



RESEARCH PROJECT, GRANT REQUEST, & MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

The Florida Aquarium (the “Aquarium”) is committed to supporting, facilitating and conducting mission-focused research which has scientific merit, rigor, defensibility and need, aide in the conservation of species and/or ecosystems, improve animal husbandry and/or welfare, and/or forward guest experience and education impacts.

All research projects and related grant funding requests and/or Memorandums of Understanding (or Agreements) (“MOUs”), whether conducted internally or in collaboration with external partners that utilize Aquarium resources will be critically reviewed, evaluated and either approved or not approved by the Aquarium’s Research Committee (the “Committee”). Any *in-situ* or *ex-situ* project in which animals will be involved in invasive procedures or procedures that may result in pain, harm, distress, or significantly and/or adversely altering of behavior as part of the research protocol (excluding veterinary or husbandry procedures) must also receive IACUC approval.

Research projects and related grant funding requests and/or MOUs that are NOT directly relevant to the Aquarium’s Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities should not be submitted.

MISSION-FOCUSED RESEARCH

Mission-focused research includes any project undertaken by, or involving, the Aquarium that:

- Involves application of the scientific method: is hypothesis-driven, involves systematic data collection and analysis of those data, and draws conclusions from the research process.
- Is primarily focused on studying questions relevant to the Aquarium’s Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities.
- Includes any of the following and occurs *in situ*, *ex situ* with the Aquarium’s collection, and/or in collaboration with external partners:
 - Systematically-conducted surveys related to the areas above which are analyzed to draw conclusions;
 - Applied research that informs our understanding and management of animals, including reproduction, nutrition, epidemiology, sensory biology, physiology, population biology, behavior, welfare, etc.;
 - Basic research that focuses on increasing understanding of fundamental biological principles, including evolutionary biology, physiology, behavior, etc.;
 - Research focused on species, habitat, or related conservation of those species or habitats;
 - Research in conservation education, public engagement, or how our guests use, are influenced by, and view the Aquarium.

RESEARCH PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for the management and integrity of the design, conduct, and reporting of the research project and for managing, monitoring, and ensuring the integrity of any collaborative relationships. The PI is also responsible for the direction and oversight of compliance, financial, personnel, and other related aspects of the research project and for coordination with administrative and/or aquarium personnel to assure that the research is conducted in accordance with all federal, state and local regulatory requirements as well as all applicable accrediting and/or certifying organizational standards and guidelines.

Internal Research Projects - If a Florida Aquarium employee(s) is serving as the PI, s/he must seek approval to conduct the Research Project by following the Research Project Processes and Protocols below.

External Research Projects – If an individual (s) from outside The Florida Aquarium wishes to conduct a research project that includes Florida Aquarium personnel OR assets, s/he must do so in partnership with a Florida Aquarium employee, who will be responsible for following the Research Project Processes and Protocols below.

1. The PI will complete the **Research Project Pre-Proposal Form** and submit it to the Aquarium employee's department VP or SVP for consideration.
 - This content submitted in this form shall provide a high-level description of the proposed Project.
 - The employee's supervisor will determine if the proposed project is aligned with the Aquarium's Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities, has a clear need and is logistically and financially feasible within the framework of the Aquarium's operations and resources.
 - The employee's supervisor will complete the form by either recommending (or not recommending) that the Research Project Pre-Proposal be submitted to the Committee within 14 days of receipt.
 - If the employee's supervisor approves the Project Pre-Proposal, the employee may then submit it to: ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org.
 - The Committee will approve (or deny) the Research Pre-Proposal and notify the employee and their supervisor of its decision within 30 days of receipt.
2. **If the Research Project Pre-Proposal is approved**, the PI will complete the **Research Proposal Form** and submit it to: ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org for consideration.
 - The content submitted in this form shall provide a detailed description of the proposed Project's:
 - Principle Investigator and Co-Investigators
 - relevance to the Aquarium's mission and Conservation Programs and Priorities;
 - scientific merit, rigor, defensibility and need;
 - methodology that meets or exceeds ethical best practices;
 - compliance with federal, state and local regulatory requirements as well as all applicable accrediting organizational standards and guidelines;
 - full budget;
 - timeline from start to finish;
 - staffing needs;

- a plan to share related presentations and publications with the Research Committee and
- a reporting and findings dissemination plan.
- The Committee will determine if the proposed Project:
 - is aligned with the Aquarium’s Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities;
 - has clearly identified scientific merit, rigor, defensibility and need;
 - has The Florida Aquarium’s IACUC approval (if appropriate);
 - if the applicant’s organization has an IACUC, it must be attached to their formal IACUC approval of the project;
 - is in compliance with federal, state and local regulatory requirements as well as all applicable accrediting organizational standards and guidelines;
 - meets or exceeds ethical best practices;
 - is logistically and financially feasible within the framework of the Aquarium’s operations and resources;
 - has a specific timeline from start to finish;
 - has a specific plan for the reporting and dissemination of the projects progress and findings; and
 - has a specific plan to document and share all related conference and meeting presentations and publications.
- The Committee will approve (or deny) the Research Proposal and notify you and your supervisor of its decision within 30 days of receipt.

3. If the Research Project is approved, the Committee will:

- provide project details to the Aquarium Registrar for tracking;
- monitor and annually review all approved projects;
- if applicable, receive and track IACUC monitoring reports;
- track that the PI is meeting the project timeline; and
- track that the PI disseminates and documents findings and/or updates appropriately.

