Harry R. Hughes
CENTER FOR AGRO-ECOLOGY

COLLEGE OF
AGRICULTURE &
NATURAL RESOURCES

Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology Call for Pre-Proposals

September 2026

The Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology is a 501(c)(3) corporation affiliated with the University of Maryland, College Park, and the University System of Maryland. The mission of the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology is to provide leadership to promote environmentally sound and economically viable agriculture and forestry as Maryland's preferred land use through research, outreach, and collaboration. We deliver science-based, applied, and unbiased information that fosters collaborative solutions. Our work is grounded in the values of equity and environmental justice. More about our Center is available at go.umd.edu/HughesCenter.

Pre-Proposal Overview

The Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology invites research pre-proposals addressing the following topic areas (see below). The Hughes Center anticipates awarding up to $400,000 through a competitive process. Historically, the Hughes Center has awarded three to four proposals per year, averaging $50,000 to $150,000 per project. The Hughes Center does not fund overhead costs. Projects must start on or before June 30, 2027. The duration of a proposal may be one or two years, but longer projects will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Summary: The proposed research should have meaningful short- and long-term impacts on the region. Proposals addressing land use, climate-smart agriculture and adaptation, best management practices, and soil health and aquaculture are welcome. We also welcome proposals that address other areas of agriculture, water quality and the environment in Maryland. The following are examples of topic areas:

Land Use: Maryland's changing landscape, population growth and competing demands for land and natural resources are creating challenges for statewide and local decision-makers, the agricultural and forestry sectors and landowners. As land-use patterns continue to shift, how can Maryland ensure that agriculture and forestry remain economically viable, competitive and environmentally sustainable?

Examples of projects of interest include, but are not limited to, A) the long-term viability of agricultural and forest lands amid changing land-use pressures, including any economic, environmental and community costs and tradeoffs associated with converting agricultural or forest land to other uses; B) identifying competing statewide goals (i.e., agriculture, forestry, land conservation, economic growth, Chesapeake Bay restoration) and policies or programs to manage conflicts among these priorities; and C) protecting and managing water resources as development expands, drought conditions become more frequent or severe, and aquifers face increasing pressure.

Climate-Smart Agriculture and Climate Adaptation: Climate change is presenting new and increasingly complex challenges for Maryland's agricultural sector. The Hughes Center's Maryland Climate-Smart Agriculture: Roadmap to Resilience identifies 13 recommendations for helping Maryland agriculture adapt to changing conditions while supporting productive farms, environmental stewardship and long-term resilience. The full study can be found at go.umd.edu/ClimateSmart.

Examples of projects of interest include, but are not limited to, examining: A) the economic and operational impacts of climate adaptation on farms; B) how climate change, drought, irrigation demands, and saltwater intrusion are affecting Maryland's surface water and groundwater resources; and C) how emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, remote sensing and advanced data tools can improve agricultural and natural resource management.

Best Management Practices and Soil Health: The Hughes Center welcomes proposals that examine the effectiveness, economics, adoption and environmental outcomes of agricultural best management practices and soil health strategies.

Examples of projects of interest include, but are not limited to, examining: A) the return on investment for commonly used BMPs and how implementation costs, farm profitability, climate variability and uncertainty in cost-share funding affect adoption and long-term use; B) how agricultural systems can more efficiently conserve, recover, recycle and use nutrients; and C) how PFAS moves through agricultural soils, crops, livestock, water resources and the broader food system.

Aquaculture: The Hughes Center supports aquaculture research and projects that strengthen industry resilience and its position within the regional food system.

Examples of projects of interest include, but are not limited to, examining: A) how to improve oyster hatchery methods to avoid or reduce seasonal production crashes; B) how the aquaculture industry can better anticipate, forecast and manage changing conditions associated with climate change; and C) what strains, strategies or production approaches produce more resilient shellfish under multiple environmental pressures.

The Submission Process

- Pre-proposal submission is required.
- Pre-proposals must communicate the importance of the research in improving the farms, forests, or waters of Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay.
- No more than one pre-proposal may be submitted per researcher.
- Completed pre-proposals (one-page narrative) must be received by **12 p.m. EST, Tuesday, Oct. 27,** 2026, to hughescenter@umd.edu with the words "Grant Proposal" in the subject line. **No late submissions will be accepted.**
- Final proposals will be invited the week of Nov. 9, 2026. Requests for full proposals are upon invitation only, based on the evaluation of the pre-proposal.
- **Invited full proposals must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 17, 2026,** and submitted to hughescenter@umd.edu with the words "Grant Proposal" in the subject line. **No late submissions will be accepted.**
- Selected projects will be asked to present at a board meeting estimated for the week of January 25, 2027.
- Proposal review and announcement of final project selection will be no later than February 5, 2027.

