

Maine Aquaculture Hub: Supporting Innovation & Outreach in the Aquaculture Sector

Proposal Guidelines for projects that *Address Farm Challenges and Improve Outreach*

Deadline for Proposals: Wednesday, March 2, 2022

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A. Introduction

The Maine Aquaculture Hub is a network for strengthening aquaculture in Maine, connecting organizations and individuals across the state. The steering committee consists of representatives from Maine Sea Grant, the Maine Aquaculture Association, Coastal Enterprises, Inc., the Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center, and the University of Maine Aquaculture Research Institute.

The Hub is currently coordinating three activities, including (1) training the next generation of sea farmers through *Aquaculture in Shared Waters*; (2) developing a shared plan for the future of aquaculture and a *10-year Roadmap* for how to get there; and (3) funding projects to address barriers to sustainable aquaculture in Maine.

This Request for Proposals is the third and final funding call from the Maine Aquaculture Hub. The timeline has been consolidated and projects must be completed by **June 30, 2023**. We intend to fund short-term projects that aim to address immediate needs of the aquaculture sector under two particular topics, outlined below. **Projects must not have any field-based elements.**

Identified in the new 2021-2030 Maine Aquaculture Economic Roadmap are four goals, each with a number of specific action items required to achieve the goal. Those goals and action items have been used to inform this request for proposals. The following two *topic areas* will be considered for funding through this 2022 Maine Aquaculture Hub Call for Proposals:

1. Marketing, consumer awareness, or outreach and engagement efforts to amplify the Maine brand for aquaculture products and/or improve understanding of Maine aquaculture - *A total of \$182,000 is available to fund project(s) under this topic area;*

proposals of any amount (up to \$182,000) will be considered.

2. Development of innovative shellfish culture gear to minimize social conflicts. Proposed work should develop or purchase innovative shellfish culture gear for planned evaluation and comparison of the innovative gear with standard gear types, regarding topics that could address but are not limited to:
 - a. Shellfish yield
 - b. Gear management including biofouling control
 - c. Potential for crop diversification
 - d. Potential to reduce social conflicts

A total of \$75,000 is available to fund project(s) in this topic area; proposals of any amount (up to \$75,000) will be considered.

Proposals should clearly identify the barrier to the industry and propose actions to overcome the associated challenges. Applicants are expected to detail the activities to be undertaken over the duration of the project, and describe how those activities would be useful to the aquaculture industry.

For the purposes of this call for proposals, we define “industry” to include both growers and companies that provide goods and services to growers.

Supporting Documents:

- Maine Aquaculture Research & Development Priorities 2019, available at www.maineaquaculture.org
- 10 Year NOAA Sea Grant Aquaculture Vision document: https://seagrant.noaa.gov/Portals/0/Documents/Handouts/AquacultureVisionNOAA_A_March2016.pdf
- Draft 10-year Roadmap for Aquaculture in Maine - will be available on [Maine Aquaculture Hub website](#) by 20 January 2022.

B. Funding, Duration, and eligibility (who can apply)

A total of up to \$257,000 is available to support projects beginning as early as May 1, 2022, 2022. Awardees will be required to provide 1:1 match to the total funds requested. Matching funds must come from non-federal sources. For example, if an applicant requests \$25,000 for a project, then they will be required to provide non-federal match of \$25,000. Match may either be through expenditure (i.e., cash), or in-kind (goods, services, personnel time). Proposals without sufficient match will not be considered. Existing equipment cannot be considered as match.

Funding may not be used toward the purchase or rental of any land or the purchase, rental, construction, preservation, or repair of any building, dock, or vessel. Payment under this grant may be applied to the short-term rental of buildings or facilities for meetings.

Applicants must be members of the aquaculture industry as defined in section A: *growers or companies that provide goods and services to growers*. We strongly encourage industry members to collaborate with other growers, industry members, or partners. We encourage applicants of all ages, races, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, disabilities, cultures, religions, citizenship types, marital statuses, educational levels, job

classifications, veteran status types, and income, and socioeconomic status types to apply for this competitive opportunity.

