

Virginia Sea Grant Graduate Fellowship

Application Deadline: January 5, 2026

Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) is pleased to announce funding for its Graduate Fellowships for the 2026-2028 academic years. The fellowship has two tracks open to full-time graduate students at any Virginia academic institution engaged in coastal and marine research and other evidence-based inquiry relevant to Virginia communities and the VASG Strategic Plan. Applications are due by 11:59 p.m. EST on Monday, January 5, 2026. This announcement and additional information can be found at: <https://vaseagrants.org/>.

FELLOWSHIP DESCRIPTION

The VASG Graduate Fellowship **invests in people** and supports graduate students in education, evidence-based inquiry, and community engagement that further the goals of VASG and show potential for:

- Long-term professional success in academic, government, non-profit, or private sectors;
- Highly collaborative, team-oriented research and problem-solving that produces innovation to address our most challenging coastal and marine problems; and
- Effective transfer of knowledge to practice and interest in ensuring their research results are useful to and used by stakeholders.

Graduate Fellows address issues relevant to coastal and marine resources and Virginia communities—broadly defined (e.g., natural or social sciences, engineering and design, policy and legal analysis, architecture, business, education, arts and humanities, etc.).

The fellowship builds skills and competencies through professional development training and provides hands-on experience in translating research results to coastal and marine stakeholders through a professional mentor.

The fellowship has two tracks for application. Track One is for Master's students and offers one to two years of funding. Track Two is for Ph.D. students and those on the doctoral track and offers two years of funding.

FOSTERING A SAFE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

VASG is committed to building research, extension, communication, and education programs that serve people from various backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives, and ways of thinking.

VASG does not tolerate any form of misconduct, discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault within its organization, at awardee organizations, field sites, meetings, or anywhere VASG-funded research, outreach and education are conducted).

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ELIGIBILITY

Track One: Applicants must be enrolled in a full-time Master's or professional degree (ex. JD) program at a Virginia academic institution prior to the award of the fellowship, no later than Fall 2025.

Track Two: Applicants must be enrolled in a full-time Ph.D. or a doctoral track program at a Virginia academic institution prior to the award of the fellowship, no later than Fall 2025. This includes by-pass programs.

All applicants for both tracks must remain in good standing at their academic institution and in compliance with the terms and conditions of the VASG award. Failure to stay in good standing with the student's academic institution, or an interruption in progress towards your degree (i.e. taking a semester off) may lead to termination of the fellowship. Students may be working toward a degree in any discipline if they are engaged in rigorous inquiry and evidence-based knowledge generation or research that is coastal- or marine-related and relevant to VASG's mission and strategic plan. Previous recipients of a VASG Graduate Fellowship are not eligible to apply. Previous recipients of a VASG internship may apply.

FELLOWSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Selected fellows will:

- Collaborate with a Professional Mentor: Select and work with a professional end-user mentor, including identifying opportunities to execute their professional development plan (see VASG's Guidance on Fellow-Mentor Relationships).
- Work with VASG's Competitive Research & Education Coordinator: to submit quarterly updates and annual report documents. Submit all deliverables in a timely manner.
- Work with VASG's Professional Development Coordinator: To develop and launch an individual professional development plan, based on their short- and long-term professional goals.
- Collaborate with VASG's Communication Center: To publicize their scholarship and fellowship activities, including creating communication products and sharing story ideas. Fellows are required to work with VASG Communications to create **one product** that demonstrates their project's value to Virginia Sea Grant and the state of Virginia. This may include research posters, infographics, fact sheets, blog posts, web story articles, PowerPoint presentations, or other products to be determined.
- Attend and participate in VASG events as applicable. Examples of VASG events include the fellowship orientation meeting; VASG Symposium; presentation of study findings; community engagement activities; and appropriate professional development offerings.
- Share Milestones: Fellows must remain in communication with VASG after the conclusion of their funding to pass along information about graduation dates and career updates following graduation. Fellows are required to notify VASG upon completion of their degree and submit a digital copy of the final project, thesis, or dissertation as well as any other relevant deliverables listed in the graduate

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fellowship proposal.

