



Lake Champlain Sea Grant Institute Research Competition Policy

September 2021

The Lake Champlain Sea Grant Institute (LCSG) hosts competitions to support a variety of initiatives, including research projects, fellowships, undergraduate scholarships, and graduate student assistantships. This policy describes the types of research competitions supported by LCSG and the principles that guide the competitions.

Research Competition Principles

Lake Champlain Sea Grant manages several different types of research competitions. All research competitions will align with LCSG's strategic plan, which includes our vision, mission, core values, technical focus areas, and cross-cutting principles. Specifically, we will abide by the following principles.

Visibility

We will distribute information about research competitions widely. Depending on the type of competition, this may include dissemination to individuals, organizations, businesses, and college and university departments both within and beyond the University of Vermont and SUNY Plattsburgh. At a minimum, LCSG will disseminate each competition description via the LCSG website, relevant LCSG-facilitated email distribution lists, and LCSG social media. LCSG will ensure that BIPOC and disenfranchised groups are informed and encouraged to participate in research competitions.

Transparency

We will clearly state information on the application format, requirements, evaluation procedures, and evaluation criteria for each research competition in the request for proposals or application materials.

Confidentiality

We will respect the confidentiality of all applications. Following federal policy and guidance, Lake Champlain Sea Grant receives proposals and applications in confidence and protects the confidentiality of their contents. For this reason, reviewers must agree that they will not copy, quote, or otherwise disclose or use material from any proposal they review. Likewise, Sea Grant policy is that reviews and reviewer identities will not be disclosed except for research project

competitions, when LCSG will send anonymized, verbatim written reviews and/or a short summary of panel discussions to principal investigators of submitted proposals. Sea Grant considers reviews and reviewer identities to be exempt from public disclosure but cannot guarantee that it will be required to release such information under terms of the Freedom of Information Act, or other laws. LCSG may release a listing of all reviewers used within a specified period as a matter of acknowledgement but will not reveal in what way these individuals interacted with LCSG.

No Conflicts of Interest

We will minimize conflicts of interest. All people involved in making decisions as part of a research competition (e.g., reviewers, panelists) are required to communicate potential conflicts of interest with LCSG staff involved in the research competition. In cases in which a conflict of interest is identified, the person will either not participate in the review at all or be excluded from discussion as related to the proposal for which there is a conflict of interest. Following the guidance provided through NOAA and other federal agencies, a person may have a conflict if any of the following affiliations or relationships exist:

1. Affiliations with applicant institution(s).

- Current employment at the institution as professor adjunct professor, visiting professor, or similar position. (This includes other campuses of a multi-campus institution, but a waiver may be available. If you are in a multi-campus institution, let the program director who solicited your review know.)
- Other current employment with the institution such as consulting or an advisory arrangement, or you are being considered for employment with the institution.
- Formal or informal re-employment arrangement with the institution.
- Ownership of the institution's securities or other evidence of debt.
- Current membership on a visiting committee or similar body at the institution. (This is a conflict only for proposals or applications that originate from the department, school, or facility that the visiting committee or similar body advises.)
- Any office, governing board membership, or relevant committee chairperson in the institution. (Ordinary membership in a professional society or association is not considered an office.)
- Current enrollment as a student. (Only a conflict for proposals or applications that originate from the department or school in which one is a student).
- Received and retained an honorarium or award from the institution within the last 12 months.

2. Relationships with an investigator, project director, or other person who has a personal interest in the proposal or other application.

- Known family or marriage relationship. (Conflict only if the relationship is with a principal investigator or project director.)
- Business or professional partnership.
- Employment at the same institution within the last 12 months.
- Past or present association as thesis advisory or thesis student.

- Your collaboration on a project or on a book, article, report, or paper within the last 48 months.
3. Other affiliations or relationships.
- Interests of the following persons are to be treated as if they were yours: any affiliation or relationship of your spouse, of your minor child, or a relative living in your immediate household or of anyone who is legally your partner that you are aware of, that would be covered by items 1 or 2 above (except for receipt by your spouse or relative or an honorarium or award.)
 - Other relationship, such as close personal friendship, that might tend to affect your judgements or be seen as doing so by a reasonable person familiar with the relationship.

