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**western
national
parks**

Research Grant

September 10, 2026

2027 | Request for Proposal

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



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 funds scientific, historical, and social science research in national parks to advance their management, preservation, and interpretation. Research funded by Western National Parks not only enhances 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. Applicants are encouraged to 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 researchers, park superintendents, and park resource and interpretive management staff ensures the research is effectively integrated into park programs.

Supporting research advances both knowledge and public appreciation for national parks. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the ecosystems and stories they preserve, sparking a greater sense of connection and stewardship among diverse audiences. The Research Committee looks forward to learning more about your research and its contributions to the missions of the National Park Service and Western National Parks.

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

Marie Buck
President | Chief Executive Officer

John Koprowski
Board of Directors | Research Committee Chair

GENERAL INFORMATION

OVERVIEW

Western National Parks Association, known as 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.

APPLICATION PREPARATION

Applicants are strongly encouraged to review the Applicant Toolkit on page 7, which includes general application tips, a variety of resources to support proposal development, and the Sample Application. Several changes have been made to the application for the fiscal year 2027 grant cycle, including updates to project information, budget structure, and requirements for multiyear projects. Reviewing the Sample Application in advance will help applicants understand the information and documentation required before beginning the online application.

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 10, 2026, through December 11, 2026. See Submission Instructions on page 6 for details.
- WNP Research Committee evaluates and scores submitted proposals to make decisions regarding funding awards. A sample of the scoring criteria is available in the Applicant Toolkit on page 7.
- Parks and the primary PI will be notified by email of funding decisions the week of February 15, 2027.
- Those approved for funding will receive an electronic copy of the 2027 WNP Research Grant Awardee Handbook as the final step in the funding process. A sample draft copy of the awardee handbook can be viewed [here](#).
 - This handbook is an agreement between WNP (the Grantor) and the benefiting/host park (the Grantee), which must be electronically signed by the benefiting/host park superintendent, resource management representative, and the primary PI. It is not a sponsored-research agreement, subaward, or contract with the primary PI's affiliated institution.
 - The resource management representative refers to the individual listed on the application as the Benefiting/Host Park Head of Resource Management or, if no dedicated position exists, the staff member identified as responsible for overseeing research activities at the park.

- 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 fund disbursement schedule and other requirements.
- All approved grants will follow WNP's fund disbursement structure, with payments issued directly to the benefiting park unit. In some cases, a third-party organization employing the primary PI may also be designated as a payee. Each award will include a payment stipulation identifying the approved payee(s).
 - If the benefiting/host park cannot accept grant checks directly, the park must identify a regional NPS office that can receive fund 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. Visit [WNP | Discover Our Parks](#) for a listing of eligible parks. Note: Sabino Canyon National Recreation Area and Palisades Visitor Center, both in Arizona, **are not** currently eligible for WNP Research Grant funding.

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 contribute 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 or acting park superintendent.
 - The application must identify the Benefiting/Host Park Superintendent. If an acting superintendent is serving while a permanent superintendent is on leave or detail, the permanent superintendent should be identified in the application. If no permanent superintendent is in place, the acting superintendent should be identified.
 - If multiple WNP-partner parks will be involved in the project, applicants must identify each participating park and upload a signed approval letter from the superintendent of each additional park. Each letter must be on park letterhead and identify the project title and confirm the park's participation in and approval of the proposed research project.
- Consideration will also be given to proposals submitted by active NPS employees.
- Graduate students may not serve as project PIs but may be listed as an additional PI if the primary PI is the academic supervisor.
- A single park may submit no more than two proposals every year.
- Parks 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 April 1, 2027, and no later than September 30, 2027.

BUDGET: QUALIFIED & NON-QUALIFIED EXPENSES

The application budget is organized into two main sections: Personnel and Honoraria, and Other Expenses. Applicants should review the category descriptions below before completing the online form.

Qualified Expenses

- Travel, equipment, and supplies required by a PI to conduct their research must be included on the budget form and explained in detail.
- Stipend Personnel: Stipends may be allowable expenses when they directly support individuals participating in the project, such as graduate students, interns, or trainees. The duties to be performed, deliverables, purpose of the stipend, and amount requested for each individual must be clearly defined and justified in the project budget.
- Honoraria may be allowable for individuals, tribes, or organizations such as tribal elders, knowledge holders, or cultural consultants providing expertise, participation, or knowledge-sharing in connection with the project. The recipient, role, purpose, and amount of each honorarium must be clearly identified. If an honorarium includes an amount for travel, the amount allocated to travel and what it covers must be identified.
- 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 a PI, Supporting Personnel member, or other outside expert 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 \$500 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 all 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, or 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, and 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 becomes the property of the NPS upon project completion unless other arrangements are made and approved in writing by the park. Any supporting documentation resulting from WNP-funded research (e.g., oral history tapes, photographs, collections, and specimens) becomes the property of the NPS. 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 expenses listed in the budget 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 6 before submitting an application.