C. Proposal Guidelines

Proposals must be submitted through eSeaGrant (<http://esg.umaine.edu>). A short walkthrough tutorial on how to use eSeaGrant can be found at https://seagrant.umaine.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/467/2021/01/2021_MSG_eSG_Instruction_Guide.pdf

Applications must be submitted and received by **Wednesday, March 2 by 5:00 p.m.** **Proposals received after 5:00 p.m. EDT will not be accepted by eSeaGrant and will not move forward in this competition.**

Full Proposals must contain the following elements and sub-sections described below. Proposals that fail to include all the following elements will not be reviewed.

Proposal narratives must be limited to 5 pages (12-point font, double spaced, 1-inch top and bottom margins)

1) **Proposal narrative** (5-page limit for this section)

Project Title:

Full Team List

- Name(s)
- Position(s)
- Contact information (phone and email of PI and all team members)

- ***Identification of the Barrier:*** Describe the problem or challenge that you propose to address and clearly identify its relation to a **topic area(s)** from Part A.
- ***Goals of the proposed project:*** Describe the major goals and objectives of the proposed work.
- ***Steps or methods to address the Barrier:*** Provide a detailed description of the activities, implementation, meetings, trainings, or professional development that will be conducted.
- ***Anticipated results and impacts:*** Describe how the proposed work will impact the Maine aquaculture industry as a whole, beyond one organization/business (projects must benefit the broader aquaculture endeavor in Maine). This may include trainings and outreach events or other sharing activities. Other identified impacts may be, for example “more farmers know x, y, and z”, “processing time is reduced by x”, “information will be shared with x number of famers and groups”, etc.

- **Relation to topic area(s):** Describe how the proposed project aligns with the goals of the next 10-year Roadmap for aquaculture in Maine, and how the proposed work would strengthen the industry.
- **Intellectual property considerations:** Federal funding requires public access to project results. Please clearly identify and describe aspects of your proposed project, and which, if any, would have to be maintained as proprietary information and not part of the public aspects of the project.

Note: Results of projects funded with federal dollars are considered public.
A Data Management form must also be completed (see below).

2) Detailed budget and budget justification

Applicants must develop a detailed itemized budget of what the funds will be used for. Project start dates cannot be before May 1, 2022.

An Excel budget form is provided along with a sample budget justification form. Forms can also be found here:

Budget Form: <https://seagrant.umaine.edu/resource/2020-aq-hub-90-4/>

Budget Justification: <https://seagrant.umaine.edu/resource/2020-aq-hub-sample-budget-justification/>

Applicants must complete these forms to be given consideration.

Matching funds: All proposals must include 1:1, or 100%, matching funds (i.e., one dollar of match for every one dollars of federal money received). If applicants do not have a negotiated Facilities and Administrative rate, a maximum rate of 10% of direct costs must be used.

Budgets for all Full Proposals must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate institutional sponsored programs office (if applicable) prior to submission to our office. Applicants should review draft budget justifications with Lynn Wardwell, Fiscal Officer (207-581-1448; wardwell@maine.edu) before final submission.

3) **CV or Resume of principal investigator(s)** (2-page limit for each principal investigator). Please include the following information:

- Investigator affiliation
- Relevant education and job experience
- Related industry projects

4) **Letters of Support** (Optional; 1-page limit for each letter)

Applicants are encouraged to include letters of support from industry

partners, agencies, organizations, and other collaborators/supporters.

5) Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire (OMB Control No. 0648-0538)

- a) Applicants must ensure that the questionnaire is completed in full for each project included in the overall application and includes detailed information regarding project location, methodology, and permits. Copies of all permits required for project activities should be included with application materials. If a permit is pending or planned, please provide this information.
- b) The questionnaire can be found here:
<https://seagrant.noaa.gov/insideseagrant/Implementation>.
- c) Guidance on how to complete the questionnaire can be found here:
<https://seagrant.noaa.gov/Portals/1/Forms/NEPA%20Questionnaire%20-%20Guidance.pdf>.

6) Data Management Plan

All projects included in the application must include a Data Management Plan that is compliant with NOAA's Public Access to Research Results Plan (or alternative statement if no data management plan is needed). The Data Management Plan should not exceed 2 pages. The Data Management Plan should include descriptions of the types of metadata and data expected to be created during the course of the project, plans for disseminating the metadata and data to the broader community, and plans for long-term archiving of the metadata and data.

