

Symbiosis in Aquatic Systems Initiative Request for Proposals: Frequently Asked Questions

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
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Eligibility

1. What are the individual eligibility requirements?

Applications are welcome from scientists based in the United States and internationally. Teams may be based in the same or different countries.

Tenure-track and non-tenure track researchers at academic institutions are eligible to apply, as are scientists at nonprofit and for-profit companies, provided all data, protocols, and methods generated projects are openly shared with the scientific community. Requirements for awards that include for-profit companies would be discussed at a later date.

2. What are the institutional eligibility requirements?

To be eligible for this solicitation, applicants’ home institutions must be able to receive research grants from a private foundation.

The foundation would make a single award for each successful proposal. The grantee would make a sub-award to the partner institution (assuming the partnering scientist works at a different organization).

For selected projects with the primary institution in the U.S., grantees must be 501(c)(3) public charities per the Internal Revenue Service code. We also fund internationally; selected projects with the primary institution outside the U.S. must be determined to be equivalent to a U.S. 501(c)(3) public charity.

3. Which organization should serve as grantee, and which as sub-awardee?

In general, we expect the person designated as the “aquatic symbiosis scientist” to serve as project lead, and accordingly that person’s institution would serve as the Foundation’s grantee. This institution would make a sub-award to the collaborator’s institution if the individuals reside at different institutions.

4. But wait, I am both an aquatic symbiosis scientist and a tool developer, or I am an aquatic symbiosis scientist with deep expertise in another discipline. How should I note my role?

Please designate the individual with greater relative expertise in aquatic symbiosis as the aquatic symbiosis scientist. We trust your judgment.

5. Can current and previous Moore Foundation grantees apply?

Yes. Current and previous Moore Foundation awardees are eligible to apply. Prior funding will not confer an advantage or disadvantage during the review process.

Please note: If you have any past due grant requirements or other requests from a current or previous Moore Foundation award, you must complete these requirements **prior to** applying for your application to be considered. If you are unsure, please send us a note.

6. Can a researcher participate in more than one proposal?

No. Each researcher may participate in only one proposal submission in response to this solicitation.

7. I’m an adjunct professor with my own research laboratory. Am I eligible?

Scientists who respond to this call must have a primary appointment at an eligible institution.

8. Can graduate students or postdoctoral fellows serve as one of the two investigators?

No.

9. Can additional investigators be involved beyond the two listed investigators?

No. The focus of this opportunity is on investigator pairs. To control costs and maintain that focus, we encourage investigators to limit the team size to two investigators. Outside investigators may be involved in the project as unfunded collaborators.

10. Is the requirement of two collaborating researchers a form of symbiosis facetiousness?

No. We actually feel this structure is well-suited to achieving our strategic aims. That said, we certainly will be looking for mutualistic as opposed to parasitic partnerships among the teams.

11. My primary appointment and research space are at a government facility. Am I eligible?

Yes. However, please see Budget and Indirect Costs section below regarding indirect cost requirements for Moore Foundation grantees, as our indirect cost rate may be incompatible with your organization. Temporary or term appointees and contractors are not eligible. If you are uncertain whether the terms of your appointment meet this eligibility requirement, please e-mail symbiosis@moore.org and provide information about the terms of your position. We will consider your situation and respond as soon as possible.

12. I am about to start my first research appointment. Am I eligible? NEW

Yes, so long as your new appointment begins by January 31, 2027.

Do members of the collaborative team need to be working together for the first time? NEW

This call does not require that the collaboration be entirely new; you can bring together an existing team, provided that there is disciplinary diversity on the team and methodological or conceptual innovation in the project.

Are there any restrictions on the number of proposals an institution may submit? NEW

No. There is no limit on the number of proposals that may be submitted by a single institution. However, each investigator may participate in only one proposal.

Can collaborators be from the same organization? NEW

Yes, as long as the collaboration brings together different disciplines.

