Courtesy of NPS

2026 | Request for Proposal
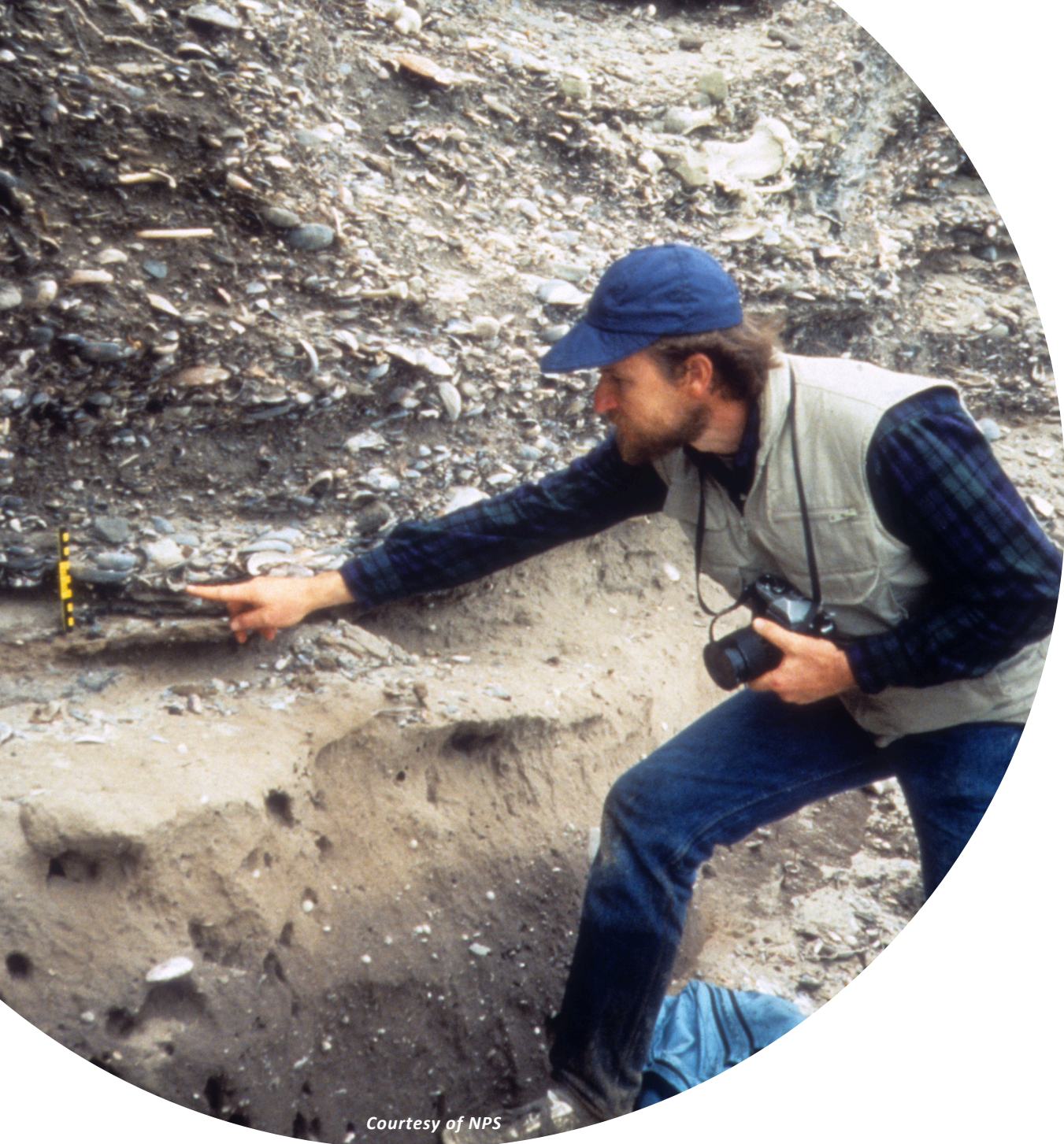
western national parks

Research Grant

September 1, 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Tip: Review the Applicant Toolkit for sample online applications, the evaluation form, and other resources to help you prepare a complete and compelling submission.

EMPOWERING RESEARCH TO CONSERVE AND
SHARE OUR NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.

INTRODUCTION
RESEARCH MATTERS TO OUR NATIONAL PARKS

National parks preserve critical natural and cultural resources. The continued preservation of these public lands relies on rigorous scientific research and the careful management of their unique ecosystems and historical assets. Your work as a researcher is instrumental in ensuring that these parks remain protected and appreciated by future generations.

As an education partner of the National Park Service, Western National Parks (WNP) funds scientific, historical, and social science research in national parks to advance their management, preservation, and interpretation. Research funded by WNP not only enhances our understanding of complex ecosystems and historical contexts but also helps inform practical solutions for park stewardship and visitor engagement.

