

FAQs

GENERAL

What is the Sea Grant Legal Network?

The Sea Grant Legal Network is a forum for Sea Grant programs with attorneys on staff or with institutional partners addressing law and/or policy issues to meet and discuss issues of common importance. It also provides a means for those programs to have representation with other organizations in the wider Sea Grant network and beyond. Further, it is a mechanism for raising awareness of Sea Grant's law and policy work and supporting cooperative efforts among programs.

I thought Sea Grant is a non-advocacy organization, so why does it have lawyers?

Lawyers are trained to perform a range of services, not limited to client advocacy. Some legal careers are focused in whole or in part on non-advocacy roles, including academic research and analysis of legal and policy topics. While many lawyers do make appearances before judges or provide counsel in transactional matters on behalf of a client, others become teachers, librarians, researchers, or use their legal skills in executive, managerial, or administrative jobs. Lawyers in Sea Grant programs play a number of roles similar to their non-lawyer colleagues. They may be researchers, extension professionals, or in program management positions. Because of their training, they are often focused on the law or policy aspects of the issues Sea Grant is concerned with as a whole.

What is the difference between the Sea Grant Legal Network and the National Sea Grant Law Center?

The National Sea Grant Law Center is a Sea Grant program providing legal information and analysis to the Sea Grant network, decision-makers, and other stakeholders on a nationwide basis. The Sea Grant Legal Network is a professional association of multiple Sea Grant programs that conduct law and policy work. The National Sea Grant Law Center is one member of the Sea Grant Legal Network.

Is the National Sea Grant Law Center part of the National Sea Grant Office? Is it part of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium?

No. The National Sea Grant Law Center is its own program, like the 33 other Sea Grant programs around the country. It is funded through cooperative agreements issued by the National Sea Grant Office. It is based at the University of Mississippi and is a distinct program from the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and its Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Legal Program, also based at the University of Mississippi.

What is the difference between what the National Sea Grant Law Center does and what other members of the Sea Grant Legal Network do?

In practical terms, the day-to-day work of all members of the Sea Grant Legal Network share many similarities. That is, the individuals in the Sea Grant Legal Network perform research, extension, education, and/or outreach activities related to questions of law and policy relevant to coastal communities or marine affairs. These individuals may be embedded in their Sea Grant program's overall extension program, they may be part of a specialized program focusing on the legal aspects of Sea Grant's scope, or they may work for a partner organization such as a policy center or law school clinic. The specific topics of interest to the members of the Sea Grant Legal Network are wide-ranging and vary from program to program. Those interested in knowing more about a particular program's focus or work should consult the programs' websites or contact the program directly.

As a stand-alone program, the National Sea Grant Law Center is charged with coordinating and enhancing Sea Grant's activities in legal scholarship and outreach related to coastal and ocean law issues on a national level and across the entire Sea Grant network. When it was established in 2002, it followed on to the pioneering work of long-established law and policy programs at multiple state Sea Grant programs. You can learn more about the National Sea Grant Law Center's five major responsibilities [here](#) and explore the remainder of its website to learn more about the program's current and past topical areas of attention.

Is the National Sea Grant Law Center counsel to Sea Grant or NOAA?

No. The National Sea Grant Law Center is not legal counsel to any group or individual. It does not provide legal advice. The National Sea Grant Law Center's work is limited to non-advocacy legal research and the communication of that research for informational purposes to the Sea Grant Network and constituents.

FOR THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING STUDENTS

I have a legal question related to the ocean, coast, or Great Lakes. Can someone in Sea Grant give me an answer?

Maybe. Some Sea Grant programs, including the [National Sea Grant Law Center](#), do have "advisory services" and may be able to provide research and information to the public. Keep in mind, however, such services do not include giving legal advice or representing parties in litigation.

My organization is looking to contract with an attorney for legal analysis on a particular issue. Is this something the Sea Grant Legal Network does?

Individual programs within the network may be able to contract with organizations needing legal research on an issue within Sea Grant's coastal, marine, and Great Lakes scope. You should contact your local Sea Grant program to assess the availability of such assistance, but the following examples provide a sense of some of the partnering options that exist depending on your needs:

- If your organization is looking for legal research related to national issues or seeking a comparative analysis of multi-state issues, please reach out to the National Sea Grant Law Center's director, Stephanie Otts at sshowalt@olemiss.edu.

