REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

VERMONT WATER RESOURCES AND LAKE STUDIES CENTER

ANNUAL STATE GRANTS PROGRAM, 2026–2027

TIMELINE:

RFP ISSUED: Friday, December 5, 2025

INTENTION TO SUBMIT EMAIL: Monday, January 12, 2026

PROPOSALS DUE: Monday, February 2, 2026

NOTIFICATION OF SELECTION: Friday, May 1, 2026

REVISED PROPOSALS DUE: Friday, May 15, 2026

SUBMISSION TO USGS (TBC & COMPLETED BY VT WATER CENTER): Monday, June 1, 2026

AWARD PERIOD: September 1, 2026–August 31, 2027

OVERVIEW

The Vermont Water Resources and Lake Studies Center (Vermont Water Center) seeks faculty and graduate student research, outreach, education, training, and information-transfer proposals for the 2026–2027 United States Geological Survey (USGS) 104b State Water Resources Research Institutes Grant Program. Information and forms for the national program are on the State Water Resources Research Act Program page of the USGS website. Information on the Vermont program is available at the Vermont Water Resources and Lake Studies Center website.

The National Institutes for Water Resources seek to build an inclusive community through research, education, outreach, and training that is strengthened by the diversity of scientists and members of society to achieve the mission set forth in the Water Resources Research Act. The Vermont Water Center encourages proposals from principal investigators, collaborators, and graduate students who are from underrepresented or underserved groups in STEM, and early-career faculty. Vermont Water Center research projects' outreach efforts should be inclusive of diverse populations.

The annual request for proposals (RFP) for the Water Resources Research Institutes Program has not yet been posted for FY2026, and the total funding and the official start date for awards are both dependent on Congressional and federal actions. However, we expect the 104b program to be funded again this year with a similar implementation period, and we will proceed with this call for proposals on the basis of the previous RFP. Questions regarding this RFP should be sent to the Vermont Water Center, vwrlsc@uvm.edu

RESEARCH FOCUS

Proposals must focus on critical water resources science and management needs in the state of Vermont, including all basins. The 104b program will consider proposals to support research, outreach, education, training, and other information-transfer activities focused on physical, biological, chemical, social, or engineering aspects of water quality or quantity. All proposals should justify project plans based on current needs, as documented in national, regional, and especially state science and technology overviews (e.g., Vermont Surface Water Management Strategy, Vermont Groundwater Management Plan). Within the broad range of topics on which proposals may focus, in 2026, the Vermont Water Resources and Lake Studies Center particularly encourages proposals addressing the following topics:

- Impacts of changing seasonal dynamics and extreme events (floods, droughts) relating to water resources
- Increasing resilience to extreme events and changing environmental conditions, including community hazard resiliency, community and municipal planning, infrastructure investments, adaptation, and emergency preparedness
- Gaps in knowledge related to use of and subsequent distribution and movement of deicing/anti-icing products through surface water, soils and groundwater, long-term impacts to soils, understanding impacts to lakes, riparian zones, and wetlands, and influence on aquatic life
- Water quality studies to inform restoration and protection practices and policies, including effects of restoring stream processes on lake health; benefits of overstory canopy, forested riparian buffers, and forested spring seeps; effects of connectivity on nutrient cycling and groundwater-surface water interactions
- Research that informs strategies and best practices for riparian forest restoration to enhance water quality and flood resilience
- Water resources management decision making (e.g., around investments in phosphorus reduction)
- Impacts of residential septic systems on lake and stream water quality
- Other water resources issues, especially those relevant to the Connecticut River basin

Proposals should describe how results will be disseminated to water managers and decision makers, other relevant stakeholders, and/or public audiences. Projects that substantially engage with non-academic partners during the research process (not just dissemination of results) are strongly encouraged.

The Vermont Water Center especially welcomes proposals from early-career professionals. All proposals must originate from an institution of higher education based in Vermont, including community and technical colleges. We will prioritize funding-worthy projects that foster the entry of new research scientists, engineers, and technicians into water resources fields.

PROJECT TYPES

Two types of proposals will be considered: Student-centered (≤$15,000 federal) and General (≤$50,000 federal). All proposals are encouraged to support the participation of students (undergraduate or graduate) or post-doctoral scholars.

Student-centered Research Projects

Student-centered research project awards can be used for stipend, tuition, research operating costs, travel, or other direct costs relevant to a graduate or undergraduate student's research at a Vermont university or college. Graduate students must have a faculty sponsor, who will act as lead principal investigator (PI) on the project, but we

encourage a statement of the extent to which the student is involved in idea generation and proposal writing. Student-centered research project awards may also be used to support research by one or more undergraduate students.

