

Schmidt Environmental Solutions Program

Research Excellence Award - Winter 2026

The Schmidt Family Foundation is again generously funding **Research Excellence Awards** for UCSB graduate students conducting research in the ocean sciences, ecology, or environmental studies. The goal of Research Excellence Awards is to provide funds to advanced graduate scholars to develop creative new aspects of their research, such as launch new experiments, carry out needed field research, and perform additional analyses. Emphasis for awards is placed on *advancing science that has direct application for environmental problem solving leading to near-term solutions for conservation of the natural world.*

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

1. Graduate student's potential for excellence in one of the identified focal areas: ocean sciences, ecology or environmental studies
2. The proposed project has direct applications to producing solutions to an environmental problem of immediate concern
3. Justification of the additional value provided to the student's career
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)

Awards of \$18,000 per student will be paid during the winter 2026 quarter. Previous Schmidt fellows are eligible to apply but must be applying for an *entirely new research question*. Previous Schmidt Research fellows are ineligible to apply for a second Schmidt Research Award. 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 student applicants must be UCSB-affiliated. Previous Schmidt Accelerator or Mentorship fellowship recipients are eligible to apply but must be applying for a new research question. The program is open to students from all departments / degree

objectives and seeks to fund students from a wide range of departments. The funding must be used before August 30, 2026. The funding must be used while the applicant is enrolled at UCSB (you cannot apply for work that will take place after graduation).

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. Attend a one-day in-person Environmental Science Communications Workshop (hosted in April 2026)
3. Submit a summary of the research progress and accomplishments, including progress on executing the communications plan, by September 30, 2026
4. *Participate in a peer mentoring pod with other Schmidt Award Fellows and postdocs (approx. six short meetings over the course of a year)*
5. *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** (150 words max) 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
 - c. **Detailed project proposal** describing the research and its scientific merit (1000 words max)
 - d. **A communications plan** describing how the student will communicate their research findings to the public (200 words max)
 - e. **A description of the applicant's broader research program** including its design and scientific significance, progress to date, and what new data would be collected with the grant including its design and analysis that would not otherwise be gathered (300 words max)
 - f. **Previous Schmidt Fellows should include an explicit statement as to how this work differs from previously funded work** (150 words max)

g. **References**

2. **The applicant's CV** (two pages maximum). 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 also include a list of other current and pending funding and clearly describe how the Schmidt Award 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)
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 applicant's research. These letters are also due by **January 6, 2026**. The letter will be sent separately to schmidt.fellows@gmail.com.

Please put RESEARCH REFERENCE – [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. Please include **a statement describing any of your contributions to diversity, equity, or inclusion in the sciences**. (500 words max)

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.