- The Rhode Island Sea Grant Legal Program (RISGLP), located at the Marine Affairs Institute at Roger Williams University School of Law is available to contract with organizations needing legal or policy research. RISGLP has expertise in healthy coastal ecosystems, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, resilient communities and economies, and admiralty law. Both staff and students are available to work on projects. RISGLP is able to contract with organizations independently, or partner with organizations on larger grant opportunities. For more information contact: marineaffairs@rwu.edu.
- Florida Sea Grant's [Thomas Ruppert](#) has brought legal expertise to the table in work with numerous partners through grant-funded projects and contracts. Mr. Ruppert's key legal focus areas recently include: the intersection of property rights law (U.S. Constitutional and state) with climate change and sea-level rise impacts; law and policy on property buyouts; local government financing of adaptation to sea-level rise impacts; and government legal liabilities for infrastructure impacted by sea-level rise and climate change.

What opportunities are available to law students through the Sea Grant Legal Network?

Several programs in the Sea Grant Legal Network offer opportunities for law students, including research assistantships and internships offering pay or academic credit. Interested students should check out individual program websites, but may find this [list](#) useful.

Many law students have been successful in applying to the [John A. Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship Program](#), which places highly qualified students with an interest in ocean, coastal, or Great Lakes resources in one-year positions with Federal legislative and executive agency offices. Several programs in the Sea Grant Legal Network also have post-graduate fellowship programs that may be of interest to recent JD or LLM graduates.

FOR OTHERS IN THE SEA GRANT NETWORK

When should I contact a Sea Grant legal professional when I'm drafting a project proposal?

If your project involves significant legal or policy issues, or if you are unsure, the answer is the sooner, the better. Members of the Sea Grant Legal Network can help identify issues inherent in your proposal that may need to be addressed before or as part of the work or that may affect the feasibility of your project. They are often available to become collaborators or co-PIs or refer you to other potential partners in the field of law, which can enhance your proposal's credibility and chances of success.

Can I have a Sea Grant legal expert talk to a group about an issue? How do I do that?

Yes! Many in the Sea Grant Legal Network are happy to make presentations to various types of groups and may be able to do so despite great distances using a webinar platform. You can reach out to your nearest Sea Grant Legal Network program or individual, or to anyone whose work is of interest to you. If you are unsure of who would best meet your needs, you can reach out to the chair of the Sea Grant Legal Network to assist you.

What constitutes legal research? Why bother consulting a lawyer for research?

Legal research is a process to answer a question about the law by applying existing information (such as case law and statutes) according to established legal principles (such as precedent and order of authorities). Lawyers are trained in techniques to find law from primary and secondary sources and in understanding how what they find is applicable to the question or situation they are researching. Because the law is perpetually evolving, lawyers must know how to validate whether something is still “good law.” They are also familiar with many terms of art that may not be familiar to non-lawyers or are at least attuned to recognizing terms of art and how to determine their definitions. Ideally, lawyers also possess the skills to effectively communicate their research in a manner appropriate to their target audience, including through formal legal memoranda.

In the U.S., law school graduates are lawyers, but not all decide to seek admission to a bar, which is a predicate for *practicing* law in a particular jurisdiction or court. The practice of law is generally understood to mean rendering legal advice or another legal service to a specific party or representing a party in a legal proceeding. Legal research is involved in the practice of law, but it can also be conducted in non-practice contexts, so it is important to understand the relationship between you and any lawyer you may choose to consult.

Aside from an understanding of researching substantive law, lawyers are also trained in procedural law, which concerns processes such as how a civil suit is filed and resolved, or how an agency issues a new rule or renders an administrative decision. Because of the close association of law and policy, a lawyer may have considerable knowledge of governmental processes, including rulemaking, legislative, and political processes.

Although lawyers are typically exposed to a similar range of legal topics during law school (and are tested on common subjects if they seek bar licensure), they may begin to focus on particular areas of law as early as their second year of law school. Once out of school, lawyers may become extremely narrowly focused in an area of law, and without active engagement in practice or continuing education in other areas, their knowledge in other areas may quickly become out of date. This is why it is important to understand a lawyer’s background and how it is relevant to your research needs. While there is a reasonable range of flexibility for lawyers to work across associated areas of law or to learn new fields, a good lawyer appreciates their own limitations and be able to guide you to the type of professional you need if they are not well-suited to your request. Lawyers with the Sea Grant Legal Network have a broad range of legal expertise, but are especially skilled at legal research related to issues affecting ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources.