

Call for Proposals – Research Aboard the *Western Flyer* in the Gulf of California, Spring 2027



Western Flyer in the Gulf of California, April 2025. Photo credit: Patrick Webster.

Purpose

In spring 2027, the *Western Flyer* will return to the Gulf of California for a multi-week expedition in April and May. This historic vessel—made famous by author John Steinbeck and marine biologist Ed Ricketts during their 1940 Gulf expedition—now operates as a platform for collaborative, community-based science. For this next voyage, we are seeking research projects that are both scientifically rigorous and meaningful to the people and ecosystems of the region.

The Western Flyer Foundation invites scientists and graduate students—especially those based in Mexico—to submit short proposals for applied marine research that takes advantage of the unique opportunity to conduct fieldwork aboard the *Western Flyer*. Proposed projects should address significant questions in the biological, chemical, or physical sciences and make meaningful use of the vessel's oceanographic tools and

capabilities. Selected projects will be carried out in close collaboration with the vessel's crew, education team, and community partners during the expedition.

We are offering ship time, use of onboard scientific equipment, experienced crew, meals onboard, and a \$5,000 USD stipend to support each selected project.

Why Collaborate with the Western Flyer Foundation?

Research time at sea is limited and highly competitive. The *Western Flyer* offers a rare opportunity to conduct applied marine research aboard a historic, fully equipped vessel in the Gulf of California. Our team provides experienced crew support, oceanographic instruments, and an interdisciplinary environment that integrates science, education, and community engagement.

Aboard the *Western Flyer*, all participants work side by side, sharing tasks, supporting one another, and contributing to vessel operations, research, education, and community outreach. Each person helps ensure the success of the voyage while advancing science and sharing it with others.

Opportunity

- **Location:** Gulf of California (Baja California, Mexico). The final itinerary is still being developed, but the expedition will likely travel between La Paz and Punta Refugio, with potential additional stops as opportunities arise. Limited research may also take place during the vessel's transit from Ensenada to La Paz.
- **Duration:** Up to 3 weeks at sea. Shorter legs are possible.
- **Accommodation:** Up to 2 berths aboard the *Western Flyer* (mixed gender; students welcome).
- **Timing:** April and May 2027. Cruise dates will be finalized in spring 2026.
- **Capabilities:** Applicants may request to use the *Western Flyer's* research instruments (table listed below) or bring their own, provided they can be deployed safely and within permit constraints.
- **Permits:** The Western Flyer Foundation will secure the necessary Mexican research permits for activities conducted on the vessel. Proposals that involve complex, high-risk, or difficult-to-obtain permits may not be accepted. Selected researchers must actively participate in the permitting process by providing all required information, documentation, and supporting materials on schedule.

Priority Themes

We welcome diverse proposals as long as the work is:

- Applied research with potential tangible benefits to local communities, such as fishers, coastal resource managers, and Mexican NGOs working with regional ecosystems.

- Scientifically sound and feasible within the vessel's operational limits.
- Able to integrate with our educational programs (participants may have the opportunity to engage with students during the voyage).
- Priority is given to research that is done in collaboration with Mexican local communities, educational/research institutions, government, or nonprofit organizations.

Data & Publications

- Data collected should be made available for public or community benefit within a reasonable timeframe (e.g., 12 months).
- The Western Flyer Foundation will be acknowledged as a partner in all publications and media resulting from the work.

Environmental & Safety Requirements

- All proposed work must comply with applicable Mexican environmental laws and regulations. Applicants should identify which permitting agencies (e.g., CONAPESCA, CONANP, SEMARNAT) would need to be consulted for their project.
- Applicants should have prior experience working at sea.
- Sample collection may be permitted if well justified and conducted in compliance with Mexican regulations.

Eligibility

- Preference for Mexican-based researchers or binational collaborations.
- Graduate students welcome; must have an affiliated institution.

Applicant Responsibilities

While the Western Flyer Foundation provides ship time, crew support, onboard meals, use of scientific instruments, and a \$5,000 USD stipend, applicants are responsible for all other expenses. These include salaries, travel, meals on shore, specialized equipment, consumables, post-cruise data analysis, and any activities conducted off the *Western Flyer*.

