NATIONAL ACADEMIES Sciences Engineering Medicine

GULF RESEARCH PROGRAM

INSPIRE AWARDS: FUNDING FOR FELLOWS TO CONNECT WITH K-12 STUDENTS IN THE GULF REGION

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY FOR GULF RESEARCH PROGRAM EARLY-CAREER RESEARCH FELLOWS

The Gulf Research Program (GRP) of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, through its Board on Gulf Education and Engagement (BGEE), is dedicated to equipping the next generation with the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to address the complex environmental and scientific challenges facing the Gulf region.

This funding opportunity invites proposals from current and former Early-Career Research (ECR) Fellows to engage K-12 students in Gulf region communities with the scientific community. The INSPIRE Awards initiative aims to mentor, connect and inspire young minds with STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields, fostering education, career exploration, and community involvement through direct interactions with researchers.

A total of $50,000 is available for this opportunity, with the number of proposals funded depending on the quality and quantity of applications received. The award cycle will remain open on a rolling basis until the funds are depleted.

Questions? Reach out to Maeesha Saeed at msaeed@nas.edu

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PURPOSE

This opportunity will be open to current and past ECR Fellows in good standing with the Gulf Research Program. The fellows will propose a project or activities that inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement.
The project goals could include:

- Inspire students to pursue STEM careers and encourage career exploration by providing real-life examples of scientists engaged in research and exposing them to diverse STEM career possibilities related to the Gulf of Mexico.
- Serve as role models and mentors, offering guidance and support, especially for underrepresented students in STEM fields.
- Provide contextually relevant STEM learning experiences by connecting with researchers studying the Gulf region, linking scientific research to local environments, and addressing local issues.
- Promote experiential learning, critical thinking, and inquiry skills through hands-on activities, field trips, and/or research demonstrations.
- Expand students' understanding of ongoing scientific investigations and emerging knowledge by exposing them to current research in the Gulf region.
- Foster community engagement, strengthening the connection between the scientific community and local communities, and cultivating a sense of ownership, awareness, and stewardship among students towards their local environment.

PROJECT STRUCTURES:

The project structures should aim to inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement in the region.

- Applicants may propose new projects or activities based in research or experience; or propose to extend existing projects across geographic, or cultural boundaries and/or topic/discipline areas to reach a broader range of participants and/or provide support services such as transportation, or personalized support and guidance.
- Applicants may propose activities that pilot or test new approaches for engaging and connecting K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement in the region.
- Applicants may seek funding to sustain and expand existing K-12 engagement activities if the proposal demonstrates significant positive impact(s) and anticipated growth.

Examples of project structures may include:

- A Scientist Speaker Series where students can learn from researchers in various STEM fields.
- Establishing a Mentorship Program to connect students with scientists for guidance and support.
- Engaging students in Community-Based Research Projects focused on local environmental issues.
- Organizing Field Trips and Research Excursions for students to experience scientific investigations firsthand.
- Hosting a STEM Workshop, Symposium or Exhibition where students showcase their Gulf region-related projects. These project structures aim to inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement in the region.

WHO SHOULD APPLY

For the purpose of this funding opportunity, applications will be accepted from current and former ECR Fellows in good standing with Gulf Research Program. Individuals who were selected for an award in 2024 are not eligible to apply for the 2025 cycle. They may reapply in 2026 if the opportunity is reopened.

To ensure a wide distribution of our funding, we are implementing a policy where each fellow may submit one independent proposal and one collaborative proposal per application cycle. We may consider additional proposals from any fellow on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of our staff. This is to maximize the number of fellows benefiting from the funding. As this is the inaugural year of our initiative, please note that we expect to refine and enhance our processes based on the insights we gain through this journey and there may be changes made to the application process during the application cycle.

The Gulf Research Program will not consider funding:

- Proposals for political lobbying or advocacy activities.

AWARD INFORMATION

- **Total funding available:** $50,000
- **Specifications for award amount:** Applicants should request funding that is commensurate with the scope and duration of work.
- **Award duration:** Award duration could be single day events; however, programmatic implementation should not exceed 18 months in duration, including project set-up, wrap-up and evaluation.
- **Estimated number of awards:** Resources made available under this funding opportunity will depend on the proposals received. The Gulf Research Program

reserves the right to negotiate, some, one, or none of the proposals received in response to this solicitation.

- **Award Cycle:** The funding opportunity will remain open on a rolling basis until the allocated funding amount has been exhausted. See below for additional information on award review cycles.
- **Selection Process:** Selection of grantees will be done as an internal review process with final funding decisions made by staff with appropriate expertise.