Submission and timeline

13. When is the application deadline?

The submission deadline is Friday July 31, 2026, at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Time.

14. When will applicants be notified of funding decisions?

All applicants will be notified of their application status by late October or in November 2026.

15. When will awards begin?

We expect projects to begin in early 2027. We are unable to provide a more specific date at this time. Given the uncertainties, you should not presume an ability to patch a current laboratory member to a new award.

16. How many proposals will be selected?

Unknown. We do not have a fixed number of awards planned for this call. The number of awards will depend on the content of the submitted proposals, both in terms of quality and associated cost drivers.

17. Does the Moore Foundation require me to include endorsement or approval from my institution to apply for this funding opportunity?

Not yet. If your proposal is selected to proceed to the next step in the process, your institution's endorsement will be required at that time.

18. Will late proposals be accepted, even if just 5 minutes late?

No. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit your proposal in case a technical issue arises. We will not be available late in the evening Pacific Time to assist.

Proposal requirements

19. How long should the proposal be?

The project description must not exceed six pages and should follow the formatting guidelines provided in the request for proposals. Proposals that exceed the page limit will not be reviewed.

20. What level of detail is expected?

Proposals should be concise but sufficiently detailed to convey the scientific vision, approach, feasibility, and potential impact. Clarity and focus are more important than exhaustive detail.

21. Are preliminary data required?

No. Preliminary data are not required. Proposals should present a compelling rationale and demonstrate that the proposed approach is feasible.

22. Are figures allowed within the six-page limit?

Yes. Figures may be included as part of the project description and are often helpful to include. A picture is worth a thousand words...

23. Can proposals span multiple topic areas? How will such proposals be evaluated?

Yes. Proposals can cover multiple topic areas, although there is no advantage or disadvantage in doing so. Proposals covering multiple areas will be evaluated via the same process as all other proposals.

24. Can supplementary materials be included?

No. Additional documents should not be included beyond the proposal and additional required materials (biosketches, budget sketch, and current & pending documents).

Scope

25. How do you define aquatic systems?

We define aquatic systems as bodies of water inclusive of marine and freshwater environments. Freshwater environments include lakes, (seasonal) ponds, rivers, streams, creeks, (hot) springs, and freshwater sediments. They also include the aquatic portion of swamps, bogs and wetlands. Marine environments include oceans, estuaries, lagoons, the seabed and deep-sea sediments. Hypersaline lakes are also included.

26. How do you define “microbe?”

Microbes include archaea, bacteria, single-celled protists and single-celled fungi. We do not consider viruses microbes.

27. What is the initiative’s view of viruses in symbiosis?

The roles of viruses in symbiotic associations that include microbes are of interest. We would favor research that considers viruses as mutualists or parasites (e.g. chronic infection) or that explores how viruses facilitate mutualism or parasitism between cellular organisms. However, we would not favor research that solely focuses on “predator-prey dynamics” between virus and host or the roles of viruses in pathogenicity and disease.

28. Will proposals on the symbiosis components of eukaryogenesis be considered?

Yes.

29. I am a methodological expert (e.g., deep learning tools, synthetic biology, or high-throughput experimental design). What's in it for me?

We strongly encourage your participation and collaboration with an aquatic symbiosis scientist and hope you find the research area inspirational. In addition, we are interested both in application of existing tools and experimental approaches to aquatic symbiosis research questions as well as wholesale creation of new tools and approaches. If appropriate, we appreciate use-inspired framing of the proposed research so long as the collaborating team is also clear in its description of the importance of the proposed approaches in advancing knowledge of aquatic symbioses.

30. Do you fund microbiome studies?

No. We define a microbiome as the full collection of microbes and microbial genes in a community relative to an animate or inanimate reference point. Studies that solely catalogue the identity and functions of microbes and genes are outside of our funding purview. Our aim is to identify projects for which partners are readily identifiable.

31. Do you fund studies on organisms that spend part of their life in water?

Yes, so long as the basis of the project relates to symbiosis in water.