PIs may propose one-year projects with budgets of up to $30,000/year, of which up to **$15,000 may be requested directly from the Water Center** (i.e., the federal source) and **an equal amount must come from non-federal matching sources** (either cash or in-kind). UVM graduate students are required to include graduate student tuition in the budget (federal funds or matching funds) unless the student is on continuing registration. Graduate student comprehensive fees should be counted as tuition. Student-centered research projects are not renewable.

General Research Projects

General research project awards can be used for research operating costs, travel, stipend, tuition, or other direct costs related to a faculty-led research project at a Vermont university or college. General research awards must be led by a Vermont university or college faculty PI but can and should include federal, state, or private partners, whose contributions can often be counted as budget match. To be consistent with USGS policy and award conditions, PIs should propose projects that have defined objectives that can be delivered in one year; however, PIs may plan for multi-year projects. However, the proposal should focus on objectives that are attainable in one year and include a section within the proposal that explains how the current objective(s) fits into the longer-term plan. Proposals for second- or third-year funding must also focus on objectives that are attainable in one year and explain how the proposed objectives fit into a specific, longer-term plan. Proposals for second- or third-year funding should be able to stand alone; reviewers will not have access to past years' proposals. No-cost extensions of project funds beyond one year are not generally possible, but they may be requested in extraordinary circumstances. The review panel and Water Center director will prioritize under-represented PIs, early-career PIs, and second-year projects that have shown sufficient progress in year one. Faculty may propose projects with budgets of up to $100,000/year, of which up to **$50,000/year may be requested directly from the Water Center** (i.e., the federal source) and **an equal amount must come from non-federal matching resources** (either cash or in-kind).

BUDGET GUIDELINES FOR FEDERAL FUNDING AND NON-FEDERAL MATCH FUNDS

All Vermont Water Center proposals require a **1:1 federal to non-federal match**. This means that for each $1 requested, $1 of non-federal "match" that will be expended during the award period is required. It is possible to obtain this match relatively easily with some ingenuity and willing partnerships. The following are possible non-monetary and monetary sources of match. Proposals must clearly state how the federal funding obtained from the USGS will leverage other funds used as match. If your proposal is selected for funding, we will work with you to finalize the budget. Graduate students submitting graduate research proposals should work with their faculty advisors to identify appropriate match opportunities.

1. Overhead (F&A) costs

Indirect costs are not allowable for this RFP, per USGS guidelines. The most substantial source of matching funds is unrecovered overhead costs (also called facilities and administrative rate cost agreement, or F&A). This "unrecovered" overhead can and should be used as match. The sum of all sources of overhead (e.g., salaries, graduate and undergraduate student support, operational costs) count towards this unrecovered overhead.

2. PI salary

PI salary is an important form of match. As noted above, USGS guidelines allow projects to count wages, fringe benefits, and related full overhead costs as match. Faculty should consider allocating a minimum of two weeks of cost-shared salary to meet match requirements.

3. Student support from other, non-federal resources

Consider matching student support from the Vermont Water Center with other institutional sources of support (e.g., graduate research stipends, tuition support, start-up funds). If the source of funding for the other portion of the graduate student support is non-federal, then this funding, as well as the overhead multiplier associated with it, can be claimed as match. This is an effective way to stretch your institutional dollars.

4. Third-party matching support

External, "third-party" matching is a simple and important form of matching support. Interested clients and stakeholders may provide matching support in the form of either cash or in-kind services.

- Direct cash support from a client or partner can be received by the university. At UVM, it may be necessary to create a separate contract to bring the funding that is offered by a partner into the UVM system. In the case of a client who might like to support more than one project, the Vermont Water Center can help consolidate the budgets and contracts to simplify the process for everyone. Direct "gifts" from a foundation can be handled in a similar manner.
- In-kind services (e.g., consulting services provided by a partner, subcontracting done on behalf of the project by a client) are a valuable and sometimes overlooked resource. In-kind services must be described and quantified in the letter of support from the partnering entity.
- We are happy to work with you, your partner(s), and your Office of Sponsored Projects representative to determine the documentation required, including developing documentation for matching contributions.
- Third-party contributions are a valuable source of match and often include F&A costs of the contributor.
- Host institutions should note that federal guidance prohibits them from assessing their own F&A charges on third-partner matching contributions.

DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

All projects that are supported by the Vermont Water Resources and Lake Studies Center must adhere to a USGS-approved data management plan, which describes how the program conforms to USGS policy on the dissemination and sharing of research results and associated data. The Vermont Water Center data management plan is available on the RFP page and will be revised as needed. All PIs who accept Vermont Water Center funding will be expected to adhere to this data management plan (i.e., you do not need to develop an individual plan for your project).

INTENT TO SUBMIT

If you plan to submit a proposal, you are required to send the following information to vwrlsc@uvm.edu, either as an attachment or in the body of the email. Please use the subject line, "Vermont Water Center letter of intent: PI name". We will treat this information as a draft; it will be used for Vermont Water Center planning only. Due January 12, 2026. Please note that we do not provide detailed feedback in response to letters of intent, but we may indicate if the proposed topic aligns with our priorities.

1. PI name, institution, email
2. Student-centered or general research project
3. Project title
4. One-sentence summary of project
5. Four potential reviewers' names, institutions, and email addresses. Reviewers do not need to be from Vermont. Reviewers may not be from the PI's institution.

PROPOSAL CONTENTS AND SUBMISSION

Proposals must utilize the outline below. Full proposals will be submitted via the InfoReady competition platform, by the deadline indicated. **Instructions for full proposal submission will be provided prior to the proposal due date**. For UVM PIs, it is imperative that you contact your assigned SPA 2.0 Pre-Award Administrator or assigned Department Administrator to assist you with the full proposal preparation and submission in UVMClick.

Please follow up with Gretchen Nareff (gretchen.nareff@uvm.edu) if you have not received confirmation of receipt within 24 hours of your submission. Due February 2, 2026.

Proposal narrative—maximum of 10 single-spaced pages including references, 12-pt font, 1-inch margins. Required contents are listed below, with the corresponding cell within the budget sheet (i.e., B#) when applicable:

1. **Title.** B6. Please be concise, but descriptive.
2. **Project Type.** B7 (select or write in). Choose from the following:

   Research
   Information Transfer
   Information Management System
   Education
   Other (please specify)

3. **Keywords (focus categories).** B13–B15. Choose a **maximum of three** focus categories. List the preferred focus category first. You may add up to three additional keywords that are not in the list (B16).

   Acid Deposition
   Agriculture
   Climatological Processes
   Conservation
   Drought
   Ecology
   Economics
   Education
   Floods
   Geomorphological Processes
   Geochemical Processes
   Groundwater
   Hydrogeochemistry
   Hydrology
   Invasive Species
   Irrigation
   Law, Institutions, and Policy
   Management and Planning
   Methods
   Models
   Nitrate Contamination
   Non-Point Pollution
   Nutrients
   Radioactive Substances
   Recreation
   Sediments
   Solute Transport
   Surface Water
   Toxic Substances
   Treatment
   Wastewater
   Water Quality
   Water Quantity
   Water Supply
   Wetlands

4. **Science Priority** B9. Choose one category that most closely applies.

   Water Scarcity and Availability
   Water Hazards and Climate Variability
   Water Quality
   Water Policy, Planning, and Socioeconomics
   Watershed and Ecosystem Function
   Water Technology and Innovation
   Workforce Development and Water Literacy

5. **Start Date.** Expected 1 September 2026
6. **End Date.** Expected 31 August 2027
7. **Principal Investigator(s).** Provide name, academic rank, university, email address, and phone number of the PI and any Co-PI(s). Please enter one PI name in cell B4 on the budget sheet.

8. **Congressional District**. B8. Vermont At-Large
9. **Abstract.** Provide a brief (up to 300 words) description of the problem, methods, and objectives.
10. **Plain Language Summary.** B1. Provide a brief (up to 150 words) description of the study that could be understandable by the public.
11. **Statement of regional or state water problem.** Include an explanation of the need for the project, who wants it, and why.
12. **Statement of results or benefits.** Specify the type of information that is to be gained and how it will be used and by whom. (Describe societal relevance, including impacts on diversity, equity, and inclusion, if applicable).
13. **Nature, scope, and objectives of the project, including a timeline of activities**.
14. **Methods, procedures, and facilities.** Provide enough information to permit evaluation of the technical adequacy of the approach to satisfy the objectives.
15. **Related research** (research projects only). Provide context for the proposed work in terms of previous and ongoing research, including citations.
16. **Training potential.** B19–B21. Estimate the number of graduate and undergraduate students, by degree level, who are expected to receive training in the project.

