Great Lakes Fishery Trust

Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations Human Dimensions Research and Engagement

Request for Preliminary Proposals
2027 Application Guidance

Program Goals and Schedule

The goals of the Human Dimensions Research and Engagement grant program are to create a more resilient and stable fish community, increase the sustainable value of the fishery to stakeholders, and foster and increase self-sustaining fish populations. In 2024, the Great Lakes Fishery Trust (GLFT) embarked upon a year-long effort to update its strategic plan. Through that process, the Fishery Trust updated its Human Dimensions Research and Engagement program funding model. The Human Dimensions program request for proposals (RFP) will be open alternate years beginning in 2025. The next RFP is scheduled for release late in 2028 for the 2029 program year.

Application Requirements

The Great Lakes Fishery Trust invites preliminary proposals for Great Lakes fisheries projects under its **Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations** focus area. This RFP process will be used for the disbursement of up to $1.3 million in 2027 in two grant categories: 1) Human Dimensions Research and Engagement and 2) Ecological and Biological Research to Inform Management.

While the GLFT's core historical investments in research and information have emphasized ecological and biological fisheries research targeted to fishery management agencies, fishery issues also have social and economic components and operate in social and economic contexts. The pilot Human Dimensions Research and Engagement program was new to the GLFT as of 2024, emerging from the trust's strategic planning process. GLFT staff welcomes feedback on this program from the research, management, and policy communities. This application guide provides background on this funding category and will assist

you with the funding criteria and preliminary proposal requirements. The forms and instructions necessary to guide you through the application process are provided below.

Applications must be submitted through the GLFT's web-based grant management system. The web-based application system will prompt you with the mandatory questions, file uploads, and instructions to guide you through the application process.

To begin, visit the Apply page on our website (https://www.glft.org/apply), where you will find application guidance documents and other useful information to help you complete an application.

Grant opportunities for which the GLFT is currently accepting applications can be viewed by clicking the Apply for Active Grant Opportunities button, which will take you to a page with online applications. Click on the title of the grant opportunity in which you are interested and follow the instructions to apply.

You must create a user account to submit an application, which will require an email address and password. If you do not have a user account in our system, click on Login/Create Account and follow the instructions provided. You may then proceed to the grant application.

If you already have an account but do not know your password, click on Forgot Your Password and instructions for changing your password will be emailed to you.

If you need assistance with setting up your account, please contact GLFT staff at 517-371-7468 or glft@glft.org.

When completing the online application:

Remember to save your work often.

When uploading a document, click Save to complete the file transfer.

You may leave your work and return at a later time to complete the application.

To return to an already-started online application, log in and click on the Dashboard button in the upper right corner of the page. The Dashboard page provides access to your applications and/or active projects.

Make sure that your answers to each question are within the text field limits.

Check each field before it is submitted to ensure the content is correct.

Be sure to answer all of the required questions. The system will not allow an application to be submitted if a required question is not answered.

Be aware that no changes can be made to the application once it is submitted (if you made an error, contact GLFT staff).

Applicants are encouraged to log in to the site and review the application well in advance of the submission deadline. Late applications will not be accepted.

Submission and Award Dates

Applications are due by **Friday, January 8, 2027,** at 5:00 p.m. EST. Late preliminary proposals will not be accepted.

Applicant Eligibility

Proposals are encouraged from educational, governmental, tribal, and nonprofit institutions with a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS. Canadian public and nonprofit organizations also may be eligible but should contact GLFT staff prior to submitting a preliminary proposal.

Questions and Answers

The GLFT will accept questions about our submission and review process as well as our funding priorities via email to mobrien@glft.org.

Additional Information

This grant announcement, further information on the GLFT, descriptions of projects previously funded by the GLFT, and information regarding funding opportunities for other Great Lakes fishery–related projects can be found on the GLFT website at www.glft.org.

Mission and Goals of the GLFT's Investments in Fisheries Research

The mission of the GLFT is to provide funding to enhance, protect, and rehabilitate Great Lakes fishery resources to compensate for lost use and enjoyment caused by the operation of the Ludington Pumped Storage Plant. The GLFT pursues these goals through investments in three broad categories: Access to the Great Lakes fishery, Great Lakes Stewardship, and Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations.

