Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) launched a new 2010-14 strategic plan and the VASG Coastal and Marine Science Request for Proposal (RFP) was designed and focused based upon the strategic plan. VASG funds research within four focus areas: Safe and sustainable seafood; Healthy coastal and marine ecosystems; Sustainable and resilient coastal communities; and Coastal and ocean literacy. Further, VASG funds impactful science aimed at solving important societal problems, with clear links between project results and problem solutions, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the region, and the nation.

In response to the 2010 RFP, VASG received an extremely competitive field of forty-three pre-proposals, seeking over $2.5M. The smaller seed awards (up to $40K) were the most popular with twenty pre-proposals, followed by larger awards (up to $120K) with thirteen, and then student-only graduate fellows with ten pre-proposals. Based upon the pre-proposal review process, which included a relevancy survey among advisory committee members and key stakeholders for Virginia and VASG and an external peer review panel held outside of the state, VASG encouraged full proposals for nine smaller seed awards, five larger awards, and eight graduate fellow awards. VASG hopes to fund 4-6 smaller awards, 1-2 larger awards, and 4-6 graduate fellows.

The guidance for full proposals includes information and details on the following:

- Format and content
- Evaluation procedures and criteria
- Deadline and submission information

If you have any questions, please contact Troy Hartley, Director (thartley@vims.edu), (804) 684-7248, or Susan Park, Assistant Director for Research, (spark@vims.edu), (804) 684-7436. Also see the website, www.vims.edu/seagrant/research.htm.

**Format and Content**

Adherence to the format requirements is mandatory and ensures fairness across all proposals. Proposals not meeting these format requirements will be returned and not considered. Font size can be no smaller than 11 point and margins must be at least 1 inch on standard 8.5x11 inch paper throughout the document.

NOTE: Form 90-2 must be submitted as a Word document (.doc) and Form 90-4 must be submitted as an Excel document (.xls). All others may be submitted as a Word file (.doc) or PDF file (.pdf).
The content of a proposal should include:

1. **Title Page or Cover Letter** (1-page). The title page or cover letter must include the appropriate institutional signatures reflecting approval of submission from the home institution of the lead principal investigator.

2. **Project Summary Form 90-2** (submitted as a Word file (.doc)). The template is available online (www.vims.edu/seagrant/full-proposals.htm); the completed document should be no longer than 2-pages in length. The form includes:
   a. Title;
   b. Detailed contact information for the lead principle investigator and list of co-investigators with affiliations, complete address, phone, fax, and email address. Include the proposed person-months (direct and matched) for each investigator.
   c. Total amount of funding requested, including funds requested from Sea Grant and total matching funds;
   d. Strategic plan priority. Cite the specific goal and priority objective from the VASG 2010—2014 Strategic Plan.
   e. Project abstract. An abstract should briefly describe the proposed work’s objectives, methodology, and rationale.

3. **Project Description** (15-pages, single-spaced maximum). Visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and other visual information are included in the 15-page limit. The narrative should include the background and rationale, project objectives, research methods, anticipated benefits, partners/research team, and information transfer and adoption strategy.

   Reference the specific VASG strategic plan objective being addressed by the proposed work. Please note that a VASG Graduate Fellow proposal still needs to demonstrate that the research project on which the VASG-funded student would be working is consistent with VASG’s strategic plan and mission, even though the research project itself is not funded by VASG.

   a. **Background and Rationale.** This section should provide an overview of the current state of knowledge of problem or issue and the justification for the proposed work. The justification must clearly describe the societal problem being considered, including but not limited to contributions the study will make to a particular discipline or subject area and citation of a particular VASG strategic plan priority. Consider how significant the societal problem is and how the project contributes to addressing that societal problem.

   b. **Objectives.** List the objectives of the proposed project, including a brief statement of the context of the proposed project in relation to other related work or fields of related research. Consider how the project leverages or provides synergistic benefits to a broader research agenda and a strategic effort among many partners to collectively address a societal problem. Be careful to state the purpose of the work as the objectives rather than list project activities or tasks.
c. **Research Methods and Work Plan.** Describe in detail the hypotheses or propositions, research methods and techniques, and analytical methods that will be used to meet the stated objectives. Discuss the approach to data management and project management (e.g., how will the team track objectives, timelines, and milestones). Include a discussion of the outreach plan and how the research and outreach efforts are integrated to effectively lead to the desired outcomes, although the detailed description of outreach tasks and activities will be included in the outreach plan section discussed below.