Detailed budget. Please complete the budget tables in the excel form available at https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/vtwatercenter/request-research-proposals. In addition to the guidance above regarding budget and match, please follow the PI's institution's budget policies (e.g., allowable expenses for travel, food, computers). For UVM PIs, you must work with your assigned SPA 2.0 Pre-Award Administrator or assigned Department Administrator in developing your budget.

- You must include responses from the dropdown menus in Column B, as noted in the required narrative contents above. If a question is not relevant to your proposal (e.g., USGS Cross-Discipline Landscapes), select "None of the Above".
- You must select at least one primary USGS keyword from the dropdown menu.
- Your budget will be returned if you do not complete the fillable excel form in its entirety.

Budget justification. Include a snapshot of the budget table along with the budget justification. Please complete using the form available at https://www.uvm.edu/rsenr/vtwatercenter/request-research-proposals.

- Please pay attention to the headings and required information for each section of the budget justification. Your submission may be returned for corrections.
- Federal costs must be explained separately from matching funds (denoted in the budget justification template). **USGS is particular about the level of detail provided in budget justifications**. For example, it would be insufficient to state, "$350 is requested to defray mileage reimbursement costs." Instead, provide the breakdown that generates the requested funding. For example: "We expect to make 10 round trips of approximately 50 miles per trip from X [e.g., campus] to Y [field site] using personal vehicles. The institutional mileage reimbursement rate is $0.70/mile." If your field sites have not been selected yet, say so and include an estimate for the cost of mileage with as much detail as possible.
- In addition, each supply in the budget should show a cost per unit. It would be insufficient to say, "$800 for lab supplies and services for lab processing." A proper budget justification would show for this example,

"($2.50/sample)*(32 samples)*(10 sample collections/year) = $800." **This level of detail is required for each budget item in the federal and non-federal budgets**.

- If USGS determines that budget details are insufficient in one project, they will delay the award of the entire funding package. ***To avoid delays in funding, please carefully and fully justify your federal and non-federal cost estimates***.

Third-party matching support. A letter documenting the value of the third-party match is required with the proposal. A second letter documenting that the matching support was provided will be required at the end of the award period.

Investigators' qualifications. All PIs and graduate students for student-centered research proposals must submit a CV no more than two pages, and with no more than 15 pertinent publications. Undergraduate students do not need to submit qualifications. CVs do not count toward the 10-page narrative limit.

REVIEW PROCESS

The review process has two steps. **Step One** consists of, a) **external technical review** by up to three disciplinary experts who have no conflict of interest, and b) consideration by a **Proposal Review Panel** (PRP) comprising local, state, university, private sector, and non-governmental organization stakeholders.

External technical reviewers will score proposals using the following criteria and a five-point scale:

- The problem is clearly defined and substantially justified.
- The project objectives, hypotheses, or questions are logical and stated clearly.
- The proposed methods or approaches are appropriate.
- The proposed project is likely to achieve its objectives.
- The proposed project is likely to inform resource management decisions or the public.

Up to two points will be added to proposal scores for each of the following characteristics:

- The proposal involves graduate or undergraduate students.
- The proposal involves early-career PIs (defined as assistant professor, lecturer, research associate, post-doctoral scholar, and equivalent positions).
- The proposal identifies how researchers will substantially engage with non-academic partners.

The PRP will consider review scores; assess proposals' strengths, weaknesses, and relevance to Vermont's water quality and quantity needs; and provide a set of funding recommendations to the Water Center Director. Among technically strong and management-relevant proposals, the PRP will prioritize student-centered proposals, early-career PIs, and those that substantially engage with non-academic partners. The Director will use these recommendations to select a group of proposals that will advance to Step Two. The Director has the right and responsibility to balance the selection of proposals differently from the recommendations of the PRP for strategic investment reasons. Such departures are not common and will be fully justified to the PRP. PIs for all proposals will be notified of the outcomes of the review by May 1, 2026.

In **Step Two**, PIs of recommended proposals will, **a) revise proposals** based on comments and recommendations from Step One and any additional guidance received from USGS, and **b) develop a final budget and budget justification** that is acceptable to UVM Sponsored Projects Administration and USGS. PIs are required to meet with the Research Coordinator prior to finalizing the budget and budget justification, to ensure they are ready for USGS review. The final proposal, budget, and budget justification must be submitted in three separate files to vwrlsc@uvm.edu, by May 15, 2026.

It is highly likely that proposals selected for advancement in the state-level review will be funded by USGS. Ultimately, the total funding made available by USGS and the official start date for awards are both dependent on Congressional and federal actions. At this point, we expect funding to be forthcoming with a planned start date of September 1, 2026. We will communicate to PIs any changes to these expectations.