The above responsibilities are nonnegotiable. Failure to comply with these responsibilities may lead to the termination of the fellowship.

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT

VASG is a federal-state partnership, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with matching support from our university partners - Virginia Institute of Marine Science at William & Mary, University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, George Mason University, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

VASG's Strategic Plan aligns with and complements the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) Strategic Plan, while addressing the Commonwealth of Virginia's specific coastal and marine challenges. VASG's Strategic Plan focuses on four areas: workforce development and environmental literacy, resilient coastal communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, and healthy coastal ecosystems and communities. The research, outreach, education, and communication conducted by fellows must address focal areas and goals of the VASG Strategic Plan. More information, including the 2024 - 2027 Strategic Plan, can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/together-for-virginia/>. Please review VASG's website to learn more about how we achieve our vision and mission (vaseagrant.org).

AWARD INFORMATION

Track One: Contingent upon available federal funding, fellowships are available for one or two years for Master's and J.D. students. The fellowship provides an award of up to \$40,000 per year. One-year proposals may request up to \$40,000.

Track Two: Contingent upon available federal funding, fellowships are available for two years for Ph.D. students. The fellowship provides an award of up to \$40,000 per year.

The start date for the fellowship (both tracks) is September 1, 2026. VASG expects to fund up to two fellowships from Track One and up to six fellowships from Track Two for the 2026- 2028 academic years.

VASG-funded projects require a 50 percent funding match (i.e., budgets must show \$1 of match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding requested). Only non-federal funds may be committed as matching contribution. VASG will make all awards to the student's primary faculty advisor, who must be listed as the principal investigator (PI) on the fellowship application. Refer to the budget and budget justification section below for additional information.

HOW TO APPLY

Applicants must submit their applications via the Virginia Sea Grant Website. **Full applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. EST on Monday, January 5, 2026.**

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Instructions on how to submit an application can be found on the VASG website (<https://vaseagrant.org>).

Application Guidelines

Students are expected to take the lead in developing their application – including writing the project narrative, developing the budget, and engaging with the institution's sponsored programs/research office. Students are responsible for routing the application through their institution's research administration or sponsored programs office and obtain all required institutional endorsements before submitting to VASG.

Adherence to the format requirements is mandatory and ensures fairness across all applications. Applications not meeting the format requirements may be rejected without review. Several application elements have specific page limits or word limits. Excess pages will not be reviewed. Only the requested materials should be submitted; additional documents (e.g., appendices, letters of support, resumes/CVs longer than two pages, etc.) will not be reviewed. **VASG recommends including the name of the student in a header or footer on all pages.**

Application Elements

Applications must be submitted via the VASG website (www.vaseagrant.org) by January 5, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. Each application must include the following elements:

Title Page (two-page maximum; template available on VASG website): List the project title and identify and provide contact information for the prospective fellow, faculty advisor(s), and professional mentor(s). List the proposed start/end dates and the total amount of VASG/matching funds being requested for each project year. Signature of the institution's authorized representative for proposal submissions is also required. (digital signatures are acceptable).

In addition, include a list of funders (agency, organizations, university programs, etc.) and funding amounts that are supporting the accompanying research or evidence-based inquiry. Separate inquiry or research funding is not a requirement or selection criteria for VASG fellowship support, although students will need to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the proposed work.

Applicant Form – Please use the fillable form on VASG's website: www.vaseagrant.org

Personal Goal Statement. (maximum 500 words) Applicants are asked to prepare a statement that includes: a) a brief introduction of themselves, b.) a discussion on why they would be a good candidate for the graduate fellowship program, and c.) information regarding the student's short-term (1-5yr) and long-term (>5yr) professional goals

Professional Development Prompts. (maximum 300 words per prompt) Applicants are asked to answer any three (3) of the following five (5) prompts:

- Detail a skill or competency that you would like to improve upon and how improving in that area will help you achieve your goals.

