

RESEARCH COLLABORATION GUIDELINES



How to initiate collaboration requests with the Reef Authority

Purpose of the guidelines and scope of collaboration

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (Reef Authority) welcomes science that aligns with our Science Strategy and addresses our priority knowledge needs. To ensure that science can be integrated into evidence-based policy, programs, and daily operations, we strongly encourage early engagement, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. While we actively seek to collaborate on projects that benefit Reef management, the extent and nature of the Reef Authority's involvement in any research proposal or project remains at our discretion.

The Reef Authority strongly encourages researchers to engage early and respectfully with Traditional Owners, recognising their enduring connection to Sea Country and their unique cultural knowledge. We support and prioritise research approaches that incorporate Indigenous knowledge, Traditional Owners' priorities and consent where appropriate.

Why collaborate with the Reef Authority?

Collaboration with the Reef Authority provides researchers with an opportunity to engage directly with a key end-user of research for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, helping to ensure projects address real management challenges and have a clear pathway to impact.

Through collaboration, researchers can better understand management priorities, refine research questions and outputs to increase their practical relevance, and improve the likelihood that research findings will be translated into policy, planning, operational activities and management actions.

Early engagement with Traditional Owners is a core part of this collaboration, which strengthens research design, methods, and results interpretation. For Traditional Owners, engagement with the Reef Authority ensures cultural knowledge is respected and appropriately reflected in research that supports on-country management and long-term Sea Country stewardship.

What do we mean by collaboration?

The table below shows examples of collaboration activities. The first column indicates the extent of collaboration, with higher collaboration indicating the project is of higher priority to the Reef Authority. Note that not all projects require a collaboration agreement or letter of support.

Step 1: Do you have a research project¹ led by a research organisation² that addresses an identified Reef Authority Knowledge Need³?

Get in touch early to discuss potential collaborations at science@gbrrmpa.gov.au.

	Collaboration level	Reef Authority involvement
Projects that address high priority knowledge needs for the Reef Authority, significant commitment from Reef Authority staff 	Co-design (likely to require researcher to enter into an agreement with the Reef Authority)	- High level of influence in project aims and expected outputs - Identification of translation pathways of research outputs - Involvement throughout all stages of the project - Some advisory capacity e.g. steering committee or part of a project team - Review of milestone outputs and ability to see draft results before published - Review of how results are communicated/ co-promotion of results - Provision of letter of support
	Co-investment (likely to require researcher to enter into an agreement with the Reef Authority)	- Contribution of in-kind resources and/or funding (Varying) levels of influence and involvement throughout all stages of the project - Decision-making capacity in steering the direction of the project - Review of milestone outputs and ability to see draft results before published - Review of how results are communicated/ co-promotion of results
	Advisory	Advisory capacity regarding the strategic direction of the project or around specific project elements
	Technical review	Reef Authority review of draft outputs to ensure accuracy and relevance
	Data and network access (likely to require researcher to enter into an agreement with the Reef Authority)	- Assistance in accessing Reef Authority expertise knowledge, information and/or data - Facilitation of exposure to strategic networks (e.g. advisory committees)
	Letter of support	- Reef Authority writes letter to support project but otherwise minimal involvement - Potential end-user role if relevant
	Research dissemination	- Share completed research outputs internally - Host research finding seminars or briefings
Projects that address lower priority knowledge needs for the Reef Authority and requires only minimal staff time or involvement	Staying informed	Reef Authority receives outputs such as peer-review publications of emerging science

- 1 A diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation with clearly defined objectives, methods and outcomes, supported by a robust and reproducible research design.
- 2 An organisation with demonstrated scientific or technical research capability, including universities, government agencies, non-government organisations, and Traditional Owner groups.
- 3 A knowledge need listed on the Knowledge Needs Dashboard, with a corresponding management use statement that the research aims to address.

Next steps

Step 2: Once you have discussed your proposal with the Reef Authority, you may be invited to complete a Research Collaboration Request Form. This will include outline of the project objectives, how the proposed sampling design will achieve them, the type and amount of collaboration you are seeking with the Reef Authority and expected research outputs. It is important that the Reef Authority has sufficient documentation to support consideration of collaboration on a project.

Step 3: Research Collaboration requests will be assessed based on alignment with Reef Authority strategic priorities, feasibility of implementation, potential for management impact, and availability of internal capacity at the time.

