

Schmidt Environmental Solutions Program

Research Mentorship Award - Winter 2026

The Schmidt Family Foundation is again generously funding **Research Mentorship Awards** for UCSB students conducting research in the sciences with environmental applications. The goal of the Research Mentorship Awards is to support the research and development of **graduate and undergraduate students** in these fields through pairing an undergraduate mentee with a graduate student mentor. These awards aim to advance science that has direct applications for environmental problem solving, defined broadly and may include the natural sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, engineering, policy, medicine or related field that provides near-term solutions for a pressing environmental challenge.

Applications for Research Mentorship Awards will be judged on the following five criteria:

1. Graduate student's potential for excellence in their identified field
2. Evidence for excellence of and potential benefit to the selected undergraduate from the fellowship
3. The proposed project has direct applications to producing solutions to an environmental problem of immediate concern
4. Thoughtfully-designed communication plan to facilitate transfer of research findings to the public or environmental decision makers
5. Contribution to diversity of underrepresented communities in the relevant science field(s)

Stipends of \$4500 per applicant (grad and undergrad) will be paid during the winter 2026 quarter. Stipends are flexible and can be used, for example, to support field costs, or directly support both graduate and undergraduate students through GSR, work-study, or hourly wages to enable them to focus their time on research. Previous Schmidt fellows are eligible to apply but must be applying for an *entirely new research question*. This award is expected to fund work conducted primarily between January 6, 2026 and August 30, 2026 (however funds will not likely be received until February 2026). Please note that another call will be released in the spring that will cover an overlapping period, but including work at least between June 15 2026, and Dec 30 2026.

Eligibility:

Graduate and undergraduate student applicants must be UCSB-affiliated and enrolled in good standing. Previous Schmidt fellowship recipients are eligible to apply but must be applying for a new research question. The program is open to students from all departments and seeks to fund students from a wide range of departments. The funding must be used before August 30, 2026. Undergraduates must not have graduated before the research effort is completed.

Applying without a partner: While applications submitted as a graduate-undergraduate student team are preferred, we also encourage applications from undergraduate and graduate students submitted individually. In this case, graduate students should submit items 1-5 from the list of Application Requirements (below) while undergraduates submit items 5-7 from the list. Students provisionally accepted without a partner will then go through a matching process facilitated by the Fellows Program before the award is finalized.

Requirements of Award Receipt: Please take note of NEW requirements this year (in italics)

1. (Prior to receiving funding) Provide a picture of the award recipient and a summary of the project written for a lay audience
2. Graduate and undergraduate students supported on the project are both expected to engage on the project for a minimum of 8 weeks throughout the academic year
3. Attend a one-day in-person Environmental Science Communications Workshop (hosted in April 2026)
4. Submit a summary of the research progress and accomplishments, including progress on executing the communications plan, by August 30, 2026
5. *Participate in a peer mentoring pod with other Schmidt Award Fellows and postdocs (approx. six short meetings over the course of a year per year)*
6. *Attend at least two short (1-2 hour) all-hands Schmidt meetings or other Schmidt networking opportunities throughout the year with other Schmidt Award Fellows*

Application Requirements:

The following will be submitted via the Google Form linked at the end of this document:

1. **Project Overview** to include:
 - a. **Project title** (please use a title that is accessible to a lay audience and captures the *solutions* aspect of your proposed work)

- b. **Brief abstract** for the project that includes a *solutions statement* explicitly stating how the funded work will translate to near-term action for conservation of the natural world (150 words max)
 - c. **Detailed project description** describing the research, its scientific merit, how the undergraduate student will participate and partner in it, and duration of undergraduate participation (1000 words max)
 - d. **A communications plan** describing how the student will communicate their research findings to the public (200 words max)
 - e. **Previous Schmidt Fellows should include an explicit statement as to how this work differs from previously funded work**
 - f. **References**
2. **Graduate student applicant's CV** (two pages maximum), including progress toward their degree and any prior mentoring experience. Clearly indicate on this CV 1) the department and the degree program (MA, MS, PhD) you are in, 2) the name of your major advisor and 3) the year you are in the program.
3. **A brief budget and budget justification** (one page maximum for both items combined). The budget should clearly describe how this funding is distinct from and complementary to any other current or pending funding *including* any funding that may be available to the applicant from related projects (e.g., funding the advisor has for related work, or funding for a related project that overlaps in time or space with this project)
 - a. It is expected that the budget will be split approximately equally between undergraduate and graduate student partnerships. Any deviation from such a split must be justified (e.g., if housing is paid for undergraduate then this split may vary).
4. **Letter of recommendation from the graduate student's supervising professor** explaining both the value and need of this award in the context of the graduate student's thesis or dissertation. These letters are also due by **January 6, 2026**. The letter will be sent separately to schmidt.fellows@gmail.com. Please put MENTORS REF – [GRAD LAST NAME] in the subject line of the email.
5. We are strongly committed to fostering opportunities for students that enhance diversity in Environmental Sciences. Each graduate and undergraduate student applicant should include a **statement describing any of your contributions to diversity, equity, or inclusion in the sciences**. (500 words max)
6. **Undergraduate student applicant's CV** (one page maximum), including major, GPA, a list of relevant coursework, and any relevant field or lab experience. Strong preference is given to undergraduates that are UCSB-affiliated during the award. However, we will consider non-UCSB affiliated students when the mentored student

will make a strong contribution to fostering diversity in the sciences and is partnered with a UCSB grad student.

7. **A brief (1-2 paragraph) statement from the undergraduate student regarding their professional goals and how this research experience will prepare them to meet these goals.** Students that commit to continuing to work on a project for more than one quarter will be favorably reviewed. *If applying separately (no mentor identified) students should also summarize their academic / research interests.*

Important: Delivery of Application Materials:

Please submit all the above application components to the provided [Google Form](#). Reference letters may be submitted separately via email as noted above.

Applications for this award should be submitted by 11:59 pm PT on January 6, 2026. No late submissions will be accepted.

Please contact schmidt.fellows@gmail.com with questions. Please note that while students may apply for multiple Schmidt Awards, students awarded a Schmidt Research Excellence Award will not be awarded any other UCSB Schmidt Fellowship in the current award cycle.