

Request for Proposals: UC Merced Earth Institute 2026-27 Climate Fellows

The UC Merced Earth Institute, an emerging union of UC Merced Sierra Nevada Research Institute with the nascent UC Merced Climate Institute, requests applications for **2026-27 Climate Fellows**. Our goal is to support graduate students and postdoctoral researchers advancing science, education, adaptation, and solutions to pressing and socio-ecologically complex climate- and energy-related challenges. **We invite proposals from faculty to support graduate student researchers (GSRs) or postdoctoral researchers conducting innovative research aligned with Priority Areas (see below) in the climate, environment, and energy space** and in support of research relating to the institute and its three affiliated Centers: the Fire Resilience Center, Sustainable Energy Center, and Equitable Climate Solutions Center.

Available funds: Approximately \$150,000 available (\$65,000 dedicated for energy-related research) to support GSR or postdoctoral researcher effort on climate and energy related research. See Funding Details section below for individual award amounts.

Deadline: Submissions are due February 20th, 2026.

Purpose:

Our goals are to foster climate and clean energy research and to build capacity for future funding success by supporting convergence research that leverages UC Merced's unique strengths. Proposals that clearly demonstrate alignment with Institute and Center priorities, community engagement, and potential for long-term impact will receive priority consideration.

Priority Areas:

Proposals should align with one or more of the following research themes. Examples of research within these areas include *but are not limited to* the following (grouped by center and overall institute priorities):

Center for Equitable Climate Solutions: Nature-based climate solutions, Equitable carbon initiatives, Food sovereignty, Climate-health nexus

Fire Resilience Center: Climate and wildfire modeling, Fire resilience and adaptation in human and ecological communities, Fire impacts, Forest management and residual biomass uses

Sustainable Energy Center: Vehicle and robotic electrification, Smart and integrated energy systems, Energy storage, Agrivoltaics, Materials and manufacturing for sustainable energy applications, Energy policy and economics

Institute: Biodiversity, ecosystems, and climate adaptation; Food-energy-water systems, Sustainable water resources; Science communication; Climate-related policy and governance

Principal Investigator Eligibility:

Funding is open to all UC Merced faculty. Faculty may be lead PI on more than one proposal.

Funding Details:

The Center offers funding tiers to support diverse research activities aligned with its key focus areas. The recommended funding levels and corresponding activities are as follows and each proposal may include a request for one of the following personnel support categories:

- **GSR Summer - \$9,000:** Estimated cost for GSR Summer 2026 support **OR**
- **GSR Semester - \$25,000:** Estimated cost of GSR Semester support (Fall 2026 or Spring 27) including fee remission) **OR**
- **Postdoc - \$25,000: approximately** 3 months at 100% postdoctoral researcher support (can be spread out at 50% over 6 months or other flexible arrangement as needed)

Proposals may also request up to an additional \$5,000 supply budget.

We anticipate awarding a minimum of 5 GSR awards or equivalent-value postdoctoral research support or combination thereof.

Funding will be available support starting in May 2026 and will expire on August 2027. ***Climate Fellows will be required to present their research to at least one Institute symposium or other approved events before December 31, 2027.***

Application Process:

Proposals must be submitted to climate@ucmerced.edu as one PDF document that includes the following information:

- Faculty Lead PI Name and Department
- Personnel support category requested (GSR summer, GSR Semester, OR 3-month postdoc) and name of personnel, if known
- Supply budget requested (up to \$5000), if applicable
- Project description (maximum 2 pages) detailing:
 - objectives,
 - methodology,
 - Alignment with Priority Areas (identify a minimum of one and up to three areas)
 - Expected outcomes, translational research potential, and future funding targets.
 - Brief statement on how the project addresses local or regional needs (community and/or industry).
 - Brief statement describing Faculty PI record of successful mentorship of the participating GSR or postdoctoral researcher
 - Supply Budget justification, if supplies are requested.

Evaluation criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Approach and methodology are sound, innovative
- Aligns with Priority Areas, catalyzes new or augments existing research in these areas
- For applied research projects only, produces actionable outcomes and public impact, engaging stakeholders to align research with community and/or industry needs; addresses climate justice and equity, particularly in San Joaquin Valley or other disadvantaged communities
- Increases capacity of investigators to secure external grant research funding; identifying external funding opportunities for projects in priority areas; strong potential to lead to the writing of a successful larger proposal

Contact Information:

For questions, please contact mstephens3@ucmerced.edu