KEY DATES AND AWARD CYCLES

- January 13, 2025: Online proposal submission opens.
- The funding opportunity will remain open on a rolling basis until the allocated funding amount has been exhausted. Applications will be reviewed in multiple cycles:

    - **First cycle:** Applications submitted by the end of March will be reviewed in April.
    - **Second cycle:** Applications received between April and June will be reviewed in July.
    - **Third cycle:** Applications submitted between July and September will be reviewed in early October.

    If funding remains after the third cycle, a final application window will be open from October to mid-November. No applications will be accepted after mid-November to allow time to finalize agreements and disburse funds by year-end.

APPLICATION SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

Applicants should review the application preparation and submission instructions and submit any questions to Maeesha Saeed at msaeed@nas.edu.

FULL PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

Applicants can submit a full proposal for this funding opportunity via the online application system. Proposals submitted by other means (e.g., mail, fax, or email) will not be considered. Full proposal materials must be submitted in English. All complete proposals will be reviewed by staff with appropriate expertise and evaluated using the Review Criteria.

The full proposal must provide the following information:

CONTACT INFORMATION

a. First Name*
b. Middle Initial
c. Last Name*

d. Suffix
e. Pronouns
f. Institutional Affiliation*
g. Department*
h. Title*
i. Address*
j. City*
k. State/Province/Region*
l. Zip/Postal Code*
m. Country*
n. Primary Phone*
o. Email* Involvement of project director or key personnel in other applications related to this funding opportunity.

If this is a collaborative effort with additional fellows, same information will be requested from all involved.

PROJECT DETAILS:

The aim of this funding opportunity is for fellows to propose a project or activities that inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement. The project structures should aim to inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement in the region. You can find the full RFA included here which includes Project Goals, Award Information and Review Criteria.

1) Are you proposing a project that comprises of one or more of the following:
- Project timeline is less than three months
- Comprises of a single activity
- Budget is less than $5000.

If yes:

1a) Provide a detailed description of the planned project structures (e.g., Scientist Speaker Series, Mentorship Program, Field Trips) and explain how they align with the goals of the program - promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement within K-12 students. (1000 words)

Include the following:

- Project Goal: What is the overarching goal of your project in inspiring, mentoring, engaging, and connecting K-12 students with the scientific community?

- Audience Engagement and Innovation: Who are your target audience? How will you actively engage K-12 students in your project, and what innovative or interactive elements will enhance their learning experience?
- Community Involvement and Collaboration: Explain how your project contributes to community involvement within the specified region and describe collaboration with local communities to address the goals of this funding opportunity.
- Collaborations for Enrichment: List potential collaborators or partners, including scientists, educators, and community organizations. Describe their roles and how you plan to leverage these collaborations to enrich the students' experience.

If no:

1b) Provide a detailed description of the planned project structures (e.g., Scientist Speaker Series, Mentorship Program, Field Trips) and explain how they align with the goals of the program - promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement within K-12 students. (2000 words)

Include the following:

- Project Goal: What is the overarching goal of your project in inspiring, mentoring, engaging, and connecting K-12 students with the scientific community?
- Audience Engagement and Innovation: Who are your target audience? How will you actively engage K-12 students in your project, and what innovative or interactive elements will enhance their learning experience?
- Community Involvement and Collaboration: Explain how your project contributes to community involvement within the specified region and describe collaboration with local communities to address the goals of this funding opportunity.
- Impact Measurement and Long-term Effects: What metrics or indicators will you use to measure the success and impact of your project on participants, and how do you plan to assess long-term effects on students' interest in STEM and career exploration?
- Project Timeline and Alignment: As part of the application, we ask you to upload a detailed timeline for implementing the project, including key milestones. How will you ensure activities are well-paced and aligned with the academic calendar?
- Collaborations for Enrichment: List potential collaborators or partners, including scientists, educators, and community organizations. Describe their roles and how you plan to leverage these collaborations to enrich the students' experience.
- Detailed Project Timeline including key milestones: Upload a detailed project timeline in a clear and easily understandable format. Consider using a Gantt chart or similar visual representation to illustrate the sequencing, duration of key activities and milestones. The timeline should cover the entire duration of the project, starting from the initiation phase to the conclusion.

BUDGET

Using the budget template provided, upload a detailed budget for the proposed project by outlining the project budget allocation and describing any additional resources or partnerships

you plan to leverage to enhance the project's effectiveness. If the budget includes personnel (consultant or trainer), include a statement of task and deliverables for each personnel included in the budget.

Budget Guidelines: The specific budget allocations will depend on the scope and scale of the proposed project, as well as the anticipated number of students and activities involved. It is important to provide a detailed budget justification that aligns with the project goals and demonstrates a responsible and efficient use of the funds.