- Describe a time you had to overcome an obstacle, the steps you took to overcome it, and what you learned about yourself in the process.
- Describe a time when you completed a project as a member of a team. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
- Describe a situation where you had to apply one or more of your strongest skills or competencies. What was that skill and what was the outcome?
- Describe a situation where you were put into or assumed a leadership role. What did you learn from the experience? How has it affected your leadership methods moving forward?

Self-Certification. The applicant will be asked to check a self-certification confirming that they are in good standing with their academic institution.

Recommendation Forms (Template form available on VASG website - form submitted separately by recommender)

Two recommendations (academic and professional) must be submitted in support of the student. To maintain confidentiality, VASG requires that recommendations NOT be submitted with the student's application, but rather submitted through VASG's website independently. Applicants will be responsible for giving their recommendation writers the template form available at www.vaseagrant.org. The forms must be submitted before the application deadline.

Academic Recommendation. The student's primary faculty advisor or appropriate faculty member (PI on the research award the applicant will be working on during the fellowship) must provide one recommendation. If a student has multiple advisors, only one has to fill out the recommendation form.

Professional Recommendation. VASG encourages applicants to consider someone who knows them from a different perspective than their academic advisor (e.g., former employer, mentor from a previous position or colleague they worked with in the past). Selected recommenders should highlight different strengths and experiences than an academic advisor.

References will be asked to rate and describe the applicant on the following:

- Self-motivation
- Response to setbacks
- Skills and interest in teamwork
- Leadership skills or interest, particularly collaborative leadership
- How the applicant would most benefit from VASG support
- Academic/Professional performance
- Academic/Professional potential
- Anything else that VASG should know about the applicant in order to fully consider their candidacy

Professional Mentor Form: The form indicates a commitment to mentoring the student and uphold the highest standards of mentorship. Only a single form should be sent even if the

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student has multiple mentors. To maintain confidentiality, VASG requires that forms are NOT submitted with the student's application. Forms must be requested and submitted through VASG's website. The form must be submitted before the application deadline.

Mentors will be asked to respond to prompts on the following topics:

- What are the objectives of the mentorship, from the mentor's perspective?
- Why did the mentor choose to become a mentor in this project? In general?
- What role will the mentor play in the student's academic and professional experience?
- How much time is the mentor willing and able to dedicate to the applicant during the fellowship?
- Is the mentor willing to participate in a VASG orientation and mentorship training?
- Will the mentor acknowledge a statement of commitment to ethical behavior, respect, honesty, and open communication with the fellow (i.e., abiding by standard code of conduct policies including, but not limited to, any: personnel policy, policy regarding sexual harassment, policy regarding workplace violence and policy regarding ethical behavior)?

Resumes/CVs (two-page maximum per Resume/CV, minimum font size 11 point, one-inch margins): A CV or resume should be included only for the student, primary advisor(s), and professional mentor(s). Any additional pages beyond the two-page maximum will be redacted or removed.

Project Narrative (three-page maximum, excluding figures, tables, other graphics, literature cited, minimum font size 12 point, one-inch margins): The full project title and name of the student must be included in the header. The narrative includes a summary of your research project or area of study, as well as an explanation on how said project will impact end-users, stakeholders, and communities in Virginia. It should also include a discussion of any engagement or outreach activities that you will be completing through your project. The narrative should include sufficient detail to evaluate the appropriateness and relevance of your research to the Commonwealth of Virginia, and how the project aligns with the VASG Strategic Plan.

The narrative should include the following sections:

Rationale: Clearly indicate the significance of the issue being studied to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Describe why the outreach strategies employed will be effective at transferring the findings of your research or academic work to the end-user you are targeting.

Objectives: Detail the research, community and stakeholder engagement plan, and professional development goals and objectives. Community and stakeholder engagement plans should consist of activities above and beyond what applicants already need to produce for their academic responsibilities (i.e., do not list peer reviewed publications or presentations at a conference as elements of a community and stakeholder engagement plan). Identify a non-academic target audience that would

benefit from knowing the outcome of your scholarship.