Please contact Maine Sea Grant fiscal officer Lynn Wardwell with any questions regarding NEPA forms or data management plans (contact details below).

D. Proposal Review Process and Evaluation

The evaluation of Proposals is a multi-step process:

- 1) Proposals will be subjected to external written reviews by at least 3 technical experts in the area of the proposed project. The criteria used by all reviewers (written and panel) to evaluate the proposals is provided below. Reviewers chosen may be those suggested by the applicant, although this is not guaranteed. All reviewers will be asked to complete a Conflict of Interest form prior to conducting their review. Any reviewer who is identified as having a conflict of interest with a proposal will not participate in the evaluation of that proposal.
- 2) Applicants will be provided with anonymous copies of the reviews and given the opportunity to respond, in writing, to the comment.

3) The ME Aquaculture Hub Steering Committee, consisting of **individuals from aquaculture organizations in Maine (Coastal Enterprises Inc., Maine Aquaculture Association, Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center, and UMaine Aquaculture Research Institute)** will meet to evaluate the proposals, the expert external written reviews (from step 1), and the applicants’ written responses to the reviews (from step 2). Any steering committee member who is identified as having a conflict of interest with a proposal will not participate in the evaluation of that proposal. **Please note that Maine Sea Grant will oversee the committee but will recuse input to the panel discussion, to avoid conflict of interest.**

The following rubric will be used by the technical reviewers and the Steering Committee panel to evaluate and score proposals. Scores will reflect the applicant’s ability and effort in articulating each criterion, with zero points indicating no / very poor discussion or explanation, to the maximum points that indicate a very good discussion or thorough explanation.

Criteria	Maximum Points
Discussion of identified barrier	5
Clearly identified goal and/or objectives	5
Detailed outline of proposed methods	10
Feasibility and appropriateness of proposed methods	5
Anticipated results and explicit link to the broader Maine aquaculture sector	5
Relation to the <i>Area(s) of Focus</i>	5
Evaluations of technical reviews	10
Applicants’ responses to technical reviews	5
	50 points total

A discussion summary of the evaluation will be provided to the applicant.

- 4) The Aquaculture Hub steering committee will use the summary evaluations based on the scoring rubric along with descriptive (High, Medium, Low) to indicate the priority to fund based on timeliness and alignment with Maine Sea Grant’s Strategic Plan and the Maine Aquaculture Hub Road Map. The ranking and scores will be used to make recommendations to the Maine Sea Grant Director and National Sea Grant Office of which projects to fund.
- 5) It is anticipated that applicants will be notified of funding recommendations by mid-April 2022 for a start date no sooner than May 1, 2022.

E. Contacts for further information

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Maine Aquaculture Hub Coordinator to discuss Full Proposal development and our Fiscal Officer to discuss budgeting.

Maine Aquaculture Hub Coordinator
Heather Sadusky
heather.sadusky@maine.edu

Fiscal Officer:
Lynn Wardwell
wardwell@maine.edu
Tel: 207-581-1448

5741 Libby Hall, Room 110
University of Maine
Orono, Maine 04469-5784

F. Request for Proposals Timeline

January 12, 2022: Request for Proposals opens

January & February: weekly open ‘office hours’ to discuss ideas and project development - Tuesdays 10 a.m. - 12 p.m., Wednesdays 12-2 p.m. (contact Heather Sadusky: heather.sadusky@maine.edu)

Wednesday, March 2: Proposals due electronically through eSeaGrant (esg.umaine.edu) by 5:00 p.m. (eSea Grant forms will be available Feb 1, 2022)

4 March: Proposals emailed to technical reviewers.

18 March: Proposal technical reviews due.

21 March: Reviews sent to applicants.

28 March: Applicant responses to technical reviews due by midnight

31 March: Proposals and technical reviews sent to Aquaculture Hub steering committee for review

Early April: Aquaculture Hub steering committee meets to review and evaluate proposal packages. The steering committee makes recommendations to the Maine Sea Grant Director and the National Sea Grant Office on which projects to fund.

Mid-April: Applicants are notified of funding decisions. The University of Maine Office of Research Administration will set up contracts for awarded projects and provide instructions on submitting expenses for reimbursement. Projects may commence.