



## RESEARCH PROPOSAL EVALUATION AND APPROVAL POLICY, PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

The Florida Aquarium (the “Aquarium”) is committed to supporting, facilitating and conducting purpose-focused research that has scientific merit, rigor, defensibility and need, aide in the conservation of species and/or ecosystems, improves animal husbandry and/or welfare, adds to the scientific knowledge of the species in our care, and/or forwards guest experience and education impacts.

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

Research projects that are NOT directly relevant to the Aquarium’s Shared Purpose, conservation priorities and/or programs, animal care and welfare, or learning programs and/or priorities should not be submitted.

### PURPOSE-FOCUSED RESEARCH

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

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

## RESEARCH PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESSES & PROTOCOLS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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