MULTIYEAR PROJECTS

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

- The initial application specifies the proper project duration and projected completion date.
- 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.
- Applicants must complete a full project budget for the entire multiyear project and then allocate the Funds Requested from WNP by category by project year.
- Each year's proposed activities, expenses, and funding allocation must be clearly justified and consistent with the project's overall objectives and timeline.

COMPLETING THE BUDGET

This section outlines how the online budget form is structured and what documentation is required for each category.

- **Personnel:** Budgets are divided into Principal Investigator(s) (up to 5), Supporting Personnel (up to 5), Stipend Personnel (up to 4), and Honoraria (up to 4). Travel expenses should not be included in personnel costs unless specifically noted in the application. Consulting fees for a PI or Supporting Personnel member being compensated for a defined scope of work should be included within the applicable personnel category rather than under Other Expenses.
 - **Stipend Personnel:** List each individual (up to 4) receiving a WNP-funded stipend and provide the individual's duties, deliverables, purpose, and total amount requested. If the stipend includes travel, identify the amount allocated to travel in the individual stipend breakdown.

- **Honoraria:** Identify each individual (up to 4), tribe, or organization receiving an honorarium and provide the recipient's role, purpose of the honorarium, and total amount requested. If an honorarium includes an amount for travel, the amount allocated to travel and what it covers must be identified in the individual honorarium breakdown.
- **Other Expenses:** Applicants must provide the required detail and justification for each applicable Other Expense category. Specific documentation or itemization requirements vary by category and are identified in the application.
 - **Supplies and Materials:** Itemization is required if the amount requested exceeds \$3,500; itemized costs should sum to the total requested from WNP.
 - **Subcontracts/Facilities:** Identify the subcontractors or facilities performing work under the project, describe the services provided, identify the cost per subcontractor/facility, and explain why the work is being subcontracted.
 - **Equipment:** Purchases over \$500 must be itemized, including the purpose of each item, how it supports the project, and who retains ownership of the item after project completion.
 - **Travel and Subsistence:** Provide a breakdown of budgeted costs by traveler (up to 4), destination, purpose, duration, and expense type. Travel expenses for Principal Investigators, Supporting Personnel, and other individuals involved in the project should be included in this category unless the travel is included as part of an honorarium or stipend. If the Travel and Subsistence budget exceeds 25% of the project's total budget, applicants **must** provide a strong justification for why alternative approaches (e.g., fewer trips, virtual coordination, shared travel) were not feasible.
 - **Other:** Applicants must explain any expenses listed under the "Other" category, including the purpose of each expense and why it does not fit into the standard budget categories. Expenses already reported in the Personnel and Honoraria section should not be included under Other Expenses.
- **Cash and In-Kind Contributions:** Clearly identify contributions for each applicable category rather than listing them as a single lump sum. Proposals with cash and in-kind contributions are given priority consideration.
- **Multiyear Projects:** Applicants must complete the full project budget for the entire project duration, including all funds requested from WNP and applicable cash/in-kind contributions for the entire project. The Funds Requested from WNP must then be broken down by budget category and project year in the Multiyear Budget Allocation.

SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

ONLINE GRANT APPLICATION

All applications must be approved and submitted by the benefiting/host park superintendent or acting park superintendent via the WNP website. To access the online application or download the RFP and a sample application form for reference, visit: [WNP | Research Grants](#) or access the application directly: [WNP | Apply Now](#)

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION

To be considered for fiscal year 2027 funding, all applications must be submitted through the WNP website between September 10, 2026, and end of day December 11, 2026.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

After reviewing all the provided materials, should you have questions or need assistance, contact Julie Tainter, WNP Senior Business Services Manager, at 520-789-7400 or julie.tainter@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.

Cash/In-Kind Contributions: Proposals with cash or in-kind contributions will be given priority. Be sure to clearly note any such contributions in your budget.

RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR CRAFTING YOUR PROPOSAL

- [Learn More about WNP](#): Visit the WNP website to explore WNP and partner parks.
- [Past Funded Research Projects](#): Explore a searchable database of WNP-funded research final reports.
- [Research Proposal Evaluation Form](#): 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.
- [Submit 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.

SAMPLE APPLICATION FORM

Download and use this sample [application form](#) to help you prepare and complete your online application.

NAVIGATING THE ONLINE APPLICATION

These [tips](#) will help you navigate and successfully complete the online application.

[Apply for a WNP Research Grant](#)