Request for Proposals

2026 Contaminants of Emerging Concern Research-to-Application Partnership Competition

Executive Summary

Funding Source: National Sea Grant Law Center, University of Mississippi using federal funds from NOAA Sea Grant

Funding Opportunity Title: 2026 Contaminants of Emerging Concern Research-to-Application Partnership Competition

Announcement Type: Notice of Request for Proposals

Timetable: Letters of Intent must be received by 5 p.m. Central Time on October 26, 2026. Full proposals must be received by 5 p.m. Central Time on November 20, 2026. The anticipated award start date is June 1, 2027.

Funding Opportunity Description: The purpose of this notice is to advise the public that the National Sea Grant Law Center (Law Center) is accepting applications from eligible applicants to fund collaborative teams of researchers and decision makers. These teams will work to translate existing or emerging research into policy, with a focus on supporting the integration of contaminants of emerging concern (CEC) research into ongoing policy discussions in the following regions: Great Lakes (IL, IN, MI, MN, NY, OH, PA, WI) and Southeast (NC, SC, GA, FL). This funding opportunity aims to enhance the translation of research into policy to foster meaningful changes in local, state, or regional policy frameworks. The *2026 CEC Research-to-Application Partnership Competition* grants have a recommended funding level of $75,000 per project, and the Law Center anticipates selecting up to two projects for funding (one in each region). Applicants can propose project timelines of up to 12-15 months. Matching funds will be required.

Full Announcement and Background

The Law Center is part of the National Sea Grant College Program, and is housed at the University of Mississippi School of Law. Established in 2002, the Law Center is a nationally recognized and respected resource for information on ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes law. The Law Center fulfills its mission by implementing integrated legal programming based on the three legs of the Sea Grant "stool," research, education, and outreach. The Law Center strives to support the creation of new law and policy knowledge through rigorous, peer-reviewed research

competitions. For more information about the Law Center and its work, please visit our website at http://nsglc.olemiss.edu/.

Despite the increasing research and attention on the potential human and environmental health risks associated with CECs, there are disconnects between the emerging scientific research and policymaking. Scoping efforts previously funded by the NOAA Sea Grant College Program identified the need for more thorough and comprehensive law and policy research related to CECs (Kohli et al, 2023, Saari et al., 2023). While research is critical to informing effective public policy, there is often a gap between the academics who generate research and the decision-makers who can act on that information, leading to meaningful and evidence-based policy changes. Disconnects may arise for a variety of reasons, including methodological or publication choices (e.g., journal article vs. policy brief). A gap analysis of CEC issues in the Southeast concluded that "[r]esearch using holistic approaches and interdisciplinary teams are needed in order to understand the complicated nature of CECs and identify climate's effect on these contaminants" (Saari et al., 2023). Further, interdisciplinary efforts are needed to connect decision-makers more directly with CEC researchers in order to support the translation of CEC research into policy through increased awareness and understanding of policy development processes and information needs.

To support the translation of CEC research into policy, the Law Center is requesting, in partnership with the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, proposals from eligible applicants to fund collaborative teams of researchers and decision-makers. These teams should work to synthesize existing scientific research related to a discrete CEC policy issue in an identified geographic area in either the Great Lakes or Southeast region. The teams should then work to translate and disseminate the findings from the research synthesis for decision-makers and other relevant audiences in formats that will equip them to make and implement policy decisions based on the most current, rigorous scientific information. This work should be designed to support the integration of CEC research into ongoing policy discussions in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions potentially leading to meaningful and evidence-based policy changes. The project objectives and activities set forth below will promote such efforts.

This announcement provides the following information:

1. Eligible Applicants
2. Funding Priorities
3. Funding Levels
4. Letter of Intent Format
5. Proposal Format
6. Proposal Submission Instructions
7. Evaluation Procedure
8. Evaluation Criteria

9. Deadline and Submission Information
10. Timetable

Eligible Applicants

The following entities are eligible and encouraged to participate in this funding opportunity: Sea Grant Programs, institutions of higher education, government agencies, and non-profit organizations that have the ability and capacity to conduct rigorous, non-partisan law and policy research.