Researchers can expect an initial response within 20 business days of submitting a collaboration request form. Review timelines may vary depending on project scope and internal capacity.

Notes:

Researchers are responsible for initiating any required or appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners for their project. The Reef Authority encourages respectful, early and ongoing communication with relevant groups. In some instances, the Reef Authority may assist with connections.

Research projects in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and Great Barrier Reef Coast Marine Park might require a joint Marine Park permit. It is the responsibility of the researcher to understand and apply for the necessary permissions to undertake their work. Information regarding permit applications can be found on the Reef Authority's **webpage** or by contacting the Reef Authority's Environmental Assessment and Protection section at **assessments@gbrmpa.gov.au**.

A letter of support for the project from the Reef Authority **does not** imply approval or pre-empt a delegate decision with respect to a permit application.

Case studies

The following hypothetical case studies illustrate how researchers can engage with the Reef Authority to achieve research impact for the management of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Case Study 1

A researcher is preparing a funding application to investigate how climate adaptation pathways can be used to compare and prioritise investments that support conservation actions. The funding body requires real-world impacts of the research being proposed.

While developing the proposal, the researcher identifies a strong alignment with the Knowledge Need ‘How can we use climate adaptation models to prioritise investment options for the Great Barrier Reef?’

After reviewing the collaboration guidelines, the researcher contacts the Reef Authority to discuss the project’s relevance to management priorities. Through these initial discussions, Reef Authority staff identify the proposal to be highly relevant and timely.

The researcher submits a collaboration request outlining the project, anticipated management benefits and the support being sought. The request is assessed, including alignment with priority Knowledge Needs, applicability, and expected staff commitment.

The research team strengthens the proposal by engaging early with Traditional Owners whose cultural knowledge and lived experience of climate impacts refine the research focus and highlight place based priorities. Traditional Owner input helps shape adaptation pathways to better reflect cultural as well as ecological values and on Country decision making. The Reef Authority recognises this engagement as significantly enhancing the proposal’s relevance and real world impact.

Given the project’s strong alignment, operational feasibility of translation into actionable outputs, demonstrated Traditional Owner engagement, and availability of staff at the time of request, this is an example of when a request for ongoing engagement may be accepted with a collaboration classification of **Co-design**.

In circumstances like this, the Reef Authority would then take actions such as providing an initial letter of support for the research team to use in their funding application, commencing negotiations for an agreement between the researcher and Reef Authority and committing to providing input into project design and proposal development to help ensure the research addresses management needs. If the project gained funding, Reef Authority staff may remain involved through advisory meetings, milestone reviews, and feedback on draft outputs. As findings emerge, the Reef Authority may work with the research team to translate knowledge into planning processes, decision-support products and management actions.

Case studies

Case Study 2

A researcher is preparing a grant application to improve methods for monitoring coral habitat resilience. The funding body requires real-world impacts of the research being proposed. The researcher identifies alignment with the knowledge need 'Which indicators best monitor coral habitat resilience over time?' They contact the Reef Authority to discuss the project's scope and identify relevance to management priorities.

Following an initial discussion, Reef Authority staff determine that the research aligns with an identified knowledge need and could inform future monitoring and decision-support tools. The request is assessed against the collaboration request assessment criteria. Although the project is relevant, the Reef Authority has no capacity to engage further in the project at that time due to competing operational priorities. As an example, the result of such circumstances, may be a collaboration classification, **Letter of support**.

For this classification, the Reef Authority provides a letter of support acknowledging the relevance of the research to reef management and its potential management application. The intention of a letter of support is to confirm the project's alignment with management needs and signals that the Reef Authority is a potential future end user of the research outputs.

It may be that the researcher would prefer greater involvement in the project from the Reef Authority but remain satisfied with the outcome, as a letter of support could strengthen their funding application by demonstrating end user engagement and a potential pathway to impact.

Case Study 3

A researcher is exploring the role of biochemical pathways in communication among coral reef shrimp. They are excited about their project and contact the Reef Authority to gauge interest. In initial discussions with the Reef Authority, it is noted that while the research may contribute to scientific knowledge generally, it does not align closely

with any of the Reef Authority's current priority knowledge needs and may receive a collaboration classification of **No collaboration**. Acknowledging this, the researcher notes their intention to make their research findings widely available by publishing in the scientific literature.