

Policies & Procedures Reference #:	Section F
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The first step in conducting any procedure involving animals is to determine whether the activity falls outside the scope of routine handling or standard veterinary care. Under the Animal Welfare Regulations, research is generally defined as invasive procedures conducted on live or dead mammals and birds, including those performed in the field (with certain exceptions).

At Georgia Aquarium, however, we have adopted a broader definition of research to ensure comprehensive oversight and ethical consistency. This expanded definition applies to all taxa and includes the following categories:

Animal Handling at Georgia Aquarium (F.1)

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 Georgia Aquarium Staff, In situ or Non-Institutional Settings (F.2)

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 Georgia Aquarium Staff at Other Institutions (F.3)

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.

Archived Sample or Data Requests (F.4)

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) (F.5)

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 (F.6)

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. Staff listed as Principal Investigators on these projects are not held to full Principal Investigator responsibilities but do retain partial responsibility for ensuring their actions align with the IACUC's Policies & Procedures and Georgia Aquarium's Research Guidelines.

Research Involving D or E Pain on Georgia Aquarium Owned Animals at Other Institutions (F.7)

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 (F.8)

Title 45, Subtitle A, Subchapter A, Part 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations requires the oversight of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) for human subjects research.

All human subject research is under the purview of Georgia Aquarium's Research & Conservation Department, pursuant to Georgia Aquarium's Guidelines for Research Activities.

While 45 CFR § 46.104 does provide some exceptions to the federal regulations, all requests for studies utilizing human subjects (e.g., staff and guest surveys) at Georgia Aquarium require IRB approval from the requestor's institution before the Aquarium will grant site authorization. These types of requests should be directed to GAresearch@georgiaaquarium.org to obtain a Letter of Support.

Activities that May Not Require IACUC Approval (F.9)

Approval from Georgia Aquarium's IACUC is not required for the collection of specimens or data/information for the purpose of managed care and for fulfilling regulatory or accreditation requirements. Questions about what requires IACUC review and approval can be directed to the IACUC. Examples of such activities include, but are not limited to:

- Providing samples to outside laboratories for analysis.
- Sending necropsy reports to Studbook Keepers for the AZA SSP Program.
- Providing examples of animal husbandry or medical records to the USDA, AMMPA, AHS, or AZA.
- Sending animal records between institutions during animal acquisition or disposition.
- Collecting data for continued managed care of an animal (e.g., Zoo Monitor).