Applicants are also responsible for designing and leading their research project, coordinating with the crew to develop daily operational plans, and submitting a post-cruise report summarizing methods, results, and data collected. Applicants must also participate in any required permit reporting or documentation related to their research activities.

Proposal Guidelines

Format: PDF, maximum 5 pages total + one-page PI CV

Language: Proposals may be submitted in English or Spanish; however, proficiency in English is preferred for ease of communication during project coordination and reporting.

Each proposal should include the following elements, presented in order:

1. **Project Information** – Project title; Principal Investigator (PI) name, position, institutional affiliation(s), and contact information; names and affiliations of co-investigators or team members; and 2–3 references who can speak to the PI's qualifications and ability to carry out the proposed work.
2. **Project Summary** – Research question, significance, and relevance to local communities.
3. **Objectives & Methods** – Key activities, study sites, and tools or equipment to be used or brought.
4. **Logistics** – Preferred dates and anticipated duration (up to three weeks); team members and roles. Final cruise dates will be determined in consultation with the Western Flyer Foundation, based on vessel availability, permitting schedules, and operational constraints.
5. **Educational Component** – The Western Flyer Foundation may bring students onboard during your stay. Describe how you or your team could help engage them—for example, by sharing your research process, mentoring participants, or contributing to simple onboard learning activities. Include any prior experience working with students, if relevant.
6. **Permits** – Expected permitting needs and agencies likely to be involved, plus any relevant prior experience with permit applications.
7. **Location** – Proposed study sites and whether any fall within marine protected areas.
8. **Expected Products** – Anticipated research, outreach, or creative outputs.
9. **Data Sharing & Publications** – Data management plan, timeline for public release of results, and how the Western Flyer Foundation will be credited.

Appendix (not counted in page limit): One-page curriculum vitae of the Principal Investigator.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Scientific merit and relevance to local or community benefit
- Feasibility of proposed activities (time, equipment, and permitting)
- Alignment with Western Flyer Foundation programs and goals
- Applicant experience and safety preparedness

Timeline

- **RFP release:** October 24, 2025
- **Proposals due:** Deadline has been extended to January 30.
- **Selections announced:** Late February 2026
- **Permit application submission:** Early April 2026

- **Fieldwork:** During the *Western Flyer's* 2027 Gulf of California expedition (exact timing contingent on partner scheduling and Mexican permit approvals).
- **Permit Reporting:** Summer/Fall 2026
- **Final Data Sharing:** By Spring 2028

Submission: Send PDF (max 5 pages + one-page CV) to sherry@westernflyer.org with subject "Western Flyer GOC 2027 Research Proposal." Following an initial review, the Western Flyer Foundation may follow up with selected applicants to request additional information needed to assess feasibility, finalize cruise plans, and prepare permit applications.

Questions? Contact sherry@westernflyer.org.

Science Instruments

Instrument Type	Example Tools	Purpose
Water Column Profiling	SBE 19, Sea-Bird CTD (Conductivity, Temperature, Depth)	Measure water properties across a vertical depth transect. Measurements included are conductivity, temperature, depth, pH, fluorescence, and dissolved oxygen.
Seafloor Mapping	Simrad EK80 Portable echosounder	Distinguish fish from plankton and ecosystem mapping.
Meteorological Sensing	Campbell Scientific, Heitronics, Vaisala, Apogee and VectorNav sensors for measuring wind speed and direction, relative humidity, air and sea-surface temperature, visibility, and barometric pressure.	Track atmospheric boundary layer conditions
Seawater Analysis	Flow-through system including thermosalinograph (SBE 21 SeaCAT), transmissometer (SBE C-Star), fluorometer (SBE/WETLabs ECO-FL RT G4), and pH meter (Pyroscience AquapHOx-T-PH)	Continuous sea surface measurements.
Remote Operated Vehicle (ROV)	Poseidon Lanai Pro	Visual surveys of habitat and species.
Biological Sampling	Phytoplankton and zooplankton nets (20, 80, and 250 micron), 1 dissecting and 2 compound scopes each with a scope camera, and a Planktoscope.	Collect, process, and image biological samples
Acoustic Measurement	SQ26-H1 Hydrophone + Zoom H1 recorder.	Listen and record underwater soundscapes.



Deploying a CTD in the Gulf of California, April 2025. Photo Credit: Patrick Webster.