

Policies & Procedures Reference #:	Section F.1-F.2
---	------------------------

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.1.1)

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.1.2)

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.1.3)

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 Biological Samples, Non-Biological Samples, or Data Requests (F.1.4)

An **Archived Biological Sample Request** is a request for previously collected and stored biological specimens from animals. A **Non-Biological Sample Request** is a request for non-biological samples, including diet/prey items and environmental samples. A **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 (No Pain Category) (F.1.5)

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. Projects that involve close approach, pursuit, disturbance, or any activity that may constitute animal harassment do not qualify for Level 1 and must be submitted as Level 2 projects.

Technical Expertise, Training, or Observation on External Projects (F.1.6)

Projects in which Georgia Aquarium staff participate in external research activities to provide technical expertise, receive training, or observe and learn research techniques under another institution's approved protocol. These engagements do not represent Georgia Aquarium-led research and do not involve an intent by Georgia Aquarium to produce a research product, such as a publication, co-authorship, or presentation.

Staff participation may include short-term, task-specific assistance, shadowing, or field-based observation conducted under the direction and responsibility of the external project's Principal Investigator and associated oversight body. These activities may be funded or unfunded and are limited to functions that fall within the staff member's professional scope, training objectives, and qualifications.

Georgia Aquarium staff may not serve as the Principal Investigator for these projects. Oversight, scientific responsibility, and regulatory authority remain with the external institution's Principal Investigator and their approving body. However, staff involved in these projects retain partial responsibility for ensuring that their conduct aligns with the Georgia Aquarium IACUC's Policies and Procedures, Georgia Aquarium Research Guidelines, and all applicable institutional safety and animal welfare standards.

Research Involving D or E Pain on Georgia Aquarium Owned Animals at Other Institutions (F.1.7)

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.1.8)

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.2)

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).