

To support consistent and proportional review of research activities, Georgia Aquarium has established a two-tiered system for evaluating research proposals: Level 1 and Level 2. This document outlines the criteria used to determine which types of research fall into each category, helping investigators understand the level of oversight required and prepare appropriate documentation for review.

## LEVEL 1 PROJECTS

### Archived Sample or Data Request

An **Archived Sample Request** is a request for previously collected and stored biological specimens from animals or diet/prey, or newly collected and/or stored environmental samples. An **Archived Data Request** is a request for access to and/or use of animal records, photos, videos, research data, or similar materials for purposes other than the direct care and management of Georgia Aquarium's animal collection.

No entity outside of Georgia Aquarium is authorized to access the institution's animal records database. All requested information must be compiled and provided separately by an authorized representative. Access to the records database by Georgia Aquarium personnel must be approved by the Registrar and must comply with the RMS Data Security Protocol.

Additionally, no external partner may access or use Georgia Aquarium's data without first signing a **Data Sharing Agreement**. This agreement is a required component of the IACUC application process for all external collaborators and ensures that data use and protection methods align with institutional expectations.

### Observational (B Pain Only)

Research involving the collection of data without manipulation or interference with an animal. This includes studies conducted at Georgia Aquarium or in the field, where animals are observed in their natural or managed environments without direct interaction or alteration of conditions.

### Technical Expertise on External Projects

Projects in which Georgia Aquarium staff are invited to provide technical expertise or support to external research initiatives, without assuming a formal research role. These engagements may or may not be funded, do not involve the intent of Georgia Aquarium to produce a research product (e.g., publication, co-authorship, or presentation), and staff participation is limited to short-term or task-specific assistance within their qualifications.

### Animal Handling by GAQ Staff at Other Institutions (C Pain Only)

Research involving any form of physical contact, behavioral manipulation, or environmental interference with animals that takes place at a zoological institution other than Georgia Aquarium. A zoological institution is defined, for this purpose, as a facility that houses animals for exhibition, education, or conservation purposes and has an on-site veterinarian. **Only projects which include methodology that propose momentary to no pain or distress can be considered for a Level 1 application.**

## LEVEL 2 PROJECTS

### Animal Handling at Georgia Aquarium

Research involving any form of physical contact, behavioral manipulation, or environmental interference with animals housed at Georgia Aquarium or its affiliated locations, regardless of who performs the animal handling. Whereby, “animal handling” includes any research activity involving physical contact, behavioral manipulation, or environmental interference with animals. This includes, but is not limited to, capturing, restraining, sampling, tagging, conditioning, or applying stimuli that influence the animal’s behavior, movement, or physiology.

### Animal Handling by GAQ Staff, *In Situ* or Non-Institutional Settings

Field studies are defined by the USDA as “...*any study conducted on free-living wild animals in their natural habitat, which does not involve invasive procedure, and which does not harm or materially alter the behavior of the animals under study.*” [9 CFR §1.1]

At Georgia Aquarium, we apply a broader definition to ensure comprehensive oversight. We define “Animal Handling by GAQ Staff in *In Situ* or Non-Institutional Settings” as any research activity involving physical contact, behavioral manipulation, or environmental interference with animals occurring either in wild populations (*in situ*) or in non-institutional settings.

For the purposes of this policy, “non-institutional settings” are defined as locations that do not have an on-site attending veterinarian. Examples include petting zoos, fish hatcheries or farms, traveling animal exhibits, or other man-made animal housing environments not overseen by a formal institutional veterinary program.

### Animal Handling by GAQ Staff at Other Institutions (D or E Pain Only)

Research involving any form of physical contact, behavioral manipulation, or environmental interference with animals that takes place at a zoological institution other than Georgia Aquarium. A zoological institution is defined, for this purpose, as a facility that houses animals for exhibition, education, or conservation purposes and has an on-site veterinarian.

### Research Involving D or E Pain on GAQ-Owned Animals at Other Institutions

Research conducted at external zoological institutions involving Georgia Aquarium–owned animals that is classified under USDA pain categories D or E. In such cases, institution-specific and/or AZA research proposal forms may be accepted in lieu of a full GAQ application, provided they contain sufficient detail to meet review requirements.

## HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Human subjects research is governed by Title 45, Subtitle A, Subchapter A, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations, which requires oversight by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). At Georgia Aquarium, such research (including activities like staff or guest surveys) is not reviewed by the IACUC. Instead, it falls under the authority of the Research & Conservation Department, in accordance with the Aquarium’s Guidelines for Research Activities. While 45 CFR § 46.104 outlines certain exemptions, all proposed studies involving human subjects must receive IRB approval from the requestor’s home institution before Georgia Aquarium will consider granting site authorization. To initiate review and request a Letter of Support, inquiries should be directed to [GAresearch@georgiaaquarium.org](mailto:GAresearch@georgiaaquarium.org).