specifics of a project idea. The conversation may also be helpful for better understanding how the reserve approaches collaborative science, reserve facilities, and research equipment. See [Applicant Tips for Reserve Outreach](#).
- Information learned from the reserve is critical for the applicant to discuss with their faculty advisor and develop a proposal for a project. Projects should directly relate to the reserve need and support the applicant's graduate course of study.
- Please note that reserve points of contact and staff may not co-develop or review a proposal prior to submission. Thus **it is expected that additional reserve input and project refinement will be required after a project is selected for funding.**
- To plan for project refinement with reserve staff, proposals should include details about how the fellow expects to engage with the host reserve during the project, i.e., the project's collaborative approach. Proposals should include a few examples of how research decisions and outputs will be shaped with reserve input.

During a fellowship project:

- Fellows will implement the project with the support and engagement of their faculty advisor and a reserve mentor. Reserve mentors will be identified after the project is selected for funding.
- Fellows will work closely with their reserve mentor and faculty advisor throughout the fellowship. This will include seeking reserve input about the research, making refinements to the approach and outputs to ensure they address reserve needs, and exploring the potential for broader use and impact beyond the reserve.
- Fellows will also work to understand the socio-ecological system, mission, and capabilities of the reserve and the reserve system. To deepen collaboration, fellows will be involved in reserve activities that relate to their project and support the reserve's community engagement, education, and stewardship efforts. These activities will be determined with the reserve at the start of the fellowship.



- It is anticipated that fellows will work on-site for a minimum of six weeks per year (can be non-consecutive). Any housing or accommodation needed to meet this requirement should be discussed with the reserve prior to submitting an application.
- The fellow, faculty advisor, and reserve mentor will be required to complete a mentoring agreement and work plan within the first 90 days of the fellowship. These documents will help guide the research, identification of professional development goals, collaborative approach to working together, and plans for data management and sharing.

The [Guide to Collaborative Science](#) may be a helpful resource to integrate collaborative science principles into project design.

3) Include required activities that support the professional development of the fellow

Training will be provided to all fellows to support their professional development and enhance their fellowship experience. Applicants are encouraged to consider how the following required professional development opportunities could advance their proposed projects. All proposals must integrate the following required activities in the timeline and associated travel costs in the budget:

- Complete a [mentoring agreement and work plan](#) that includes professional development goals (within the first 90 days of the fellowship);
- Attend the reserves' system-wide meeting, held in the fall of 2027 and hosted by the He'eia NERR in Hawai'i (include travel to Honolulu in the budget);
- Participate in formal training in project design, collaborative science, facilitation, and communication (dates to be determined but approximately two trainings per year and 1-2 days in duration; virtual and no additional cost to the fellow);
- Participate in the annual fellow workshop. The year 1 workshop is expected to be held in the spring of 2028 and virtual. The year 2 workshop is expected to be held in the fall of 2028 and in-person; the location is to be determined, but likely Charleston, SC or Silver Spring, MD (include travel in the year 2 budget); and
- Present research at a professional conference of the fellow's choosing, likely in year 2, but can be earlier (include travel and registration fee in the budget).

NOAA Data Sharing and Management Requirements

NOAA requires that environmental and social science data collected and/or created under NOAA grants and cooperative agreements be made visible, accessible, quality controlled, documented, and independently understandable to general users. It should be available free of charge or at minimal cost, and made available in a timely manner



(typically no later than two years after the data are collected or created), except where limited by law, regulation, policy, or security requirements.

Fellowship projects are subject to these data sharing and management requirements. If a project selected for funding involves the collection of new data, including receiving or incorporating sensitive data such as data related to Indigenous Knowledge, a data sharing plan must be developed as a part of the work plan within the first 90 days of the fellowship. This plan must address elements such as methods and protocols for data collection, data quality control/quality assurance procedures, metadata, data access, and data archival. A data sharing plan template will be provided.

