

Call for Projects: 2026 RI-NEST Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowships

Advancing Rhode Island's Blue Economy & Environmental Innovation through Undergraduate Research

Building on the success of our inaugural year, the Rhode Island Network for Excellence in Science & Technology (RI-NEST) is pleased to announce its Year 2 Call for Projects for the Summer 2026 Undergraduate Research Fellowships (SURF) program. RI-NEST, supported by the National Science Foundation's Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (NSF EPSCoR), continues to strengthen Rhode Island's research and innovation ecosystem through hands-on undergraduate training and collaborative, use-inspired science.

Deadline for Project Submission

Friday, November 21, 2025

Program Dates

Tuesday, May 26 – Friday, July 31, 2026

RI-NEST SURF Program

The RI-NEST Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF) program provides undergraduate students with a 10-week immersive research experience focused on environmental, coastal, and marine sciences within Rhode Island's broader innovation ecosystem. Students work under the mentorship of researchers from Rhode Island's partner institutions, conducting hands-on research that may include fieldwork, laboratory experiments, or data analysis.

For Summer 2026, RI-NEST anticipates supporting the equivalent of 14 full-time SURF positions, with flexibility to distribute these funds across a combination of full-time SURF and half-time SURF Flex students depending on project design and student interest. The final number of participants will reflect this balance but is expected to total approximately 16–20 students statewide.

In addition to their research, fellows participate in professional-development activities - such as workshops on science communication, visualization, and career preparation - and present their results at the culminating statewide research symposium. Competitive and fully funded, the SURF program equips students with valuable skills and experience for future careers in science and research.

Support

Full-time SURF undergraduate fellows receive a \$6,500 stipend plus \$550 for project supplies. Half-time "SURF Flex" fellows receive \$3,250 stipends and \$275 for supplies.

- *Please note that there is no direct funding for PIs through the SURF program, though opportunities may exist through other RI-NEST initiatives.*

Program Goals & Focus Areas

The RI-NEST SURF program aligns with the statewide initiative's goals to:

- **Strengthen workforce development** by broadening opportunities for research and education that create clear pathways into Rhode Island's technology, environmental, and research industries.



- **Catalyze partnerships** by supporting diverse, use-inspired projects that engage higher-education institutions, small businesses, and community collaborators to advance Rhode Island's Blue Economy and climate resilience.
- **Promote science communication and data sharing** by encouraging translation of scientific results for understanding and use by broad audiences across the state.

Projects are invited that address Rhode Island's Blue Economy and related areas of environmental and technological innovation, including (but not limited to) sustainability, marine and coastal science, ecosystem resilience, ocean technology, and resource management.

Project Criteria

We seek projects that advance the goals of RI-NEST by meeting the following criteria:

- **Support Workforce Development:** Projects should provide meaningful research opportunities for undergraduate students from across Rhode Island's colleges and universities, helping build the state's future STEM and Blue Economy workforce.
- **Promote Collaborative, Use-Inspired Research:** Projects should demonstrate interdisciplinary approaches and address Rhode Island's priorities in environmental sustainability, ocean and coastal science, or technology development that benefits the state's economy and environment.
- **Advance Science Communication and Broader Impact:** Proposals should include strategies for communicating research findings to diverse audiences, strengthening public understanding of science, and contributing to Rhode Island's innovation ecosystem.
- **Foster Mentorship and Student Development:** Proposals must describe mentorship plans that promote students' growth in research and professional skills.
- **Encourage Sustainability and Long-Term Impact:** Preference will be given to projects with potential for lasting benefits to Rhode Island's economy, environment, and communities.
- **Leverage Existing RI-NEST and State Partnerships:** Projects connected to active or recently awarded RI-NEST Seed Grants or Rhode Island STAC Collaborative Grants will receive strong consideration, as these efforts align with RI-NEST's goal of sustaining research momentum and fostering multi- institutional collaboration.