A key goal of this work is interpretation—translating research findings into meaningful, accurate narratives that foster understanding, engagement, and a sense of stewardship among visitors. We encourage proposals that include plans for developing interpretive products that translate research into accessible formats for the public. This can include workshops, presentations, maps, guidebooks, and educational materials, ensuring that research reaches and resonates with park visitors. Collaboration between grantees, park superintendents, and chief interpreters ensures the research is effectively integrated into park programs.

Supporting research advances both knowledge and public appreciation for our national parks. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the ecosystems and stories they preserve, sparking a greater sense of connection and responsibility among diverse audiences. We look forward to learning more about your research and its contributions to the National Park Service and WNP missions.

Thank you for your continued dedication to advancing the understanding and protection of our national parks.

Marie Buck, **President/Chief Executive Officer**
Western National Parks

OVERVIEW

Western National Parks (WNP) provides grants to support research that benefits the management, preservation, and interpretation of National Park Service (NPS) resources. Through this program, WNP enhances NPS research efforts by bringing additional support to vital projects within partner parks.

At the heart of WNP is a commitment to advancing research and interpretation that deepens the understanding and appreciation of national parks. This grant program supports projects that contribute to conservation and stewardship of these treasured natural and cultural resources while making their stories more accessible and meaningful to all visitors. By encouraging authentic interpretation, WNP seeks to foster meaningful connections between a broad range of communities and the national parks, working to ensure these public spaces become increasingly accessible, engaging, and relevant to all.

GRANT PROCESS

- Proposals are typically generated in one of two ways:
  - NPS official determines a need for research and finds a primary principal investigator (PI).
  - Researcher contacts the park with an idea for research.
- Applications must be completed electronically through the WNP website from September 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025. See Submission Instructions on page 5 for details.
- WNP Research Committee evaluates submitted proposals and makes decisions regarding funding awards.
- Parks and the primary PI will be notified by email of funding decisions the week of February 16, 2026.
- Those approved for funding will receive an electronic copy of the 2026 WNP Research Grant Awardee Handbook as the final step in the funding process.
  - This handbook includes the grant agreement, which must be electronically signed by the benefiting/host park superintendent, chief of interpretation, and the primary PI.
  - The benefiting/host park is the Grantee, and the funder, Western National Parks Association, is the Grantor.
  - The terms and conditions outlined in the handbook cannot be modified. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the draft version prior to applying to ensure their proposed project aligns with WNP's funding disbursement schedule and other requirements. A draft copy can be viewed here: **2026 Research Grant Awardee Handbook SAMPLE**.
  - All approved grants will follow WNP's funding disbursement structure, with payments issued directly to the benefiting park unit. If the primary PI is employed by an external organization (e.g., university, research institution, or nonprofit), that organization may also be designated as a payee. Each award will include a payment stipulation identifying the approved payee(s) at the sole discretion of WNP. If the benefiting/host park cannot accept grant checks directly, the park may be asked to identify a regional NPS office that can receive payment disbursements on its behalf.

FUNDING CRITERIA

WHERE WE FUND

Grant projects must originate in a WNP-partner park in Arizona, California, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming. A listing of partner parks is available in the "Learn More about WNP" section of the Applicant Toolkit (page 6) or online at WNP | Discover Our Parks.

WHAT WE FUND

WNP supports a wide range of scholarly research across various disciplines, including but not limited to anthropology, archaeology, botany, citizen science, ecology, geology, history, natural history, social science, and zoology. Applications proposing research that contributes to the understanding and preservation of natural and cultural resources within WNP parks are particularly encouraged.

WHO MAY APPLY

- The park superintendent and/or their key staff identifies the need for research and seeks a qualified primary PI or institution/organization before submitting an application. Qualified researchers may contact the superintendent directly regarding unsolicited research proposals.
  - All applications must be approved and submitted by the park superintendent.
- Consideration will also be given to proposals submitted by active NPS employees.
- Graduate students may not serve as a primary PI but may be listed as a co-PI if the primary PI is the academic supervisor.
- A single park may submit no more than two proposals every year.
- Superintendents submitting more than one proposal in a year must rank each proposal in terms of its priority for park needs.

HOW MUCH WE FUND

The funding limit for research grants is $20,000 for one-year projects; $40,000 for two-year projects; and $60,000 for three-year projects. For information regarding multiyear funding, see the section titled Multiyear Projects on page 5.

GRANT GUIDELINES

RESEARCH PROJECT START DATE

Applications must reflect a project start date no earlier than March 23, 2026, and no later than September 30, 2026.

BUDGET

Qualified Expenses

- Travel, equipment, and supplies required for research (must be itemized and justified).
- Stipends may be allowable expenses when they directly support graduate students, interns, or trainees involved in the project. The type and purpose of each stipend must be clearly defined and justified in the project budget. Only reasonable living expenses, travel, and other direct costs related to project participation are permitted. Stipends are not considered salaries or wages and should not include fringe benefits.