Sea Grant is committed to building inclusive research programs that serve people with unique backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives, and ways of thinking. We encourage all eligible applicants to apply for this opportunity.

Only those applicants who submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) by the required deadline are subsequently eligible to submit full proposals.

Funding Priorities

The Law Center is soliciting applications to fund collaborative teams of researchers and decision-makers seeking to integrate CEC research in the Great Lakes (IL, IN, MI, MN, NY, OH, PA, WI) and Southeast (NC, SC, GA, FL) regions into ongoing policy discussions. There is a need for research to be translated into actionable local, state, or regional policies that support the regions' environmental priorities. Successful projects will identify a specific geographic area within the Great Lakes or Southeast that will serve as the focus of the project. The geographic scope may include a municipality, state, watershed, body of water, or other clearly defined geographic area. Applicants should explain why the selected geographic scope is appropriate to the policy question and how the geographic scope will inform the proposed research synthesis.

As communities continue to address pressing environmental challenges, including those related to CECs, there is an opportunity to ensure that research is accessible, relevant, and actionable for decision-makers. By fostering collaboration between researchers and government entities, these efforts can help identify and address barriers to translating research into effective policy, ultimately leading to meaningful and evidence-based policy changes.

Projects solicited through this announcement should focus on translating existing CEC research into local, state, or regional policy. Successful projects should involve the formation of a collaborative team of researchers and decision-makers responsible for CEC policy development or implementation. Teams will synthesize, translate, and disseminate research findings to address a clearly defined local, state, or regional CEC policy issue. Projects are encouraged to provide opportunities for graduate or law student involvement in appropriate aspects of the proposed

research and research-to-application activities. Proposed projects may involve a variety of research-to-application activities, including

- Assessments of available data on critical CEC policy issues to evaluate its feasibility for use in state regulatory actions or policymaking, as academic research may not always produce data in a format useful for regulators.
- Co-design of tools or resources derived from existing research that can assist decision-makers in implementing evidence-based strategies.
- Development of "Living Evidence" approaches to synthesize CEC research in a way that is adaptable to decision makers' need for up-to-date information.
- Development of research-based recommendations or guidance that can help decision-makers apply scientific findings within existing legal, regulatory, or policy frameworks.

Successful projects will demonstrate a clear, actionable pathway for informing policy development or implementation with a focus on long-term collaboration between researchers and decision-makers. In addition to ensuring academic rigor, the Law Center is committed to projects that engage and inform key communities. Proposals must include a strong engagement and outreach plan that clearly identifies the target audience(s) (i.e., end users) for the research and explains how research findings will be shared with the target audiences. The engagement and outreach plan should also provide clear rationales for why certain outreach methods were selected.

Researchers are required to partner and engage with relevant government entities responsible for CEC policy development or implementation, aiming to generate new knowledge about how emerging research can drive impactful changes in policy. This partnership should help ensure that the research addresses a clearly identified policy need and that findings are relevant and usable to decision-makers. Engagement should occur throughout the project, including during the development of the CEC policy question or issue, synthesis and interpretation of findings, and application or dissemination of results. Engagement with additional audiences, such as community organizations, is encouraged and may occur beyond the required government agency partnership. Examples of engagement activities could include:

- Engaging with other government agencies or organizations that will be direct users of the research.
- Writing non-technical summaries of findings for managers and key audiences.
- Presenting research findings to relevant management and community organizations.

This funding opportunity aims to enhance the integration of CEC research into policy-making processes and strengthen connections among researchers, decision makers, and other key audiences. Projects should demonstrate how the proposed collaboration and

research-to-application activities can serve as a model for future efforts in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions.