For the VASG Graduate Fellow proposal, please also describe the role that the student will be playing in the project activities.

d. **Specific Outcomes and Broader Societal Benefits.** Describe the results to be achieved for the project (beyond activities to be performed), how these results relate to current knowledge of the proposal topic, and of what use the results will be for specific audiences or end-users. Consider and discuss quantifiable measures of outcomes.

In addition, consider the desired end states that could be achieved from addressing the societal problem and suggest measureable outcomes that Sea Grant could monitor as evidence of broader societal impacts from its research program. These are not performance measures that are specific to the proposed research, but rather considerations of the broader strategic effort among many partners to collectively address a societal problem.

e. **Partners and Research Team.** Short description of the research team and their roles and responsibilities. VASG encourages formal collaborations with end-users. Short CV’s can be attached separately, so emphasize the roles and responsibilities of team members rather than detailed biographies.

f. **Outreach Plan: Information Transfer and Adoption.** Discuss how the information generated or technology developed will be transferred to and adopted by decision-makers. Decision-makers could be government policy makers and resource managers, industry members, citizens, educators, etc. These are typically not scientists or the researcher’s professional peers. Describe the specific outreach goals, activities, and deliverables, including a timeline for outreach activities.

g. **Time Schedule.** Indicate time progression of key elements of the work plan, milestones, and deliverables throughout the entire project, including those associated with collaborators, user groups, and outcomes. A table containing monthly increments is often sufficient.

4. **Literature Cited.**

5. **Results from Prior Research.** If any investigator or collaborator on this project has received VASG funding in the past five years (2005—present), please provide the award
number, amount and period of support, title, brief summary of results (~250 words), and publications, patents, or other products resulting from the work.

6. **Budget Form 90-4** (submitted as an Excel file (.xls)). Applications must include a total, 12-month budget for the project, using the Sea Grant Budget Form 90-4. Sample budget justification formats can be found in the “Budget Form 90-4 Guidance” document online. Both 90-4 and budget templates are available at [www.vims.edu/seagrant/full-proposals.htm](http://www.vims.edu/seagrant/full-proposals.htm). A 50% match is required (i.e., $0.50 non-federal match for every $1.00 of federal funds).

Please note that in late January of every year, VASG hosts a project participant’s symposium in Richmond. Funded principal investigators and students are encouraged to attend and may be invited to present. If other travel support is unavailable, it would be appropriate to include travel funds to attend the one-day event in Richmond.

7. **Letters of support.** Please provide letters of support from collaborators on the research team, as well as any support letters from stakeholders.

8. **CV’s for project participants** (maximum 2-page each).

9. **Reviewers not to include.** (Optional) At the pre-proposal stage, investigators provided a list of suggested reviewers who they believe are qualified to review the proposal, and they do not need to submit further suggestions. However at this time, investigators may indicate and justify persons they would prefer not review the proposal. These suggestions are optional; investigators may include this informant in a separate email directly to VASG Assistant Director for Research, Susan Park, at spark@vims.edu. The decision whether or not to use suggested reviewers remains with VASG.

**Evaluation Procedures and Criteria**

The evaluation procedures for VASG involve:

- **External proposal reviewers** (typically 4—6 out-of-state scientific reviewers). Reviewers are selected to ensure absence of conflict of interest, and special attention is given to ensure that gender, race, or ethnic discrimination is not affecting proposal ratings. In addition to scientific experts, external reviewers are sought from outreach professionals and resource managers.

- **PI response** (optional) to external reviews. Reviews are shared with PIs and they are granted an opportunity to submit a memo in response to the external review, as they see fit. A response is optional.

