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Call for Student Grant Research Proposals 2026

DEADLINE: **Friday, February 27, 2026**

The Virginia Water Resources Research Center (VWRRC) is providing competitive funding for student research in water resources. This funding is supported through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) under Section 104(b) of the Water Resources Research Act of 1984. Proposals are invited in all areas of water resources-related research including science, policy, management, and engineering. The maximum funding amount is $10,000 for one year; up to four proposals may be awarded depending on availability of funds. No-cost time extensions will not be available for this program. Applicants must be enrolled as a full-time undergraduate or graduate student at a Virginia institution of higher education and be the primary participant in the research. Faculty and staff are encouraged to contribute as Co-Principal Investigators, but *the proposal and application materials should be written and completed by the student*. At least one faculty member acting as the main research supervisor must be included as a Co-PI. This faculty member will become a VWRRC affiliate for the duration of the project since they will serve as the fund manager. The anticipated start and end dates for projects are September 1, 2026 and August 31, 2027, respectively. Start dates, awards, and award amounts are contingent upon receipt of federal funds to VWRRC from the USGS.

Example research areas include but are not limited to:

- Water quality and supply
- Watershed planning, management, and policy
- Impacts of land use and climate change on water resources
- Stormwater management and water infrastructure
- Watershed community engagement
- Intersection of water, energy, and/or food
- Ecological impacts or ecosystem services
- Harmful algal blooms and aquatic invasive species
- Contaminants of emerging concern (e.g., PFAS, microplastics)

Additional research focus areas are provided in the Water Resources Research Act Program vision report for 2020–30, available at https://pubs.usgs.gov/circ/1488/cir1488.pdf.

Evaluation Criteria and Selection Process

Proposals will be evaluated with emphasis on intellectual merit, innovation, likelihood of success, and alignment with state or regional water resources challenges. The following criteria will be considered and should be addressed by the proposal:

- To what extent does the proposed activity explore creative concepts and innovative approaches to solving water-related problems?
- How clear are the objectives of the proposed work? If part of a larger project (e.g., thesis or dissertation) or a project supported by another grant, which objectives or components of the larger project will be supported by this grant?
- How well-conceived and organized is the proposed activity?
- How well-qualified is the proposer (and Co-PIs) to conduct the project? Is there evidence to support that the PIs have experience with the subject matter?

- What is the value added through support from this grant? In other words, would funding from this grant increase the student's success on the project? How important is the proposed work to the student's overall thesis or dissertation project? Does the proposed work add a new component to an existing study or increase the capacity of ongoing work? It is important to describe how this grant would provide value added to ongoing or planned student research.
- Does the proposed activity address water resources problems of major importance to Virginia or the region?

Eligibility
Students are eligible at any point in their graduate program, and undergraduate students are eligible if they enroll in independent study credit with a faculty member or are receiving wage pay and are at least junior level standing. Students must be full-time status during the grant period. Applications for research involving oceanography or marine systems are not eligible; however, estuarine research applications are acceptable. Only one application is allowed per student *and the student must write the proposal*.

Proposal Format
All proposals should be written using 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Provide the following information and specific section headings in the proposal and as one pdf. The proposal narrative should be written so that a general professional in water resources (i.e., not necessarily a specialist) can assess its feasibility and merit.

Title: Concise but descriptive.

Principal investigators: Provide name, department, and university of the principal investigators with the student listed first.

Abstract: Provide a brief (300 word) description of the problem, methods, and objectives.

Proposed Work: Limited to 3 pages with the following subsections.

Statement of need:
Include an explanation of the need for the project. The significance and relevance of the proposed project should be explained, and it should also highlight the significance in terms of important water resource issues in Virginia or the region. This section should also explain why receipt of this grant is important to the student's research and the field of water resources. It should address how the project may allow the student to carry out work beyond that which was originally planned in their thesis or dissertation (if applicable) or how it will enhance/achieve goals of the student's training. Any additional information to support the student's application should be included in this section.

Statement of benefits:
Specify the type of information that is to be gained and how it will be used.

Background:
Provide context for the proposed work in terms of previous and ongoing research, including citations. Provide suitable background that provides context and justification to the proposed work. References cited are not included in the page count.

Objectives:
Briefly describe the objectives of the work.

Methods:
Provide enough information to permit evaluation of the technical adequacy of the approach to satisfy the objectives. Details should be adequate to evaluate probability of project completion/success. This section should include specific aspects of experimental design, analysis, and methodologies as appropriate.

Investigator's qualifications*:*
Include short (no more than 2 pages) biographical sketches of the principal investigators.

References:
Provide names and contact information for two professional or academic references, not including the student's major advisor. Letters are not required and should not be submitted.

Detailed Budget
Use the budget justification template to develop your project budget. Detailed instructions for budgets are provided in the template. Include the completed template as a Microsoft docx file with your proposal submission. The budget may not include indirect costs and must not exceed $10,000. The funding will be awarded as a grant to the student's faculty advisor. *Proposals submitted from institutions outside of Virginia Tech will only be accepted from the student's university office of sponsored programs or grants and contracts office and not directly from individual students or departments.*

Submission
Incomplete applications and those that do not conform to the above format will not be considered, and applicants will not be notified as such. Late submissions will not be accepted. If awarded, applicants will be notified and required to provide additional information to meet USGS proposal requirements. Submit the proposal packet as one PDF and a separate completed budget justification template as a Microsoft docx file via email to Daniel McLaughlin at mclaugd@vt.edu. The student's major advisor must be copied in the submission email.

Reporting
Reporting requirements will include an interim report to be submitted to the VWRRC by February 14, 2027 and a final report to be submitted by August 15, 2027. All funds must be spent by the end date even if the award is delayed from the anticipated start date. Reports are to be written in the form of a broad science communication article (<450 words) that describes progress or findings and significance of the work. Details on the report format are provided on the VWRRC's website. The student PI may be asked to contribute to VWRRC communications (e.g., newsletter, website, etc.) related to the student's research.

The VWRRC shall be credited in all publications (journal articles, conference papers, presentations, graduate thesis, websites, etc.) that result from the project. ***It is the responsibility of the student and faculty Co-PI to communicate publications, proposals, and data resulting from this grant even after the reporting period.*** This should take the form of a simple statement such as: "Support for this research was provided by the Virginia Water Resources Research Center (VWRRC)."

Data Archiving
Projects are funded with federal dollars and therefore must make all data openly accessible no later than one year after project completion, or one year after a related thesis or dissertation is submitted. Data must be deposited in a trusted open repository (e.g., VT's data repository, CUAHSI's Hydroshare, or Environmental Data Initiative), and students or mentors will be required to provide a URL/DOI once the data are available. More detailed instructions will be provided to applicants selected for funding.

Geospatial Data Policies
Recipients producing or using geospatial must follow the Geospatial Data Act, which requires checking for existing datasets, using them when available, and ensuring any newly created data meet Federal Geographic Data Committee standards, open-format requirements, and metadata guidelines. Recipients must deposit a digital copy of all GIS data produced or collected under the award in a trusted open repository. Additional guidance will be provided to funded applicants.

Publication Policy
Publications resulting from this grant must be made open access, either through an open access journal or by depositing an accepted manuscript or preprint in a suitable repository. Virginia Tech researchers may use the university's institutional repository for compliance and must provide a URL/DOI once the publication is available. Full guidance on publication requirements will be provided to funded applicants.

For More Information Contact: Daniel McLaughlin (mclaugd@vt.edu), 540-231-6616