Funding Levels

The *2026 Contaminants of Emerging Concern Research-to-Application Partnership Competition* grants have a recommended funding level of $75,000 per project, and the Law Center anticipates selecting up to two projects for funding (one in each region). Researchers can propose project timelines of up to 12-15 months with a start date of June 1, 2027. A 50% match of the funds requested is required (i.e., 1 dollar of match for every 2 dollars requested).

Letters of Intent Format

To be eligible to submit a full proposal, a Letter of Intent (LOI) is required. LOIs will help the Law Center identify the required number and qualifications of reviewers. Any applicant that submits an LOI meeting the criteria below may submit a full proposal.

The LOI (max. 2 page not including CVs) shall consist of the following:

1. Anticipated title of the proposed project.
2. Expected project duration (Researchers can propose project timelines of up to 12-15 months with an anticipated start date of June 1, 2027).
3. Total budget request estimate.
4. Lead Principal Investigator: Name, Title, Institutional Affiliation, Contact Information, two-page Curriculum Vitae or Biosketch.
5. Known or Anticipated Government Agency Partner: Name, Title, Institutional Affiliation, Contact Information, two-page Curriculum Vitae or Biosketch.
6. Brief summary of the proposed research project that clearly states the geographic area of focus, the preliminary CEC policy question to be addressed, end user of research findings, the research-to-application methodology, and anticipated outcomes from partnership.
7. Brief statement of the applicant's qualifications to conduct the proposed research.
8. Full name, title, and contact information (email) for three individuals who are especially well qualified to review the proposal. These suggestions may serve as one source in the reviewer selection process at the Law Center's discretion. Suggested reviewers will not be assigned to the applicant's proposal to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Please combine all LOI documents into one PDF file. The LOI should be submitted to Lauren Fremin, Project Coordinator for the National Sea Grant Law Center, via email, lrfremin@olemiss.edu. An email confirming receipt of the LOI will be sent within 24 business hours. Applicants not receiving a confirmation email should contact Lauren Fremin at (662)

915-7187. Submissions must be received no later than 5:00 pm Central Time on **October 26, 2026.**

Proposal Format

Proposals are to be submitted as a single file in PDF format via email. The instructions provided below for submitting proposals must be followed. Information requested for each of the following sections must be included in the proposal. Proposals that are missing required elements listed below, or applications coming from ineligible applicants may be rejected without further review. The Law Center in its sole discretion may continue review of those applications with minor deficiencies that may be easily cured.

Changes in lead investigator or lead institution post-LOI submission are permitted if the original PI remains on the team with no major changes in the scope of the project.

Cover Page

The proposal should include a cover page listing the title of the proposal, PI and any Co-PI names, titles, affiliations, and contact information of the PI and any Co-PIs.

Project Narrative

The maximum length for the narrative is 10 pages using a minimum of 12-point font (1-inch margins). Additional pages will not be considered, and the entire proposal rejected if the stated number of pages is exceeded. The project narrative must include the following subsections:

1. **Project Abstract.** Provide a general summary of the purpose of the project, activities to be performed, expected outcomes, and intended decision-maker audience (limit 500 words).
2. **Project Background.** Explain the specific opportunities and challenges this project seeks to address and justify its importance. Applicants should clearly identify:
    a. The existing CEC law or policy framework in the identified geographic region, including key decision-makers for policy development and implementation.
    b. The discrete CEC policy question or issue the conducted research is intended to address.
    c. How the proposed research would inform the existing policy framework in the short-term and drive impactful changes in policy over the long-term.
3. **Project Objectives.** Provide a list of clearly defined objectives and how those objectives align with goals and priorities of this RFP.
4. **Project Details.** Provide an explanation of the methods you will use to address your project objectives. Applicants must clearly describe the methodology that will be used to translate research into local, state, or regional policy in the identified geographic area and

explain how various components of the research project will be conducted, including engagement with the target audience(s). Applicants must also explicitly describe how they will collaborate with the government entity responsible for policy implementation, aiming to generate new knowledge about how emerging research can drive impactful changes in policy.