Fisheries research is one element of the GLFT's Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations funding stream. The broad goals of these investments are to:

- Create a more resilient and stable fish community
- Increase the sustainable value of the fishery to stakeholders
- Preserve self-sustaining fish populations

Specifically, the key intended outcomes for fisheries research and engagement investments are to:

- Enhance the ability of managers/agencies to respond to changes in the fishery and ecosystem

- Build research capacity and management expertise needed to understand and manage the Great Lakes ecosystem for sustainable production of valuable species
- Reduce the cost of fishery management in relation to benefits provided

The key goals for the GLFT's investments in human dimensions research and engagement specifically are to:

- Build awareness and understanding of the economic value of Great Lakes fisheries to communities
- Increase the value of Great Lakes fisheries to anglers and local communities
- Build knowledge and capacity to promote a more equitable framework for Great Lakes fishery management
- Help policymakers understand the values and motivations of participants in the fishery

The GLFT believes strongly in the importance of scientific merit when selecting projects for funding. Social and economic research efforts that fail to employ rigorous, valid, and reliable methodology, or to build on existing knowledge, will not be supported, regardless of the quality of fit between the proposed research and Great Lakes information needs.

The next sections will assist you with the preliminary proposal requirements and funding criteria.

Lake Michigan Priority

Whether shore-based fishing access, stewardship, dam removals, or fisheries research and engagement, all GLFT-funded projects must have benefits directed primarily to the Great Lakes. The settlement agreement establishing the GLFT requires grant funding to benefit the residents of Michigan and further requires that priority be given to efforts that benefit the Lake Michigan fishery projects that directly inform policy and management in the Lake Michigan basin within the state of Michigan will be prioritized. Projects that focus on other lake basins will also be considered, if their results benefit residents of Michigan or are transferable to the Lake Michigan basin.

It is important to note that the GLFT's Lake Michigan priority emphasizes *benefit* to the Lake Michigan fishery, as opposed to *activity limited to* Lake Michigan. In the context of fisheries research, the question is not whether there are "feet on the ground" in Lake Michigan but whether proposed research will yield high-priority knowledge and information for policy and management in Lake Michigan. For example, in some areas of research inquiry, cross-lake comparative efforts may hasten learning compared to studies focused exclusively on Lake Michigan. Such cross-lake studies are encouraged.

Research and Engagement Themes

The GLFT pursues its fisheries research efforts through competitive grantmaking within established thematic areas. The GLFT invites proposals responding to topics identified in the Great Lakes Fishery Commission document, *Human Dimension Research Needs for Great Lakes Fishery Management*. In 2027, the GLFT's primary interests in human dimensions research and engagement are explained below.

The Economic Value of Great Lakes Fisheries

The GLFT's **primary interests** in this category are in innovative research, development, or analysis leading to a better understanding of how fishery management relates to the economic value of the Great Lakes fishery.

Supported projects may include:

- Explorations of strategies to increase the economic value of Great Lakes fisheries
- Analysis of the economic value of the fishery from nonusers and/or nonconsumptive users
- Research into the value of fisheries to tribal, provincial, state, regional, and local economies

Equity Considerations Within Great Lakes Fisheries

The GLFT's **primary interests** in this category are in efforts that:

- Consider how local and traditional ecological knowledge can be better integrated into fishery policy and management
- Engage stakeholder groups that have been historically less engaged to increase their participation and/or influence in the decision-making process

User and Nonuser Values and Motivations

The GLFT's **primary interests** in this category are in efforts that:

- Document the ways in which user and nonuser groups value Great Lakes fisheries, including existence value, recreational value, etc.
- Consider angler values and motivations relative to recreational and commercial fishing regulations
- Detail stakeholder expectations regarding fishery management
- Document the motivations of Great Lakes anglers, both recreational and subsistence

Particular priority will be placed on efforts that focus on current issues, values, and challenges and are germane to audiences including fisheries managers, policymakers, environmental and conservation groups, and commercial interests.

Dissemination of information generated through GLFT investment in human dimensions research and engagement efforts is critical to these undertakings and will be proactively managed and supported by the GLFT to ensure intended audiences are connected to relevant information.

The GLFT believes in the importance of sharing project information in forms that are both accessible and understandable to key audiences.

Ecosystem Health and Sustainable Fish Populations Human Dimensions Research and Engagement

Preliminary Proposal Requirements

The online application will prompt you to provide the following information:

Basic Information

Project title.

Applicant eligibility: Does the applicant's organization have a nonprofit status with a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS (or is it a nongovernmental organization that holds charitable status in your country), or is it considered to be an educational or governmental (including tribal) organization? (Y/N)

Organization: Some individuals who submit proposals to the GLFT have affiliations with multiple entities. Applicants will be asked to select the organization the grant would be awarded to. If the organization the applicant is submitting a proposal under is not listed, add the organization online or contact GLFT staff for assistance. All applications should be submitted by the organization that would receive funding from the GLFT.

Applicant Information and History

The questions in this section are for staff use only. They will be redacted prior to review, so that the preproposal will be considered by the SAT without identifying information. Please be mindful of the amount of identifying information you include outside of this section and within this section that would be difficult to redact.