Methods and Timeline: Detail the approach to undertake your research as well as your community and stakeholder engagement activities and how you will advance the translation of findings to your targeted end-user(s). Students should include a schedule that indicates academic, research, and engagement milestones and tasks along with the anticipated dates for achieving those tasks.

Outcomes: Clearly identify and describe the anticipated outcomes of the activities, including the broader impacts on the Commonwealth of Virginia. Discuss how specific end-users or audiences will use the results. You may also indicate what longer-term deliverables may be planned after the fellowship.

Literature Cited (*does not count toward page limit*)

Budget and Budget Justification: Up to \$40,000 per year for up to two years for full-time graduate, professional degree, or Ph.D. program students at a Virginia academic institution can be requested for fellowship-related costs. The following are examples of eligible and ineligible fellowship-related costs:

Eligible Costs include: student stipend; graduate research assistantship costs; fringe benefits; tuition; enrollment, university and graduate program fees; health insurance; indirect costs; VASG events and conference fees, expenses and travel; all other related training and travel expenses; publication costs.

Ineligible Costs include: research and lab supplies & equipment; sample processing; research-related service fees; and post-graduation expenditures.

Budgets for both tracks should include travel support for the fellow to attend two to three VASG meetings over the course of the fellowship (e.g., fellowship orientation meeting, VASG Symposium, VASG- sponsored professional development workshops).

Match: VASG-funded projects require a 50 percent funding match (i.e., budgets must show \$1 of match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding requested). Only non-federal funds may be committed as matching contribution. In-kind contributions, unrecovered F&A and tuition, non-federal research expenses, start-up funds, faculty salaries, travel support (research, conference, professional development, etc.), partial stipend and tuition are all examples of match.

Common methods used to meet match and full support requirements include: 1) providing partial support for the stipend and/or tuition as part of the required match, or 2) academic institutions using unrecovered indirect charges even in cases where it is not normally charged to fellowships or volunteering to waive overhead on the federal dollars.

Budgets should be developed in the 90-4 budget worksheet (available on the VASG website). Please identify the PI (faculty) and student on the budget and budget justification text. The budget justification must be a detailed description of each cost item in the 90-4 budget; and

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should be broken down by year; additional guidance is available on the VASG website. VASG strongly encourages students to begin working early with their institution's research administration or sponsored programs office to develop their budgets.

NEPA Questionnaire & Data Management Plan: A National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) [Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire](#) (OMB Control No. 0648-0538) and a Data Management Plan will only be required from students selected for the fellowship.

Mentorship Opportunity: Students will be asked if they have an interest in mentoring a summer undergraduate intern to support their research if selected for a Graduate Fellowship.

REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

VASG follows strict conflict-of-interest policies in all of its review procedures. Track One and Two applications will be reviewed in the same manner, although they will be ranked for progression and selection separately.

Stage 1 - Initial Internal Review

VASG staff will review all fellowship applications for completeness of applications, and adherence to format requirements. Any fellowship application not considered complete will not be eligible for further review.

Stage 2- Peer & Relevancy Review

Key stakeholders, including VASG's External Advisory Committee (EAC) members, will be engaged to complete written peer reviews of each application project. The reviews will examine the relevance of the project to VASG's strategic plan, as well as the scientific merit of the project. The peer reviewers will be asked to consider the following criteria:

Relevance of the Project to the Commonwealth of Virginia and VASG's strategic goals: Reviewers will be asked to explain the relevance of the proposed research to the state of Virginia, as well as explain how the proposed research will help VASG meet its current strategic goals.

Clarity and Attainability of the projects' objectives (including methodology): Reviewers will be asked to discuss the research project's objectives, noting if the methodology and timing are appropriate to the suggested project.

Broader impacts of the project to the Commonwealth of Virginia or specific end-users: Reviewers will be asked to discuss the impact the project is likely to have on the Commonwealth of Virginia and the relevant field of study.

Effectiveness of proposed outputs, outcomes, results and deliverables: Reviewers will be asked to discuss the outcomes and results listed in the research and outreach projects.

Feedback submitted by VASG's peer reviewers will be shared with the panel in stage 3 as well as

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the applicants.