5. **Anticipated Deliverables and Outcomes.** Detail the deliverables the project team will produce for target audiences and anticipated outcomes of this project. At a minimum, funded projects will be expected to produce a (1) literature review or synthesis of existing CEC research of relevance to the identified policy question and (2) a report summarizing the research-to-application methodology, outcomes, and lessons learned. Project teams will also be expected to share research results as well as impacts to date and progress towards evidence-based policy change during a virtual symposium planned for 2029. Anticipated project outcomes should support achievement of the objectives of this RFP, which include (1) enhanced collaboration between CEC researchers and policymakers in the Great Lakes and Southeast Regions and (2) development of research-to-application partnerships that can serve as models for future efforts.
6. **Project Timeline.** Researchers can propose project timelines of up to 12-15 months with an anticipated start date of June 1, 2027. Detail when key project activities and outputs would occur within the project period.
7. **Engagement and Outreach Plan.** Detail the anticipated engagement and outreach approach. Applicants should identify key target audiences and the specific outreach strategies that will be used to reach them, and clearly outline how research findings will be accessible and usable to key partners and audiences. Researchers are required to partner and engage with relevant government entities responsible for policy implementation, aiming to generate new knowledge about how emerging research can drive impactful changes in policy. Engagement with additional audiences, such as community organizations, is encouraged and may occur beyond the required government agency partnership. Additionally, applicants are strongly encouraged to include sufficient funds in the budget for the outreach and engagement component, as applicable. *Publication of results in academic journals alone is insufficient evidence of a successful outreach and engagement strategy*.

Curriculum Vitae

The maximum length is two pages for each principal and co-principal investigator. The vitae must provide evidence of the investigator's education, qualifications, and experience in the field.

Literature Cited

References required if used in the proposal; citation of literature is important to establish the familiarity and expertise of the PI to the subject in the proposal. Include full citation: name of author, title, and location in the literature (no maximum length, single-spaced).

Letters of Commitment and Support
The Law Center requires letters of commitment from any named collaborators or partners providing direct funding support or with responsibility for implementing key aspects of the proposed project. Letters of commitment are not required from collaborators or partners serving on advisory committees or contributing expertise through similar means.

In addition, the Law Center requires a letter of support from the government agency partner that will be engaged in the project.

The Law Center also encourages up to two additional letters of support from potential partners or end users that may benefit from the proposed work.

Data Management Plan & Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire
To be recommended for funding, applicants are required to provide a Data Management Plan (or alternative statement if no data management plan is needed) as well as a completed Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire (and copies of associated permits, if applicable) at the time of submission of the full proposal. Guidance on how to provide and submit this information is provided below:

- **Data Management Plan:**
    - Data management plans are required for projects that generate environmental data. Environmental data are defined as "recorded and derived observations and measurements of the physical, chemical, biological, geological, and geophysical properties and conditions of the oceans, atmosphere, space environment, sun, and solid earth, as well as correlative data such as socio-economic data, related documentation, and metadata." A Sea Grant Data Management Plan template is available at this link. If you do not believe your project will generate environmental data, please provide the following Data Management Plan statement within your full proposal package: "This project will not generate any environmental data. A data management plan is therefore not required."

- **Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire:**
    - The Abbreviated Environmental Compliance Questionnaire can be found here.
    - Please see this Step By Step Guide for assistance in completing this questionnaire.

Budget and Justification
A Budget and a Budget Justification are required. The Budget should be prepared using the standard Sea Grant 90-4 budget form available on the Law Center's funding page at https://nsglc.olemiss.edu/funding/index.html. The narrative Budget Justification should itemize and explain all budget items in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the

appropriateness of the funding requested. Please pay special attention to any travel, supply, or promotional budgets and provide details. Subcontracts, if any, should have a separate budget page and justification.