Types of Research Competitions

Research Projects

Competitions for research projects will comply with National Sea Grant Office specifications, including:

- Investments in potential research topics will be informed by LCSG’s Program Advisory Committee, a body of regional thought leaders and organization directors.
- Pre-proposals are required. LCSG will provide non-technical feedback to PIs regarding the likely competitiveness of their pre-proposals within the pool of pre-proposal submissions. Any PI who submitted a pre-proposal may submit a full proposal, regardless of feedback.
- At least two external, disciplinary experts will review proposals for *technical merit* according to criteria outlined in the RFP.
- At least two local stakeholders who are external to LCSG and LCSG’s home institutions will review proposals for *relevance* according to criteria outlined in the RFP.
- A panel of local stakeholders who are familiar with the key research needs relevant to the lake and basin will decide if proposals are fundable and provide a ranking (individually or in priority groupings) of proposals recommended for funding.
- Based on the recommendations from this panel, the LCSG Director will submit a group of the ranked proposals to the National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) to fund, based on the resources available to support research initiatives. The director will endeavor to follow the recommendations of review panel but has authority to make final decisions that in their opinion best serve the strategic interest of the program and its stakeholders.
- The LCSG Director will provide a report to the Program Advisory Committee at the nearest meeting after a research competition concludes, to inform them of the competition outcomes. The director will justify any deviations from the recommendations of the panel.
- The NSGO Program Officer will review the process and recommendations and make a final determination.
- All applicants will receive reviewers’ comments and a meaningful summary of the panel discussion.

Fellowships

LCSG is involved with national-level fellowship competitions and co-sponsors local-level fellowships to provide early-career training and research experiences around critical coastal, marine, and freshwater issues.

National fellowships include, but are not limited to, the Sea Grant John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship and the National Marine Fisheries Service Fellowship. National fellowship competitions are developed and implemented through the NSGO, and LCSG plays a supporting role in to promote and select top candidates.

At the Lake Champlain basin level, LCSG collaborates with partner organizations to co-fund fellowships for highly qualified university post-graduates that contribute to LCSG's strategic plan and the partner organizations' strategic needs. For each fellowship, LCSG and the partner organization(s):

- Match federal NOAA Sea Grant funding (through LCSG) with non-federal cost share funding (through partner organizations)
- Jointly develop the position description and an associated applicant scoring rubric including educational and experiential requirements and evaluation criteria.
- Collaborate to advertise the opportunity widely, including recruitment of fellows from diverse backgrounds
- Serve on the selection committee, together with other stakeholders.

Graduate Student Assistantships

Graduate students are supported by LCSG both indirectly and directly. Graduate students who are supported indirectly are part of a larger research project that LCSG has vetted as described above. Graduate students who are indirectly supported by LCSG research awards will compete for these positions by the standards and processes established by the institution or organization that is the recipient of the research award. However, language in the award offered by the LCSG will direct the recipient institution or organization to follow the principles of this competition policy as best they can. Graduate students will be supported directly by the LCSG to meet strategic needs of the program. In both cases, the investments in graduate support are intended to enhance *the student's* understanding of principles, practices, and pedagogy related to LCSG's focus area goals. Each student will have opportunity to engage in research, professional development, and hands-on training related to their field of study.

Announcement and competitive award of directly supported graduate student positions will follow all principles discussed in section II of this policy. Each competition will include an open recruitment period during which applications are received, review of applications by a selection committee made up of at least three individuals, and interviews. Applications will be evaluated according to criteria shared in the position announcement and using established policies and hiring processes at the University of Vermont and SUNY Plattsburgh (where the hiring will take place), including the [Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity](#) policy.

Undergraduate Sea Grant Scholars

Lake Champlain Sea Grant offers a 15-month Sea Grant Scholars program for first- and second-year undergraduate students interested in the sciences and related fields. The LCSG Sea Grant Scholars Program strives to grow representation of and help prepare Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) students for successful careers in science, science communications, technology, policy, natural resources management, engineering, or related fields. However, applicants of all ages, races, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, cultures, religions, citizenship types, marital statuses, veteran status types, income levels, and socioeconomic status are encouraged to apply to this program. We will share opportunity announcements, with description of application procedures and evaluation criteria following visibility principles described above. Application packages will be reviewed by at least three people based on the selection criteria shared above and in advertising materials.