Applicant contact information.

Collaborator(s): If the project includes collaborators, provide the name, organization, and department for each collaborator.

Has the applicant or a collaborator applied to the GLFT before? (Y/N)

Has the applicant or a collaborator previously received a grant award from the GLFT? (Y/N)

Prior GLFT-funded projects summary: If the applicant or a collaborator has previously received a GLFT grant, provide a brief summary (including the GLFT grant number and title) of the work. (Limit your response to 200 words.)

Is this proposal, or a similar proposal, currently under consideration by any other funders? (Y/N)

If so, please identify all entities that are concurrently reviewing the proposal.

Grant Request

Requested amount

Match amount

Project start date

Project end date

Has your organization proposed this project to the GLFT in the past? (Y/N)

Proposal

Project Summary

Briefly explain what the project proposes to accomplish using terminology that would be appropriate to include on the GLFT website to communicate project goals to a general audience. (Limit your response to 75 words.)

GLFT thematic area: Indicate the primary GLFT thematic area the proposed project would support. The areas are: The Economic Value of Great Lakes Fisheries, Equity Considerations within Great Lakes Fisheries, and Angler Values and Motivations.

Project Description

1. ***Problem statement (needs assessment).*** Explain the importance of the problem relative to Great Lakes fisheries. Describe the problem affecting Great Lakes fisheries **AND** the ability of fisheries managers, policymakers, or other groups to resolve it. The problem statement is a key element of a proposal. An applicant may include data or other information in support of the problem statement.

The information provided should be both factual and directly related to the problem addressed by the proposal. (Limit your response to 300 words.)

2. ***Project goal.*** Describe the basis for the proposed project and what you hope to accomplish. If this is a research project, please include the hypotheses that will be tested. If this is an engagement project, please discuss the goals you plan to achieve and your theory of change. (Limit your explanation to 500 words.)

3. ***Methods and/or activities.*** Describe the activities that will take place in order to achieve project objectives. If relevant, identify any pilot work necessary to substantiate the proposed methodology, describe specific methods that have been successfully applied to other projects, and/or describe alternative approaches that were considered and explain why they were rejected. (Limit your response to 300 words.)

4. ***Geographic focus area***. Explain the geographic impact area of the project. All GLFT-funded projects must have benefits directed primarily to the Great Lakes. Projects outside of the Lake Michigan basin are considered if their results and outcomes are transferable to Lake Michigan. Refer to page 4 of this document for more details about the State of Michigan and Lake Michigan priority. (Limit your response to 100 words.)

5. ***Partnerships and collaboration.*** List collaborating individuals and/or organizations, if any, and describe how they have/will be involved in the project. Priority will be given to projects that involve strong support and collaboration of individuals and/or organizations. (Limit your explanation to approximately 500 words.)

6. ***Potential management benefits and outcomes of proposed project.*** Describe the impact of your project and its ability to advance management goals of the Great Lakes fishery (e.g., how will fisheries managers or policymakers use information developed by the project and to what end?). (Limit your response to 200 words.)

7. ***Relationship of the project to ongoing activities.*** Provide information demonstrating that the proposed project will not duplicate existing activities in the region. Describe how the project may complement existing efforts. If the project is closely tied to ongoing work, explain how coordination will occur. (Limit your response to 200 words.)

8. ***Evaluating results*.** Describe the plan for evaluating the project's results. Priority will be given to projects that include the implementation of a sound evaluation design and methods and will provide information or insights that will help guide future grant activities of the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. (Limit your explanation to approximately 500 words.)

9. ***Prior experience.*** Provide information that demonstrates your ability to successfully manage grants or projects of similar size and complexity. Identify key members of the project team by name and title. Do not submit curriculum vitae at this time. (Limit your response to 150 words.)

Communications

1. ***Target audience.*** Describe the resource managers, policymakers, or other entities at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels who will find the outcome of this project most beneficial. (Limit your response to 100 words.)

2. ***Usefulness of results***. How will the resource managers, policymakers, or other entities listed above be able to use the results of this project to solve problems dealing with the fishery? (Limit your response to 100 words.)

3. ***Distribution of findings***. Detail the media that will be employed to get results of the project in front of target audiences identified above. Please note: The GLFT will encourage all funded researchers to seek a presentation before a relevant committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. For those projects that are designed to synthesize and disseminate information from existing research, explain how your project will aid the target audiences. (Limit your response to 100 words.)

Project Budget

Budget Narrative

Preliminary proposals must provide a budget highlighting category line items listed below and identify other monies that will be raised to support the proposed work. Definitions on the budget categories can be found at www.glft.org on the Resources page. For the preliminary proposal, provide the cumulative budget information with the amount requested from the GLFT. The expense categories listed below may not be changed.