32. Are proposals to develop new genetic tools within scope?

Yes. Genetic manipulation approaches (e.g., CRISPR-based tools) comprise a critical toolkit for studying organisms, enhanced in value for symbiosis research when all partners can be experimentally manipulated. However, because the Initiative has already supported and is continuing to support genetic tool development as part of another line of funding, we will evaluate proposals that include genetic tool development in relation to past and current awards. All awards can be viewed on the [Initiative dashboard](#).

33. What don't you fund?

Studies centered on agriculture, aquaculture, aquaponics, the human microbiome, applied sciences, symbiosis in terrestrial systems (such as plants and soil), symbioses without a microbe, predator-prey relationships, and pathogen research are outside the scope of this funding opportunity.

34. Will you focus on applied areas of research, like coral reef conservation?

No. Our focus for this initiative is on fundamental, basic research, rather than applied challenges or conservation efforts. (Use-inspired research is within scope so long as the knowledge gained and/or tools developed advance aquatic symbiosis research and knowledge.)

Budget and indirect costs

35. Should I begin working with my institution to develop a budget?

No. We prefer that you do not engage your institution to create a formal budget at this time. Final budget details will be negotiated with teams selected to proceed to the next step in the process.

36. Are budgets required as part of the application process?

No. However, a one-page budget sketch is required. The aim is to help Foundation staff understand project cost drivers, but not to estimate a specific dollar amount at this time. Please include the number and level of laboratory personnel critical for project success and what each person would do. Note that we strongly prefer to support postdoctoral fellows and technicians as opposed to graduate students due to the high-risk nature of the projects we aim to support. Please also include information about non-standard materials and supplies and equipment needs, as well as information about the scope of contracts required for activities such as nucleic acid sequencing. Detailed budgets will be developed for projects that are selected to advance in the process and will need to abide by the Foundation's [indirect cost policy](#).

37. What are the expected duration and amount of the awards?

Awards are expected to last for three years (2027-2029; non-renewable). Awards will likely vary in costs depending on the type of work proposed. Applicants may find it helpful to review previously funded projects by visiting the [Aquatic Symbiosis community dashboard](#) and exploring the DOI links associated with funded work.

38. How much time will I be expected to dedicate to this award?

We expect the researchers to prioritize Moore Foundation funding. The project lead and collaborator should determine how much time is necessary to achieve the project's goals.

39. Can funds be used to buy out teaching obligations at my institution?

No. The Symbiosis in Aquatic Systems Initiative does not support funds being used to buy out teaching time.

40. How does the Moore Foundation establish a budget?

Grant budgets are set through discussions with staff and are subject to review by Moore Foundation approvers. We will work with you to prepare a detailed budgets if we select your project to proceed to the next step in the process.

41. Does the Moore Foundation pay indirect costs?

Yes. We provide limited overhead costs, not to exceed 12.5% of allowable expenses. Indirect cost discussions will occur with finalists. As a preview, finalist institutions must agree to abide by the Foundation's [indirect cost policy](#).

42. At what point should my home institution be brought into the conversation?

We prefer to engage prospective grantee institutions only at the point when Foundation staff have selected projects that will move to the next step in the process. It is at this juncture that we will request an official proposal (which may be revised based on feedback from Foundation staff). We will also request a transmittal letter at this time from the grantee institution to confirm its adoption of the project and/or proposal.

Review process

43. Who are the reviewers?

Reviewers include Foundation staff and external experts selected by the Initiative.

44. Will you share reviews or provide feedback on the application?

No. We are restricting any counsel or guidance to ensure we remain neutral and fair to all applicants.

45. What is the policy for conflicts of interest?

We will not have reviewers evaluate a proposal if one or more of the following criteria apply:

1. The reviewer has been a mentor to or mentee of the applicant, for example as a graduate student, postdoctoral researcher or advisor.
2. The reviewer has had a significant collaboration with the applicant in the past 48 months, such as a jointly funded research project or a co-authored publication.
3. The reviewer is in the same department (or equivalent) as the applicant.
4. The reviewer is a family member or partner of the applicant.
5. The reviewer or Foundation has determined the review cannot be impartial for reasons not listed above.