Who Can Apply: Professionals and academics at Colleges, Universities, nonprofits, and 501(c)(3) organizations with credentials supporting their ability to complete this project. The Center encourages collaborative proposals across disciplines and among organizations, agencies, and institutions. **Researchers with outstanding reports due to the Hughes Center are ineligible.**

Proposals including University of Maryland, College Park Researchers as Non-lead Collaborators: Proposals must clearly identify whether or not funding is being requested for non-lead collaborative research activities to be carried out by University of Maryland, College Park faculty or staff members. Funding for University of Maryland, College Park non-lead collaborative research activities must be budgeted separately from the lead proposer's funding. See recommended budget template, which includes a required breakdown of proposed project costs.

Pre-proposal Format:

- One (1) page maximum should be dedicated to the narrative, including:
  - Title of project
  - Overview of Project
    - Should focus on high-level information with an emphasis on the importance of the project to Maryland or the region
    - Do not include references in the pre-proposal
  - Impact
    - on Maryland's agriculture or forestry industries
    - on environmental or ecosystem indicators, such as nutrient reductions, carbon sequestration, Bay health, etc.
    - (if any) on underserved communities or populations or an aspect of the proposal that addresses equity
  - Outreach: How the project information will be disseminated to stakeholders
  - Note: Please use 1-inch margins and single-spaced 11-point Times New Roman font.

- One (1) page maximum should contain the following:
  - Principal investigator title and contact information
  - Co-PI or project partners, titles, and contact information
  - Anticipated budget request **(The Hughes Center does not support indirect costs.)**

Review Process

Hughes Center Board members, staff, and ad hoc reviewers with expertise in the subject area evaluate pre-proposals and select submissions to invite for the full proposal process. For the full proposal outline, see below. All inquiries regarding the RFP should be directed, in writing, to Hughes Center's staff at hughescenter@umd.edu. **Your pre-proposal and full proposal submissions should be emailed to hughescenter@umd.edu with the words "Grant Proposal" in the subject line.**

Invited full proposals should include the following:

Full proposal Format (only upon invitation)

Note: Please use 1-inch margins and single-spaced 11-point Times New Roman font.

1. Cover Sheet: Maximum of 1 page
   a. Proposal Title
   b. Names and Contact Information of the Principal Investigator and all participants
   c. Date of Submittal
   d. Start and end dates of the project (start date must be on or before June 30, 2026).
   e. Topic area addressed
   f. Budget total

2. Proposal: Maximum of 4 pages
    a. A clear statement of the need for the project
    b. A methods section including experimental or project design and how data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted
    c. Brief description of the role of each participant
    d. Potential limitations in completing the project
    e. An outreach plan including the methods and tools that will be used to share the findings with stakeholders
    f. Timeline of the Project
        i. Provide specific dates when deliverables will be available to the Center
        ii. Include information regarding the outreach efforts to stakeholders, which may extend beyond the grant time period
3. Budget: Include a chart and description of each category in the chart, Maximum of 1 page
    a. The budget should include the following categories:
        i. Salaries
        ii. Fringe benefits
        iii. Subcontractors' salaries/fringe benefits
        iv. Equipment/materials/supplies
        v. Travel
        vi. Outreach expenses
        vii. The total amount of the project and the total amount requested from the Hughes Center

Important Notes: Please use a copy of our budget template, available here. The Hughes Center does not fund overhead costs.

Matching funds are not required. If your organization is providing resources or has conducted significant work that contributes to the proposed project, these are best described in the proposal text. For projects with additional funders, please provide, if possible, further information on the likelihood of being awarded and the amount requested from each potential funder.

4. Qualifications of the Participants: Maximum of 2 pages per person
    a. Brief bio of the project participants with highlights of their skills and expertise that will bring value to this project
    b. Current and Pending Support information on other grant-funded projects that are related to this proposal should include
        i. PI and co-PI names and project title
        ii. Supporting Agency
        iii. Amount of Award
        iv. Beginning and ending dates of the grant award

The following are the evaluation criteria for invited full proposals:

- How well does the proposal meet the mission and goals of the Hughes Center?
- Does the proposal help further the knowledge base in the agricultural, forestry, natural resource, or policy arenas so that something significant and beneficial to working lands and the Chesapeake Bay and its resources can be derived from the work?
- Does the project display scientific merit in theory, methods, and design?
- Has a realistic and achievable public education/awareness/outreach component been included?
- Do the Investigator(s) appear qualified to perform the work as outlined?
- Is the budget feasible for the scope and time frame of the project?
- Is the time frame adequate for the work proposed?
- Is this work original and not duplicated elsewhere?
- Has the proposal identified key collaborators who can assist in achieving project outcomes and goals?
- Rate the project's impact, if any, on underserved communities or populations or its ability to address equity