

Guide to Request for Proposals Master of Environmental Science and Management Program

Master's Group Projects

OBJECTIVES

Through a Master's Group Project, Bren School students help clients solve a pressing environmental problem facing their organization.

Serving as the program's Master's thesis, Group Projects are nine-month collaborations between a client and a team of highly dedicated Master's students.

Throughout the project, clients receive high-quality consulting work that is approximately equivalent to one full-time employee engaged for a year. This work helps students develop skills in project management, teamwork, leadership, financial management, organization and data presentation, and effective stakeholder communication. The projects also serve to expand both parties' professional networks by connecting future and current environmental leaders.

The Bren School encourages creative, interdisciplinary proposals, and has supported a variety of projects, including (but not limited to): cost benefit analyses, life cycle assessments, spatial planning, carbon accounting, fisheries management, pollution remediation, supply chain efficiencies, strategic communication, and assessing community attitudes toward environmental problems.



DESIRABLE PROJECT ATTRIBUTES

A desirable group project proposal demonstrates the following attributes:

Solution-Oriented: Group Projects prepare students to produce meaningful solutions to today's environmental problems. To this end, projects should yield a specific policy or management recommendation, contain multidisciplinary elements, and align with student and faculty interest.

Data-Driven: Projects should also provide an existing dataset for students to analyze; projects that require extensive data collection or fieldwork are not desirable and will not be considered. Surveys or data collection can be a component of a project but should not be the primary focus.

Funding Support: External funding for the project (e.g., for summer internships, travel, or supplies, sampling and analysis) is one of several factors considered in project selection. If the proposal requires substantial resources, the client will need to include a clear commitment of financial support for the proposed project.

Collaborative, Yet Flexible: A spirit of trust and collaboration by all parties is expected; client involvement should support students while allowing them to develop their own ideas and approaches.



PROJECT REQUIREMENTS

Project proposals should meet the following criteria:

- Represent a significant environmental problem that requires the group to produce a solution
- Focus on a clear science and policy or management question
- Provide data for analysis
- Match the interests, expertise and capabilities of students and faculty
- Present a feasible project scope, given student experience and availability (must propose a manageable scope of work for a group of 4-5 master's students spending about 25% of their time during three academic quarters, or 9 months)
- Anticipate financial needs and provide adequate support
- Support and prioritize open and professional communication among all parties; proposals should outline a clear client point of contact
- Must not require completion before March of the second project year.

SUBMITTING A PROPOSAL

Any organization looking to solve an environmental problem is welcome to submit a Master's Group Project proposal. Past clients have included local, state, and federal agencies; corporations; think tanks; non-profits and NGOs.

Proposals are due in January of Winter Quarter each year and will be reviewed during that quarter (January – March) by the Bren School Group Project Committee. The Committee evaluates proposals on the criteria outlined in the Project Requirements. Approximately 18 Group Project proposals are selected each year.

Given that projects must align with student interest to be selected, clients are encouraged to work with current Bren students and faculty on proposal development.

Project proposals are limited to three pages (excluding references, budget and justification, and client letter of support). For a complete description of proposal requirements, please see the full proposal guidelines.

Examples of successful proposals can be found on the Bren School website.

Visit bren.ucsb.edu/projects to explore our project archive.

PROJECT TIMELINE

YEAR 1:

Fall

Client works independently or with students to identify an environmental problem and write a Group Project proposal.

Winter

Proposals due in January. Projects are selected in late March. Students and faculty advisors are assigned, clients are notified by end of March.

Spring

Client meets the team; students refine project objectives, gather data, review literature, and develop a work plan.

Summer

Students often continue project work through internships.

YEAR 2:

Fall

Students work on analysis and produce an outline for their Group Project.

Winter

Students complete an academic defense and their final reports.

Spring

Students present findings to the public, and produce an executive summary and additional deliverables as needed by the client.