INSTITUTIONAL ANIMAL CARE AND USE COMMITTEE (IACUC) WORKING GROUP APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

Any *in-situ* or *ex-situ* project in which animals will be involved in invasive procedures that may result in pain, harm, distress, or significantly and/or adversely altering of behavior as part of the research protocol (excluding veterinary or husbandry procedures) must also receive an IACUC approval recommendation. If a project also requires IACUC approval, the Research Committee will provide the proposal to the IACUC Working Group for review (see the IACUC Approval Processes and Protocols for more details).

GRANT PROPOSAL APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

All research grant and funding proposals must be approved by the Research Committee prior to their submission. This protocol assures that grant/funding proposals are directly relevant to the Aquarium’s Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities, and will be dedicated to Committee-approved research projects.

When seeking approval to apply for external grants or funding to support a Committee-approved research project, the applicant will assure that the following Grant Funding Request Processes and Protocols are followed:

1. The PI will complete the **Grant Funding Request Pre-Proposal Form** and submit it to: ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org for consideration.
 - This content submitted in this form shall provide a high-level description of the grant or funding program, a generalized funding case statement for the research project and how these fit with the priorities of the funding program, and a generalized grant budget.
 - The Research Committee will determine if the proposed funding request is aligned with a Committee-approved research project, has a clear need, is logistically and financially feasible within the framework of the Aquarium's operations and resources, and will inform the Development Department of the proposal.
 - The Research Committee will either approve (or deny) the Grant Funding Request Pre-Proposal and notify you of its decision within 14 days of receipt.

2. **If the Grant Funding Request Pre-Proposal is approved**, the PI will complete the **Grant Funding Proposal Form**, including the fully completed grant or funding proposal, and submit both to ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org at least 30 days prior to the proposal deadline for processing.
 - The content submitted in this form and the fully completed grant/funding proposal shall provide a detailed description of the proposed grant or funding:
 - relevance and support for a Committee-approved Research Project;
 - the grant or funding program;
 - the funding justification case statement and how this proposal will fit within the priorities of the funding program;
 - the full budget and match (if appropriate); and
 - all reporting and financial obligations
 - The Committee will determine if the proposed grant/funding request:
 - is aligned with a Committee-approved Research Project;
 - has clearly identified the funding need and justification;
 - is in compliance with federal, state and local regulatory requirements as well as all applicable accrediting organizational standards and guidelines; and
 - is logistically and financially logical within the framework of the Aquarium's operations and resources;
 - The Committee will approve (or deny) the Grant Funding Proposal and notify you of its decision within 7 days of receipt.

3. **If the Grant Funding Proposal is approved**, the Committee will:
 - provide grant details to the Aquarium Development Department for tracking;
 - monitor and annually review all approved funding;
 - track that the PI is meeting the funding requirements and timeline; and
 - track that the PI completes all documentation and reporting appropriately.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (OR AGREEMENT) APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

All research-related MOUs must be approved by the Research Committee prior to their being agreed to and signed. This protocol assures that research MOUs are directly relevant to the Aquarium's Mission and Conservation Programs and Priorities and will be focused upon Committee-approved research projects.

When seeking to formalize a partnership via an MOU that will advance the scope of work for a Committee-approved research project, the applicant will assure that the following research MOU Processes and Protocols are followed:

1. The PI will complete the **MOU Pre-Proposal Form** and submit it to ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org for consideration.
 - This content submitted in this form shall provide a high-level description of the purpose for the MOU and how it fits with the priorities of a Committee-approved research project, the proposed partner organization, a generalized scope of work for both parties, and a work /partnership timeline.
 - The Committee will determine if the proposed MOU is aligned with a Committee-approved research project, has a clear need, is logistically and financially feasible within the framework of the Aquarium's operations and resources, and has been reviewed at the institutional level (by the Chief Operating Officer and Chief Executive Officer).
 - The Committee will either approve (or deny) the MOU Pre-Proposal and notify you of its decision within 30 days of receipt.
2. **If the MOU Pre-Proposal is approved**, the PI will complete the **MOU Proposal Form**, including a final draft of the complete MOU, and submit both to ResearchCommittee@flaquarium.org for consideration.
 - The content submitted in this form and the fully drafted MOU shall provide a detailed description of the proposed MOU's:
 - relevance and benefit for a Committee-approved Research Project;
 - the partner organization;
 - scope of work to be agreed upon by both organizations;
 - appropriateness of the tasks identified in the scope of work in how they address the Aquarium's Mission and conservation, animal care and welfare, science, or learning programs and/or priorities; and
 - the work and partnership timeline.
 - The Committee will determine if the proposed MOU request:
 - is aligned with a Committee-approved Research Project;
 - establishes or expands a partnership with an organization that is of benefit to the Aquarium's mission, vision, and reputation;
 - includes only a scope of work, down to the task level, that are designed to advance the research project' objectives and goals and/or the Aquarium's Conservation Programs and Priorities; and
 - is logistically and financially logical within the framework of the Aquarium's operations and resources.

- The Committee will approve (or deny) the MOU request and notify you of its decision within 30 days of receipt.

3. **If the MOU Request is approved**, the Committee will:

- provide the MOU details to the Aquarium Registrar for tracking;
- monitor and annually review all MOUs;
- track that the Aquarium's responsibilities identified in the MOU requirements and timeline are being met; and
- track that the Partner's responsibilities identified in the MOU requirements and timeline are being met.

Special Note: The proposer must inform the Committee if there is an urgency to have their research project, grant proposals or MOU requests reviewed in a condensed timeline.