Stage 3 – Panel Review

A review panel composed of coastal and marine science scholars, educators, fellowship managers, and talent search and development professionals will assess the student's academic/professional performance and potential, professional mentorship plan, and community and stakeholder engagement activities. Top candidates from each track will move forward to Stage 3.

The Stage 2 review panel will consider the following criteria:

Strength of Academic and Professional Performance (25%): Students will be evaluated on their responsibility, motivation, resiliency, teamwork and leadership; as well as any additional or extraordinary circumstances.

Academic and Professional Potential (30%): Students will be evaluated on their professional motivation, initiative, interests in the applied impacts of findings and knowledge generated by their work, collaborative team problem-solving, and in end-user engagement. Reviewers will consider the student's potential as a collaborative team member or leader, particularly in integrated, trans-disciplinary or co-production of knowledge settings.

Professional Mentor Relationship (25%): Students will be evaluated on the strength and potential of the relationship established with a professional mentor, the rationale for selecting the proposed mentor and potential professional growth for the student working with the selected mentor.

Research Project, Community & Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Deliverables (20%): Students will be evaluated on the strength and potential of the research activities, engagement plan, and deliverables to produce valuable and transferable knowledge for the end-user. Reviewers will also consider the creativity and innovation of engagement activities, and the feasibility of the research and engagement plan to be accomplished within the financial and time constraints of a graduate student.

Stage 4 – Interviews and Final Assessment

Selected finalists from each track will be invited for in-person interviews to discuss their research, professional goals, proposed mentorship, and outreach plans. Finalists will be asked to make a presentation overviewing their fellowship activities. Interviews will most likely be held at Virginia Sea Grant Headquarters at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, in Gloucester Point, Virginia. Although, VASG reserves the right to change the location as necessary. If an applicant is unable to travel to Gloucester Point for the interview, VASG will work with said applicant to designate an alternative location.

The interview committee will have access to all previous application elements (peer review and panel comments). They will consider these and the interview when they advise VASG on the

selection of fellows. Their recommendations will be based on the following criteria:

Candidate Interview (45%): Candidate's ability to communicate the importance of their proposed activities to a lay audience, describe how those activities align with VASG's mission, and their ability to demonstrate how their mentor will meaningfully contribute to both their short- and long-term goals.

Relevance of Project (20%): Relevance of the research or other evidence-based inquiry to the Commonwealth of Virginia and VASG's Strategic Plan, the significance of the issues studied, and the potential of the project to influence the selected end-user. VASG will assess the short- and long-term potential to make a difference and address a substantial societal challenge locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

Professional Potential and Impact (35%): Quality and extent of collaboration between student and mentor, quality of mentorship, and impact of the community and stakeholder engagement activities. Interest of the student in being an engaged, active member of a long-term professional network and cohort.

VASG will consider peer reviews, panel recommendations, and interview committee recommendations for funding when making selections, and VASG retains the final discretion to select projects based on all review stages, interview committee advice, balance of the award portfolio, availability of funding, and programmatic objectives, needs and priorities.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE FOR FELLOWSHIP COMPETITION

Announcement released	September 2025
Applications due to VASG by 11:59 p.m. EST	January 5, 2026
Stage 1 – Relevancy review	January/February 2026
Stage 2 – Review panel	March 2026
Stage 3 – Candidate interviews	March/April 2026
Notification of results	April 2026
Fellowship Orientation	August 2026
Awards begin	September 1, 2026

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACT

Applicants are strongly encouraged to register and attend one of the VASG fellowship webinars which will be conducted during the fall semester; dates, times and URLs will be announced in the VASG email newsletter (sign up on the [VASG site](https://vaseagrant.org)) and on the fellowship webpage. This announcement, application element templates, and additional resources can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/fellowship-research-funding/fellowships/>.

For questions or inquiries, please contact Lisa Eddy, VASG's Competitive Research and Education Coordinator, at lmaddy@vaseagrant.org. Please reference "Graduate Fellowship" in your email subject line.

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