Submission Guidelines

Eligibility: Faculty, postdoctoral researchers, and graduate students from all Rhode Island institutions of higher education are invited to submit proposals. Early-career faculty are especially encouraged to apply, as the program provides an excellent opportunity to mentor undergraduate researchers and establish collaborative connections across the RI-NEST network. Collaborations across institutions and partnerships with community, Tribal, or industry stakeholders are also strongly encouraged.

Project Duration: Projects should span the 10-week summer research period, providing a full-time experience for students. Projects may be designed for either full-time SURF placements, half-time SURF Flex placements, or both. Proposals that can accommodate students in either format are especially welcomed.

Cover Page Requirements (1 page – not included in the 3-page project description limit)



All proposals must include a cover page as the first page of the submission. This page should clearly present project and contact details and verify institutional awareness of the submission. The cover page does not count toward the 3-page proposal limit. The cover page must include:

- **Project title**
- **Principal Investigator (PI):** One designated lead responsible for the project. Include name, title, department, institution and email address.
- **Co-Investigator(s) (if applicable):** Include names, titles, departments, institutions, and email addresses for any additional faculty, staff, or collaborators involved in the project. If the proposal is submitted by a graduate student: include the name, title, department, institution, and email address of their faculty advisor.
- **Primary Institution of Record:** The institution responsible for managing the oversight of project activities.
- **Project Category:** SURF (full-time), SURF Flex (half-time), or either
- **Institutional Approval Statement:** A brief statement confirming that the PI has received internal approval from their home institution to submit the proposal and that the institution is aware of this application.
- **Suggested language:** “I confirm that this proposal has received appropriate internal approval for submission to the RI-NEST SURF program and that my institution is aware of this application.”
- **PI signature and date**

Project Description (maximum 3 pages, plus optional references):

Proposals should be concise yet sufficiently detailed to convey the project’s objectives, student role, and alignment with RI-NEST goals. Please include the following sections:

- **Project Title and Abstract:** A concise overview (250-300 words) suitable for sharing on the RI- NEST website. The abstract should clearly state the project’s objectives, approach, and expected student involvement. Because these abstracts will be used to inform student applicants, they should be written in clear, engaging language appropriate for undergraduates with a general STEM background.
- **Research Objectives and Relevance:** Description of the project’s scientific focus, its alignment with RI-NEST’s Blue Economy and environmental innovation goals, and anticipated outcomes. If applicable, describe how the project aligns with or builds upon any current or prior funding (institutional, state, or federal), including but not limited to RI-NEST Seed Grants or Rhode Island STAC Collaborative Grants.
- **Student Involvement and Mentorship Plan:** Explanation of the student’s role, supervision, and training opportunities. In this section, please indicate whether the project can accommodate full-time (SURF) and/or half-time (SURF Flex) students, and note any differences in project scope or expectations.
- **Collaborators and Partnerships:** Identification of any institutional, community, Tribal, or industry partners involved.
- **Anticipated Outcomes and Broader Impacts:** How the project contributes to workforce development, partnerships, and/or public engagement with science.
- **Optional:** References may be included on a separate page if desired.



Titles and abstracts of accepted projects will be posted on the RI-NEST website. Students will apply to the program, ranking their desired projects. Students will be evaluated, selected and placed on projects by the SURF Selection Committee, made up of RI-NEST staff and partners, with consultation with project mentors.

Deadline for Project Submission: Friday, November 21, 2025

Student application window: Friday, December 5, 2025 – Friday, February 6, 2026

Student award notification: by the end of March 2026.

RI NSF website: <https://web.uri.edu/rinsfepscor/>

Contact Information: Direct questions and submit proposals to:

- **Jim Lemire**, RI-NEST Undergraduate Research Coordinator
- jlemire@rwu.edu
- 401-254-5718

By investing in undergraduate research, RI-NEST continues to leverage Rhode Island's unique coastal and technological assets to build a sustainable and innovative future. We look forward to receiving your project proposals and to another productive year of statewide collaboration advancing Rhode Island's research capacity.