The NERRS Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) is the coordinating entity for Davidson Fellowship data management activities and can provide support and advice to fellows in the development of a data sharing plan. CDMO personnel will provide data management guidance during post-selection project refinement and technical support during projects. In addition, CDMO can help fellows archive and make their project datasets accessible using CDMO's access and archival services and standard protocols.

Environmental and Cultural Resources Review

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental and/or cultural impacts of projects or proposals seeking funding from NOAA. Fellowship projects are covered under a National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion. No additional consultations are needed as long as the research takes place within the reserve boundaries and the study is supervised by reserve staff under the existing, approved practices of the reserve. Any field work conducted as part of a project must be consistent with the host reserve's approved management plan and is subject to the particular laws, regulations, and best management practices that govern all activities of the reserve. Universities are responsible for obtaining any permits in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.



Application Requirements

Applications must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 7, 2026 using the online form available at the [application website](#).

All of the application requirements are detailed in [Appendix A](#). Applications not meeting these requirements, including budget and header requirements, will be removed from the competition without further review.

The application structure is as follows:

- 1) Title Page
- 2) Statement of Interest
- 3) Project Narrative
 - a) Statement of Reserve Need and Response
 - b) Project Approach
 - c) Outputs and Outcomes
 - d) Data Accessibility (if applicable)
- 4) Appendices A-G: These include items such as timeline, budget table and narrative, letters of support, resume, transcripts, cited references, etc.

How to Submit Your Application

You will need a U-M Friend Account to start and submit your application. [Information on how to create an account can be found here](#).

Go to the [application website](#) and click “Apply.” You will then be prompted to login with your Friend Account.

Once you have logged in, submitting your application will consist of the following:

- 1) Completing all required fields in the online application form (these required fields closely follow the information requested on the title page);
- 2) Uploading a single PDF of all of the required materials (including the budget in the appendices);
- 3) Uploading a separate Excel spreadsheet of the budget; and
- 4) Clicking the "save" button.

You will receive a confirmation email the first time you successfully upload and save your application. The email will include the link you may use to return to your application and make edits until the deadline. Your saved application will be automatically submitted at 11:59pm EST on December 7, 2026.

If you do not receive a confirmation email after the first time you save your application, your application was not saved properly and you should resave or contact us directly at DavidsonFellowship@umich.edu.



Questions Regarding this Request for Applications

Question and Answer Record:

Responses to all questions, without reference to individuals, will be posted on a rolling basis for all interested applicants to view on the [application website](#).

Overview and Q&A Webinar:

On November 2, 2026 at 2pm EST, NOAA and the Water Center will host a webinar that provides an overview of the opportunity and time for Q&A with participants. [Register for the webinar](#).

The webinar will be recorded. After the webinar, questions and responses will be incorporated into the online Q&A Record and the recording will be posted to the [application website](#).

Email:

- Questions regarding this request for applications should be submitted to DavidsonFellowship@umich.edu.
- General questions regarding the Davidson Fellowship should be submitted to OCM.DavidsonFellowship@noaa.gov.

Phone:

To discuss questions over the phone, we suggest emailing DavidsonFellowship@umich.edu to set up a time or leaving a voice message for Doug George, NOAA (510-210-3952) or Maeghan Brass, University of Michigan Water Center (734-763-0727).



Appendix A: Application Requirements

Applications must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 7, 2026.

Applications must be provided as a single PDF file using 12-point, Times New Roman font, no less than single spaced, and with one-inch margins, and be organized using the headers below. Applications must include a title page, statement of interest, five-page maximum narrative, and appendices as outlined below. **Applications not meeting these requirements, including budget and header requirements, will be removed from the competition without further review.**

Title Page

The title page should include the following information and headers:

- 1) Project Title
- 2) Sponsored Principal Investigator (Student)
 - a) Name
 - b) Telephone Number
 - c) Postal Mailing Address
 - d) E-mail Address
- 3) Institutional Principal Investigator / Fiscal Lead (Faculty Advisor)⁴
 - a) Name
 - b) Title / Position
 - c) Institution
 - d) Telephone Number
 - e) Postal Mailing Address
 - f) E-mail Address
- 4) Fiduciary Information – Indicate the institution that would receive and manage the grant contract. The fiscal lead should be employed at this institution. Please provide a point of contact, including email address, to receive fiscal questions. The fiduciary institution is responsible for tracking grant-related spending, and submitting invoices to the University of Michigan for reimbursement on behalf of the grant.
- 5) Student Degree Information - University, department, degree being sought, anticipated graduation date.