Note: According to the GLFT overhead policy for all projects, administrative/overhead costs are limited to 10 percent of the total salaries and wages.

- Salaries
- Fringe benefits
- Materials/supplies
- Other direct expenses
- Contracted services
- Indirect costs (administrative/overhead)
- Amount requested from GLFT
- Matching funds
- Total project cost

Briefly explain how the figures in each budget category were estimated and justify the need for the costs. Projects with financial support from other sources are encouraged. Although matching funds are not required, proposals that include funding from other sources will be favored. If matching funds or in-kind contributions are involved, please a) identify the sources and amounts of these and explain for each whether these have been requested, pledged, or secured; b) explain whether the GLFT funds are to be

used as a match requirement and, if so, what percentage of GLFT funds would be used to complete specific items (e.g., 30 percent of needed funds for a task would be from the GLFT, 70 percent from other sources); and c) address contingency plans if pending funding is not realized. (Limit your response to 150 words.)

Review Process

GLFT staff will review the preliminary proposals based on the GLFT's funding criteria (see next section, pages 11–12). Invited full proposals will be due by Monday, April 12, 2027. Research-focused human dimensions full proposals will be subject to external peer review and be evaluated by the Scientific Advisory Team, which will make funding recommendations to the board of trustees. Engagement-focused human dimensions full proposals will be evaluated by staff, which will make recommendations to the board of trustees. Grants are targeted for award in August 2027.

Questions

For questions about whether your project fits the GLFT's mission or about the proposal process, contact grant manager Meagan O'Brien at 517-371-7468.



Funding Criteria

Project Size

There are no cost or time limitations on grant requests; however, projects will be evaluated on the cost versus the expected benefits as well as upon the reasonableness of the time requested to complete the project.

Who Can Apply?

Proposals are encouraged from educational, governmental, tribal, and nonprofit institutions with a 501(c)(3) designation from the IRS. Canadian public and nonprofit organizations also may be eligible but should contact GLFT staff prior to submitting a proposal.

Evaluation of Preliminary Proposals

Preliminary proposals will be evaluated on the degree to which they meet the following criteria:

- **Project applicants must be a public entity, nonprofit organization, or private educational institution.**

  Organizations receiving funds and managing a project must demonstrate evidence of current 501(c)(3) tax status with the IRS.

- **Projects must not duplicate ongoing activities in the region or activities funded by alternative sources.**

  Projects must represent new efforts not currently under way in the Great Lakes region.

- **Projects must target RFP priorities and have measurable outcomes.**

  Project proposals must address research priorities outlined in the request for proposals and contain measurable objectives and processes for measuring success.

- **Projects must have direct fisheries management, policy, or practice implications.**

  The GLFT funds basic research only when there is a clear consensus that such efforts are essential to address a critical issue facing fishery managers.

- **Research-focused projects must have scientific merit.**

  The GLFT believes strongly in the importance of scientific merit, as determined through an external peer review process and by an independent peer review panel, when selecting projects for funding.

- **Engagement-focused projects must be directed toward clear objectives and use best practices for engagement and/or facilitation.**

  Applicants should carefully articulate the objectives of engagement projects and state how those objectives will be measured and achieved.

- **Projects must have benefits directed primarily to the Great Lakes.**

  Projects must provide benefits to the Great Lakes fishery. Projects with benefits (e.g., findings, protocols, new capacity) directed primarily to the Lake Michigan fishery are of higher priority than projects without significant benefit to the Lake Michigan fishery.

- **Project applicants must have demonstrated an ability to undertake such projects.**

  Project applicants must be able to demonstrate prior experience in successfully managing similar grants or projects.

- **Projects must be feasible and cost-effective.**

  Costs should be aligned with potential benefits, and the proposed project timeline should be realistic, given the scope of proposed work.

In addition, preliminary proposals that exhibit the following four attributes will be reviewed more favorably than those lacking these qualities:

- **Highly visible results**

  Dissemination of results to resource managers, policymakers, and other appropriate forums or groups should be incorporated into the project proposal. At a minimum, successful applicants will be required to seek the opportunity to present their findings to a relevant audience connected to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. An additional and broader vision for dissemination of results is encouraged.

- **Management support**

  Projects should have demonstrated support from representatives of the management or policy making community, and/or be responsive to published priorities of management agencies. Expressions of broader support (e.g., from organizations interested in Great Lakes fisheries, from the scientific community) are pertinent as well.

- **Collaborative approach**

  Efforts that involve collaboration between and among the applicant and management agencies, policy makers, or other relevant communities are preferred.

- **Facilitation of future uses of GLFT funds**

  Projects should provide information or results that will help guide future activities of the GLFT.