Budget allocations may include funds for personnel such as project coordinators, educators, and mentors, materials and supplies for hands-on activities, field trips, and research demonstrations, travel and transportation expenses, outreach and communication efforts, professional development opportunities, conference registration fees, and partnerships and collaborations. Personnel such as the current fellows with Gulf Research Program will not be compensated for their time. **Keep in mind that grant funds may not be spent on institutional overhead or indirect charges.**

These budget items should support the successful implementation of the project, facilitating the goals of inspiring, mentoring, engaging, and connecting K-12 students with the scientific community to promote STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement.

REVIEW CRITERIA

All complete full proposals will be evaluated based on the review criteria below. Applicants should consider the Full Proposal Guidelines and Review Criteria in the development of their full proposal. Reviewers may raise additional issues that are not covered by the criteria.

- **Alignment with Project Goals (35%):** The proposed project should align with the goals of inspiring STEM careers, serving as role models and mentors, providing contextually relevant STEM learning experiences, promoting critical thinking, expanding understanding of scientific investigations, and fostering community engagement.
- **Impact and Reach (25%):** The potential impact on K-12 students, including inspiring STEM careers, career exploration, and engaging underrepresented students, as well as the reach and scalability of the project, will be considered.
- **Age, Place and Cultural Awareness (20%):** The proposal should demonstrate an understanding of age and cultural appropriateness, considering developmental needs and cultural backgrounds to ensure inclusive, place-based and engaging activities.
- **Feasibility and Resources (10%):** The feasibility of implementation, including resource availability, expertise, and partnerships, along with a realistic and well-justified budget and timeline, will be evaluated.
- **Approach and Innovation (10%):** The proposal should demonstrate a creative and innovative approach, outlining the use of real-life examples, diverse STEM career possibilities, relevant learning experiences, hands-on activities, field trips, research demonstrations, and exposure to current research.

Making the Award

Selection Notice

The GRP reserves the right to select all, some, one, or none of the proposals received in response to this solicitation.

When the evaluation of a proposal is complete, the applicant(s) will be notified that (1) the proposal has been selected for funding pending negotiations, or (2) the proposal has not been selected. These official notifications will be sent via email to the applicants identified on the application. If a proposal is selected for award, the GRP reserves the right to request additional or clarifying information for any reason deemed necessary.

Award Notice

The GRP transmits award notices e-mail. The award is not finalized, and the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is not obligated to provide any funding until all necessary documents required for the fund disbursement process have been received and finalized by the Academies.

Award Periods

If there are any adjustments to the proposed period of work, notify GRP staff as soon as possible.

Post-award Management

Coordination with GRP: After the award is conferred, awardee shall coordinate with the GRP to formally initiate the project. GRP staff may periodically request status updates during the project implementation phase to discuss progress and any unanticipated developments that may affect the project outcomes as specified in the proposal. These interactions will help ensure successful management of the funding.

Reporting Requirements: Within 60 days following the conclusion of the award period, the awardee is required to submit a written summary report of the activities undertaken. This report should address the project's initial objectives as outlined in the proposal, detail any modifications to these objectives, describe the project's final achievements, and provide a financial account of funds expended.

Scientific Integrity

A fundamental purpose of the GRP is to facilitate the advancement of knowledge and the application of science to address challenges relevant to the GRP's mission. All activities of the GRP will be conducted to meet the highest standards of scientific integrity. All grantees have a responsibility to use the funds wisely.

BACKGROUND

ABOUT THE GULF RESEARCH PROGRAM

The GRP is a division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine—a private, nonprofit organization with a 150-year history as an independent advisor to the Nation on issues of science, engineering, and medicine. The GRP was founded in 2013 as part of legal settlements with the companies involved in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster, and received an endowment to carry out studies, projects, and other activities in the areas of research and development, education and training, and monitoring and synthesis.

The GRP seeks to enhance offshore energy safety, environmental protection and stewardship, and human health and community resilience in the Gulf region and beyond. It focuses its work on five Gulf states and other outer continental shelves of the United States where there is hydrocarbon production, and on their coastal zones; specifically, this includes the areas of the Southcentral region of Alaska that are or could be impacted by activities (e.g., drilling, production, and transportation) associated with hydrocarbon production in the offshore. Where appropriate, the GRP's work may extend farther inland or into adjacent seas.
The GRP uses four strategic approaches to "catalyze, implement, and track positive impact in the Gulf region and beyond"[1]:

1. Advance science and understanding
2. Bridge knowledge to action
3. Build partnerships and engage networks
4. Monitor for progress and change

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is the goal of this pilot initiative?

This initiative aims to inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, promoting STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement. The focus is on fostering real-life examples of scientists at work, especially in research related to the Gulf region, and promoting diverse STEM career possibilities.

[1] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2020. *Gulf Research Program: 2020-2024 Strategic Plan*, pp. 3-4. Available at https://www.nationalacademies.org/_cache_0f9e/content/4885770000227383.pdf. Retrieved April 24, 2021.