- Research technician positions specific to the project and hired through conservation groups such as AmeriCorps, Conservation Legacy, Student Conservation Association (SCA), or similar organizations may be eligible for funding, as long as a clear explanation of their role and justification for the expense are provided.
- Consulting fees for PIs or other experts from private organizations may be allowable if clearly defined and justified within the project budget, including a detailed scope of work and deliverables. Examples of allowable consulting services include technical expertise, data analysis, regulatory compliance support, project coordination, community engagement, and report preparation directly related to the research project.
- Equipment purchases over $100 require an itemized list on the budget form.

Non-Qualified Expenses

WNP will not provide funds for the following expenses and **will deny funding** if they are included in the project budget:

- Salaries, wages or fringe benefits of any kind, regardless of employer. This includes:
  - Permanent employees—including NPS staff.
  - PIs affiliated with academic institutions, tribal nations, nonprofit organizations, private-sector companies, or any other entity.
  - Additional compensation for permanent employees—such as:
    - Pay for time spent on the project.
    - Offsets or supplements to replace part of their regular salary.
  - Faculty salary augmentation at institutions of higher education, including:
    - Salary supplements during periods covered by regular institutional appointments.
    - Reimbursement for consulting by faculty who already receive a full-time institutional salary during the same period as the proposed research. WNP considers research to be a normal and expected function of faculty appointments.
- Publication costs (e.g., page charges, journal fees, etc.).
- Administrative or overhead costs charged by affiliated organizations or institutions.
- Tuition payments or other educational fees, including enrollment costs for courses, degree programs, continuing education, and fees for certifications or licenses.

Note: Purchased equipment and any supporting documentation from WNP-funded research (e.g., oral history tapes, photographs, collections, specimens) become the property of the NPS unless other arrangements are approved in writing by the park superintendent. The primary PI and park superintendent are responsible for complying with current NPS policies and procedures regarding the disposition of materials.

Important: Applicants must ensure that all budgeted expenses are qualified according to the guidelines. Inclusion of non-qualified expenses will result in automatic rejection. For clarification, contact the Program Administrator listed on page 5 before submitting an application.

MULTIYEAR PROJECTS

WNP will consider proposals requesting funding for up to three years, based on the following conditions:

- The initial application specifies the proper project duration and projected completion date.
- Project objectives, methods, and participants for each year are clearly outlined, with an explicitly detailed and justified budget.
- A park may have only one ongoing multiyear project underway at any given time.
- Funding limits are $40,000 for two-year projects and $60,000 for three-year projects.
- Budgets for multiyear projects must be comprehensive and reflect the full duration of the project. Applicants should ensure all anticipated expenses over the multiyear period are included. Incomplete or partial budgets may result in disqualification or a request for resubmission.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

ONLINE GRANT APPLICATION

All applications must be approved and submitted by the benefiting/host park superintendent via the WNP website. To access the online applications or download the RFP and sample application forms, visit **WNP | Apply for a Research Grant.**

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

To be considered for fiscal year 2026 funding, applications must be submitted through the WNP website between September 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

After reading all the provided materials, should you have questions or need assistance, contact Julie Tainter, senior business support manager, at julie.tainter@wnp.org or 520-789-7400.

PROPERLY PREPARE YOUR SUBMISSION

Review the Applicant Toolkit on the next page, which includes the evaluation form and sample electronic applications, to help prepare a complete and compelling submission.

WNP | APPLY FOR A RESEARCH GRANT

western national parks

12880 N. Vistoso Village Drive, Tucson, Arizona 85755
To learn more, visit wnp.org.

APPLICANT TOOLKIT

General Tips for Completing Your Proposal

- **Interpretation Focus**: WNP prioritizes the effective interpretation of research findings. Proposals that include a plan for accessible, inclusive, and engaging interpretation-related products—which impact visitor experiences directly—are looked upon favorably. Consider including products that authentically represent diverse perspectives or reflect civic engagement within the parks.
- **Distinctive Factors:** Emphasize what makes your proposal stand out, such as citizen science initiatives, public involvement, innovative tools (e.g., interactive brochures or visitor center videos), bilingual materials, research on understudied topics, media outreach, or critical research opportunities.
- **Funding Relationships:** If you are requesting seed money to justify proposing a larger project or augmenting an existing project funded by another source, clearly explain the relationship and how the WNP grant will contribute to the overall project.
- **Matching Contributions:** Proposals with matching cash or in-kind contributions will be given priority. Be sure to clearly note any such contributions in your budget.

Resource Materials

The following documents can help you craft your proposal.

- **Learn More about WNP:** Review an overview of WNP and our partner parks.
- **Past Funded Research Projects:** Explore a searchable database of WNP-funded research final reports.
- **Research Proposal Evaluation Form (Sample):** See an example of the review approach the WNP Research Committee uses.
- **Sharing Your Research with WNP:** Learn how to support WNP's mission and goals while promoting your research.
- **Submitting a Compelling Research Project:** Review examples of compelling research projects supported by WNP's research grant program.
- **Tell Your Research Story:** Get tips for effectively sharing your research project.

Samples of Online Application Forms

Use these samples to help you prepare and complete your online application:

- **1-Year Project**
- **Multiyear Project**
- **Pointers for Using the Online Application**

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