⁴ The fiscal lead manages the grant award and will have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the proposed scope of work is completed. The fiscal lead must be employed at the fiduciary institution that will receive the grant contract.



- 6) Name of Reserve – Name of reserve at which the project will be conducted.
- 7) Reserve Need – The priority reserve management need that would be addressed by the project. List just one need. This need should come from the list of [reserve management needs](#).
- 8) Budget Request – Indicate funding requested by year, i.e., Year 1: \$____, Year 2: \$____. Annual totals may not exceed \$60,000.
- 9) Project Duration – Provide start and end dates. Start date must be August 1, 2027 and end no later than July 31, 2029.
- 10) Project Summary – Provide a 200-word summary of the proposed project that is suitable for a non-technical audience. Include the reserve management need to which the project is responding and how, planned outputs, and anticipated outcomes.
- 11) Key Words – Provide up to 5 key words related to the proposed project. See [list of key words](#) from which to choose.

Statement of Interest (1 page maximum)

How do the following connect to and support your interests, graduate course of study, and career goals?

- The research project you are proposing;
- The opportunity to do collaborative science with a reserve that helps to address their management need; and
- The professional development opportunities that would be available to you through the fellowship. Please indicate your professional development goals and any suggestions for opportunities that would enhance the work you are proposing to undertake.

Project Narrative (5 page maximum)

The project narrative **should not exceed five pages** and should be organized using the following headers in this order.

- 1) Statement of Need and Response to the Need –
 - Identify a [reserve management need](#) of focus, discussing the importance and context.
 - Describe the project's relevance to the reserve(s) involved in the project. Explain how it will contribute to addressing the reserve management need, including how it will advance understanding and examples of how it could inform decision making related to the need.



- 2) Project Approach – The approach should describe the technical methods and collaborative approach that will address the research question(s), provide opportunities for meaningful input from the reserve, and lead to outputs that meet reserve needs. Include the following information, using an organizational structure that best suits the proposal topic.
- Provide the core research question(s).
 - Describe the approach that will address the research question(s). The approach should be supported by literature references.
 - Describe an anticipated collaborative approach for working with the reserve. The process should support iterative engagement and contribute to building reciprocal relationships with the reserve and, if relevant, other intended users. If selected for funding, these details will be further refined with reserve input. At the proposal stage, focus on how the fellow anticipates working with the reserve. Provide a few examples of how research decisions and outputs will be shaped with reserve input.
- 3) Outputs and Outcomes – Provide a list of the planned outputs and anticipated outcomes, clearly distinguishing between the two. Describe these briefly, indicating how the outputs are expected to help address the reserve management needs discussed in the “statement of need” and contribute to anticipated outcomes.
- Output – A specific product that is developed during or upon project completion; there may be several outputs associated with a project. See [example outputs](#) provided above. Outputs should include sharing the research at a professional conference.
 - Outcome – An expected impact of the project process and outputs. See [example outcomes](#) provided above.
- 4) Data Accessibility (if applicable) – If proposing to use **existing** datasets, provide essential details for access. Identify the datasets, who owns them, and explain how they will be accessed. For example, if proposing use of NERR System-Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) Data or Sentinel Site data, indicate which specific SWMP or Sentinel Site data will be used. These data are publicly available. If datasets are not publicly available, explain how permission has or will be obtained.