Eligibility

2. Who is eligible to apply for this funding opportunity?

Applications are welcome from current and former Early Career Researcher Fellows in good standing with the Gulf Research Program. However, individuals who were selected for an award in 2024 are not eligible to apply for the 2025 cycle. They may reapply in 2026 if the opportunity is reopened.

3. Can fellows submit multiple proposals?

Each fellow may submit one independent proposal and one collaborative proposal per application cycle. Additional proposals may be considered on a case-by-case basis, at the discretion of our staff, to ensure broad participation.

Project Details and Structure

4. What kinds of projects are encouraged?

Projects should aim to inspire, mentor, engage, and connect K-12 students with the scientific community, emphasizing STEM education, career exploration, and community involvement. This can include new projects or activities, extensions of existing projects to new audiences, pilot initiatives testing new engagement approaches, or efforts to sustain and expand successful K-12 engagement activities.

5. What are examples of project structures?

- A Scientist Speaker Series for student learning from STEM researchers.
- Mentorship Programs linking students with scientists.
- Community-Based Research Projects on local environmental issues.
- Field Trips and Research Excursions for firsthand scientific experiences.
- STEM Workshops, Symposiums, or Exhibitions showcasing student projects.

Funding and Budget

6. What is the total funding available, and how should budget requests be structured?

The total funding pool is $50,000. Applicants should request funds commensurate with the scope and duration of their project. Remember, this funding is intended for smaller-scale projects, and distribution will depend on the number and quality of proposals received.

7. Is there a rolling deadline for this opportunity?

Yes, the funding opportunity will remain open on a rolling basis until the allocated funding amount has been exhausted, allowing flexibility for applicants. Applications will be reviewed in multiple cycles throughout the year:

- First cycle: Applications submitted by the end of March will be reviewed in April

- Second cycle: Applications received between April and June will be reviewed in July.
- Third cycle: Applications submitted between July and September will be reviewed in early October.

If any funding remains after the third cycle, a final application window will be open from October to mid-November. No applications will be accepted after mid-November to allow time to finalize agreements and disburse funds by year-end.

8. What costs are not covered by the grant?

The grant will not cover proposals for political lobbying or advocacy activities. Also, indirect costs or institutional overhead are not allowed.

9. Is there a maximum funding amount for each proposal?

We encourage applicants to request funding amounts that align closely with their project's scope and duration, mindful of the limited total funding available and the competitive nature of the grant process. In this regard, please consider the following guidance:

- Applications requesting over $5,000, or for projects lasting more than two months, or projects that encompass multiple events or activities, will be required to submit additional details during the application process.
- Given the limited funding available and the focus of this opportunity on smaller initiatives with an aim to support a variety of projects, it is highly unlikely that we will fund projects requesting more than approximately $15,000. This approach ensures a broader distribution of funds among eligible projects.

10. What is the award duration and estimated number of awards?

Award durations can range from single-day events to programmatic implementations not exceeding 18 months, including setup, wrap-up, and evaluation. The number of awards will depend on the proposals received and their alignment with the initiative's goals.

Application and Disbursement Process

11. How and when should I submit my proposal?

Applicants can submit a full proposal for this funding opportunity via the online application system starting January 13, 2025. Proposals submitted by other means (e.g., mail, fax, or email) will not be considered. Full proposal materials must be submitted in English. All complete proposals will be reviewed by staff with appropriate expertise and evaluated using the Review Criteria.

12. What is the selection process?

Proposals will undergo an internal review process, with final funding decisions made by staff with appropriate expertise. The Gulf Research Program reserves the right to negotiate or decline proposals as seen fit.

13. What is the fund disbursement process?

Grant funds will be disbursed through the fellow's respective institution. This process will include confirming the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR), submitting the required forms from your institution, and establishing a grant agreement. Once the agreement is fully executed, the total budget amount will be disbursed to your institution.

14. Are there other grant opportunities I should consider?

Yes, we also have other grant opportunities that open throughout the year, which may be more suited for larger programs. Details of these opportunities can be found here and may offer alternative funding avenues for projects that exceed the scope of this initiative. We also encourage you to subscribe to our e-updates to receive funding opportunities via e-mail.

15. Can indirect costs or institutional overhead be included in the budget?

No, indirect costs or institutional overhead are not allowed under this initiative.

Additional Information

16. Will the application process change?

We are always seeking ways to improve our processes, and as such, changes to the application process may occur throughout the cycle based on ongoing insights and feedback.

17. Who can I contact for more information or if I have questions?

For further details or inquiries, please contact Maeesha Saeed at msaeed@nas.edu.
For any more questions or clarification, do not hesitate to reach out.

We greatly value your feedback and encourage any questions you may have. Your input are deeply appreciated as we continue to refine our processes and build on our previous experience.