- **Peer review panel** recommendations. A peer review panel will be held in the late fall to evaluate proposal packages (i.e., proposal, external reviews, and PI’s response to external reviews) relative to the evaluation criteria and provide recommendations to VASG. As with external proposal reviewers, VASG selects panelists to ensure absence of conflict of interest, and special attention is given to ensure that gender, race, or ethnic discrimination
is not affecting proposal ratings. The National Sea Grant Office (NSGO) program officer for VASG will attend the peer review panel, as an observer.

- **VASG management team determination.** VASG considers the panel’s advice, VASG’s strategic plan priorities, and the urgency and importance of the issues and research portfolio in making a final determination of projects to fund. NSGO then reviews the final list of recommended projects, concurs, and VASG announces the research awards.

VASG employs a stringent conflict of interest policy throughout the review process.

**Evaluation Criteria.** VASG applies the following criteria for proposal review:

1. **Rationale.** The degree to which proposed activity addresses an important and relevant societal issue, problem, or opportunity regarding marine or coastal resources. Will it advance our understanding of issues relevant to solving clear societal problem(s) in coastal and/or marine issues? Will it likely improve the effectiveness of coastal and marine resource decision-making by end-users? Will addressing the problem have a real impact in Virginia and/or the region? Are there clear deliverables of importance to end-users? Is the proposal responsive to VASG’s 2010—2014 Strategic Plan and priorities (see link on VASG research web page, [www.vims.edu/seagrant/research.htm](http://www.vims.edu/seagrant/research.htm))

2. **Scientific and Technical Merit.** Feasibility of the project and likelihood of it being successfully implemented as proposed, given the practicality of the approach proposed, qualifications of the team and their past performance, requested funding and staffing levels, and the ethical and responsible manner of the research approach.

3. **Innovativeness and Potential for Impacts.** The degree to which novel approaches are proposed to solve problems or focus on new opportunities or issues. The extent of leveraged expertise, capacity and resources through partnerships and collaborative efforts with end-users. Will there be future opportunities for expanded collaboration and synergistic impacts? What is the likelihood that the proposed information transfer and adoption strategies will broaden the impacts beyond immediate partners?

4. **Qualifications and Past Record of Investigators.** The degree to which investigators are qualified by education, training, and/or experience to execute the proposed activity. The record of achievement with previous funding.

5. **Partnerships and End User Relationship.** The extent to which the proposed project reflects a genuine collaboration and integration of knowledge, experience, and resources of collaborators, end users, or other partners and stakeholders involved with the proposed project. Did the partners work together to define the problem, flesh out the approach and nature of the deliverables, and will work closely together throughout project implementation? Do the end users and supporting stakeholders see real value in the work and outcome of the project?

**Research Involving Vertebrate Animals and/or Human Subjects.** If the proposed research involves vertebrate animal or human subjects, investigators should contact and comply with their
home institution’s Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures. Any project proposing use of vertebrate animals for research or education shall comply with the Animal Welfare Act and the appropriate regulations under the Secretary of Agriculture pertaining to the humane care, handling, and treatment of vertebrate animals held or used for research, teaching or other activities supported by Federal funds. Projects involving research with human subjects must ensure that subjects are protected from research risks in conformance with the relevant federal policy for the protection of human subjects.

**Deadline and Submission Information**

Pre-proposals must be submitted via email to vsgproposals@vims.edu by 5:00pm EST on **June 30, 2010** in Word or PDF format. Insert “VASG Science Proposal_{PI name}” in the email subject line. Confirmation of proposal receipt will be sent by return email to the originating mailbox only. If you do not receive a receipt notification email or do not have email access, please contact VASG staff at the phone numbers below. Investigators are reminded to plan sufficient time for and follow submission policies of their home institutions, e.g., obtaining institutional review and signatures.

Proposals or partial proposals received after the deadline (for any reason) will be disqualified and returned to the investigator.

**For Additional Information**

Please contact Troy Hartley, Director (thartley@vims.edu), (804)684-7248, or Susan Park, Assistant Director for Research, (spark@vims.edu), (804)684-7436. Also see the web-site, [www.vims.edu/seagrant/research.htm](http://www.vims.edu/seagrant/research.htm).