Appendices

- A. Timeline – Using the required [timeline template](#) found on the application website, include the following:
- a. Project start and end dates. Projects are two years in duration. Projects should start August 1, 2027 and end no later than July 31, 2029.
 - b. A schedule with key tasks and deliverables. This schedule must:



- i. Identify significant tasks;
 - ii. Specifically cite and link directly to the outputs identified in the project narrative; and
 - iii. Indicate completion of all final project outputs.
 - c. All required activities that support the professional development of the fellow. See [Required Elements](#) for the list of activities and estimated timing.
 - d. Regular check-in and reporting with the University of Michigan Water Center program officer. **Fellows and their faculty advisor are required to meet reporting requirements and engage with the University of Michigan Water Center program officer.** Check-ins occur at the kickoff of the fellowship and semi-annually via one-hour virtual calls. Written progress reports are required semi-annually.
- B. Cited References – Up to 2 pages of references may be included.
- C. Budget, Budget Narrative & IDC Rate Agreement –
- a. Budget Table - Use the required [budget template](#) found on the application website to provide an itemized estimate of all costs. **Budget tables should be submitted as an Excel file and also included as an appendix within the application PDF.**
- The budget request may not exceed \$60,000 annually for two years, for a total of \$120,000. Direct costs are intended to support the student and their research. Direct costs may include personnel, fringe benefits, travel, supplies, and tuition.
- To support the professional development activities and fellowship experience, travel must be budgeted for required attendance at the NERRS Biennial Meeting in year 1 (He'eia NERR), fellow workshop in year 2 (likely Silver Spring, MD or Charleston, SC), and a professional conference of the student's choice, unless other funds for these activities have already been secured and can be confirmed. Registration fees should also be budgeted for the NERRS Biennial Meeting and the professional conference.
- Additional budget may be required to support the fellow's travel to and from the reserve and potentially housing while [spending time on-site](#).
- There is no cost-share requirement.
- b. Indirect Rate Agreement - The University of Michigan will reimburse overhead costs up to an institution's federally negotiated indirect cost (IDC) rate agreement. **Use the institution's negotiated rate that applies to fellowship grants, rather than the negotiated rate for general research. Provide a copy of the IDC rate agreement for the fiduciary institution that would manage the grant.**⁵

⁵ If the fiduciary institution does not have a federally negotiated indirect rate, they should use the de minimis rate of 15%.

- c. Budget Narrative – Provide a budget narrative to justify expenses in all budget categories. Please note the following:
- i. Personnel costs for the fellow, including number of months and percentage of time requested. For a Graduate Student Research Assistant position, provide the stipend/salary per term and the total personnel costs requested.
 - ii. Supplies costs must include a description of the needed supplies, the costs per supply, the quantity, and the total amount of supplies costs requested.
 - iii. Tuition costs must be based on the fellow's institutional rate for master's or doctoral students. Please include the rate per semester, number of semesters requested, and the total amount of tuition costs requested.
 - iv. Travel costs must be broken out by number of people traveling, destination, and purpose of travel, and projected costs per person. Conference fees and any membership fees required to attend the conference must be explicitly stated in the budget justification. Domestic and foreign travel should be itemized separately. Foreign travel must comply with the [Fly America Act](#) which limits the use of foreign flag carriers.
 - v. Overhead may be charged up to the fiscal institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate. Use the institution's negotiated rate that applies to fellowship grants, rather than the negotiated rate for general research. The budget narrative should explain the project's IDC rate and which project expenses are used for calculating the total indirect amount.⁶
- D. Subrecipient Statement of Collaborative Intent – The fiduciary institution must complete the [Subrecipient Statement of Collaborative Intent form](#).
- E. Letters of Support for the Applicant – Include a letter from the applicant's faculty advisor and at least one letter from a different faculty member or professional colleague regarding the following:
- a. Applicant's faculty advisor (maximum of two pages): The letter should include the following: Assurance that the student is in good academic standing; support for the project as part of the student's course of study; acknowledgement of requirements for the fellow's time at the reserve and in professional development events; explain how the faculty advisor will support the collaborative approach for working with the reserve; and acknowledgement of data management and sharing requirements for data

⁶ For example, applicants should indicate if the project will use their institution's federally negotiated indirect cost rate, something lower, or a de minimis 15% rate. In addition, the budget narrative should indicate which project costs (e.g., salaries and travel but not tuition) the IDC rate is being applied to for the calculations of the total indirect amount.



collected as part of the project, including making them available to reserve staff. See [Required Elements](#).

- b. A faculty member or professional colleague (maximum of two letters, up to two pages each): The letter should describe familiarity with the applicant's work, and address the applicant's ability to succeed in the program. Experience working with the applicant in prior collaborative settings and ability to speak to their collaborative work is ideal.
- F. Resume or C.V. – A resume or C.V. for the applicant should be provided. Include all graduate and undergraduate institutions (department or area of study, degree, and year of graduation), all publications (including undergraduate and graduate theses), awards or fellowships, and related work/research experience.
- G. Transcripts – Unofficial copies of transcripts from all undergraduate and graduate institutions. Transcripts from the current institution should indicate the enrollment status.



Appendix B: Evaluation Criteria, Review, and Selection Process

Applications must comply with all submission instructions and guidelines to be considered for funding. Applications not meeting these requirements will be removed from the competition without further review.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the 12 equally weighted criteria listed below.

1) Response to Reserve Need

- a) The proposal identifies a [reserve management need](#) of focus and demonstrates an understanding of the need.
- b) The proposal clearly explains how it will contribute to addressing the reserve management need, including how it will advance understanding and examples of how it could inform decision making related to the need.

2) Project Approach

- a) The methods are sufficiently detailed and appropriate for addressing the research question(s).
- b) The approach incorporates collaborative science principles including an anticipated strategy for reserve engagement and input on the proposed research and outputs. This approach is both appropriate and demonstrates an openness to refinement with the reserve, if selected for funding.
- c) The approach is appropriate for addressing the need and achieving the project outputs.

3) Applicant Qualifications

- a) The applicant demonstrates significant interest in the following: working with the NERRS; conducting collaborative science with a reserve to address a management need; and advancing their capacities through participation in professional development activities provided by the fellowship.
- b) The applicant has the necessary expertise and experience to complete the proposed work.
- c) Letters of support confirm the applicant's capacity and likelihood for success in the fellowship.

4) Feasibility

- a) The timeline is realistic for the proposed work and includes sufficient time for integrating reserve input and completing proposed project outputs.
- b) The budget is appropriate for the proposed work, including travel requirements for fellowship professional development opportunities.



- c) The letter of support from the faculty advisor demonstrates commitment to the required elements of the project and explains how they will support the student in completing the fellowship.
- 5) **Potential Impact** – The proposed approach and outputs likely to lead to the desired outcomes.

Review Process

The review process for applications is as follows.

- 1) **Minimum requirements assessment** – Applications must be submitted by the stated deadlines. Water Center staff will review all applications to confirm that they meet the requirements as described in this solicitation, including adherence to application specifications (e.g., font size, page limit, title page, budget limit), and inclusion of required elements, specified headers, and appendices. Applications not meeting these requirements will be removed from the competition without further review.
- 2) **Application review** – Applications meeting the minimum requirements will be reviewed by reserve-led panels with expertise in coastal and estuarine science and management, stewardship, education, and training and engagement. Panelists will include reserve staff that have strong familiarity with reserve needs, resources, and capabilities as well as external panelists with relevant expertise.
 - a) *Written review* – Each application will be assigned to three non-conflicted panelists who will develop written reviews according to the evaluation criteria outlined above. In their written reviews, panelists will be asked to provide comments to explain their rating and, where possible, suggestions for improvement.
 - b) *Panel discussion* – Panelists will convene to discuss the outcomes of the written reviews. Panelists will discuss strengths and weaknesses of each application and any discrepancies among the written reviews. The panel will then develop a rank order list of supportable projects.
 - c) *Recommendations for funding* – The panel's rank order list of applications will be provided as input to the final selection process as outlined in the following section.

Selection Process

Final funding recommendations will be based on the panel recommendations of supportable projects for each reserve in rank order and available funds. Award notifications are expected in April 2027.