Applicants may include indirect (F&A) costs in their budget at their institution's federally negotiated appropriate rate for the activity proposed.

Proposal Submission Instructions

Please combine all proposal documents into one PDF file. The proposal should be submitted to Lauren Fremin, Project Coordinator for the National Sea Grant Law Center, via email, lrfremin@olemiss.edu. If you experience technical difficulties during submission or do not receive an email confirmation acknowledging receipt within 24 hours of the competition's closing time, please contact Lauren Fremin at (662) 915-7187 as soon as possible. Submissions must be received no later than 5:00 pm Central Time on **November 20, 2026**.

Evaluation Procedure

Each full proposal received will be reviewed by three external peer reviewers serving as members of a Technical Review Panel (TRP). Individuals selected to serve as TRP members will be attorneys, resource managers, academics, and Sea Grant personnel familiar with current CEC research and policy challenges free from conflict of interest. Proposals will be individually reviewed and scored by the assigned TRP member using the criteria identified below. The TRP will meet to discuss each proposal, review peer review scores, and panel rankings to inform the Law Center decisions.

The Law Center will conduct a final review of the proposals, taking into account the TRP's recommendations and advice. The Law Center Director has final discretion to select research projects, based on the panel's recommendations, topical and geographic diversity and balance of proposals, availability of funding, and alignment with programmatic objectives, needs and priorities.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Rationale (20%)**. This criterion assesses whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work. Specifically, this criterion assesses whether a research question is clearly identified, whether the research question is valid and significant, whether the researchers demonstrate adequate awareness of significant present or previous work.

- **Project merit, objectives, methods, and feasibility (30%)**. This criterion assesses whether the project's proposed approach is technically sound, if the methods are appropriate and likely to achieve desired results, whether there are clear project goals and objectives tied to the overall goals of this research competition, the level of collaboration with the government partner, whether the time frame is appropriate to complete the project, and whether appropriate levels of resources (budget) are dedicated to the project.
- **Potential societal impact (10%)**. This criterion assesses the degree to which the proposed research will successfully identify feasible pathways through which CEC research may be integrated into local, state, or regional policy to improve health and environmental outcomes. This criterion also assesses the extent to which the project provides opportunities for graduate or law student involvement.
- **Qualifications of the research team (10%)**. This criterion assesses whether the applicant and partners possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the proposed activities. This assessment will be primarily based on the investigator(s) curriculum vita(s).
- **Strength of engagement plan (30%)**. This criterion assesses the degree of government agency collaboration, how well the proposal identifies and engages end users of the research, and whether it provides a focused and effective engagement and outreach strategy.

Deadline and Submission Information

LOIs must be received by 5 p.m. Central Time on October 26, 2026. Full proposals must be received by 5 p.m. Central Time on November 20, 2026. Full proposals should be submitted in PDF format via email to Lauren Fremin at lrfremin@olemiss.edu.

General questions about the *2026 Contaminants of Emerging Concern Research-to-Application Partnership Competition* and the scope of projects considered should be directed to Stephanie Otts, Director of the National Sea Grant Law Center, via email, sshowalt@olemiss.edu, or phone, (662) 915-7714. General questions about the application process should be directed to Lauren Fremin, Project Coordinator for the National Sea Grant Law Center, via email, lrfremin@olemiss.edu.

The Law Center has a FAQ document available on our website at https://nsglc.olemiss.edu/funding/index.html. We strongly encourage applicants to review this document before reaching out with questions via email.

Timetable

The *2026 Contaminants of Emerging Concern Research-to-Application Partnership Competition* process takes approximately nine months from the request for proposals to the initiation date. The following dates provide milestones throughout the process:

RFP Released:	October 5, 2026
Letters of Intent Due:	October 26, 2026
Full Proposals Due:	November 20, 2026
Notification of Project Selection:	January 29, 2027
Award Start Date:	June 1, 2027