46. Can I get a list of potential reviewers who might be assigned to my application?

No. We do not make public the roster of reviewers for this competition.

47. Are the contents of my application confidential?

Yes. The Moore Foundation will treat all application materials, including ideas and descriptions of plans, as strictly confidential. External reviewers will also be required to maintain confidentiality on all materials.

Technical support

48. What platform should I use to submit my application?

Applications must be submitted through the [Moore Foundation Application Portal](#).

49. Do I need to create an account to apply?

Yes. All applicants must create a [SmartSimple account](#) (or log in to an existing account) to access and submit an application. When creating your user account, please use an email address that you check regularly, as all communications and status updates regarding your application will be sent to that address.

50. Can multiple investigators work on the same application?

Yes. However, only one individual (the proposal lead) should create and submit the application in the portal. Other investigators may be listed within the application but do not need to submit separately.

51. Can I invite a collaborator to help edit or review my proposal before submission?

Yes. The application platform allows proposal leads to invite collaborators to assist with editing and reviewing application materials prior to submission. Collaborators may include project team members, research assistants, postdoctoral researchers, or other colleagues who contribute to developing the proposal. The proposal lead remains responsible for completing and submitting the final application.

52. Can I save my application and return to it later?

Yes. The application platform allows you to save your progress and return to your application at any time prior to submission.

53. Can I edit my application after submitting it?

Yes. You may edit your application after clicking "Submit" and continue making changes up until the application deadline. After the deadline has passed, no further edits will be allowed.

54. What should I do if I experience technical issues with the application portal?

If you experience technical difficulties, please contact ymbiosis@moore.org with a description of the issue, screenshots (if available), and the browser you are using. We recommend reaching out well in advance of the deadline.

55. Which web browsers are supported?

The Application Portal on SmartSimple works best with current versions of major web browsers (e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Edge). We recommend using an up-to-date browser for optimal performance.

56. Can I submit my application after the deadline?

No. The Application Portal will close at the stated deadline, and late submissions will not be accepted.

57. Will I receive confirmation that my application was submitted?

Yes. You will receive an on-screen confirmation and a confirmation email once your application has been successfully submitted.

58. Can I download a copy of my application?

Yes. Applicants are encouraged to download and save a copy of their application for their records prior to submission.

Other questions

59. Will there be another request for proposals in the coming years?

Unknown, but unlikely. Please [sign up](#) for our distribution list and newsletter to learn of any future opportunities.

60. Can I continue to receive grant funding from other sources?

Yes. You may continue to receive other grant funding. However, receiving other grants should not compromise your time commitment to the Moore Foundation-funded component of your research portfolio.

61. I am currently close to 100% effort on my active grants. Would that be a concern?

Possibly. If your project is selected, we would ask you and your institution to examine your commitments and discuss with us.

62. Who can I contact with questions?

Please direct inquiries to: symbiosis@moore.org

63. I heard about Evolution of Motion at the Microscale and other projects the Foundation is supporting, including on symbiosis, protistology and related fields. How do they relate to the Symbiosis in Aquatic Systems Initiative?

The Symbiosis in Aquatic Systems Initiative is a 12-year (2019-2031), \$200 million, board-authorized funding program. The Foundation's [Science Program](#) supports many other areas in the natural sciences as well, including those adjacent to symbiosis, evolution and ecology, as well as those further afield such as astronomy and green chemistry. With a small staff at the Foundation, you will see the names of the same

individuals connected to multiple portfolios and projects. We encourage you to peruse our [dashboard](#), which shows the numerous portfolios supported by the Initiative.

64. Where can I find more information?

Please visit our [website](#) and [dashboard](#) for more details about the Initiative.