



PRESS RELEASE

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UOG launches program to help local talent stay, return home

The University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant recently launched the 2023 National Science Foundation's Navigating Home Early-Career Fellowship Program, taking steps to help stem brain drain and its impact on the island's development.

Alongside climate change, the outflow of local talent has been identified as a contributing factor to population declines in U.S. territories like Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico, according to the 2020 Census.

In response to this pressing challenge in the territories, UOG CIS and Sea Grant, and its partners in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, launched the Navigating Home program, designed to create a pipeline for training and recruiting individuals with advanced degrees in marine, environmental, or sustainability sciences who may have left the island territories for educational or work opportunities. For the UOG, the primary aim is to entice them back to Guam, where they can contribute their expertise to the local workforce.

"We're empowering our future, one homecoming at a time," said Austin Shelton, Director of the UOG Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant. "Our capacity-building program unlocks the potential of our students and reverses the brain drain, bringing them back home to Guam where they will lead the way towards a prosperous future."

Thanks to the National Science Foundation's \$7.5 million funding, the five-year program will provide opportunities to 68 fellows and 68 professionals from Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Of the amount, \$2.17 million goes directly to UOG. Young professionals can apply for early-career fellowships at UOG or in local government agencies. They will receive a \$45,000 annual salary and airfare to come home to Guam.

Morgan Leon Guerrero, a fellow in the National Science Foundation's Inclusion across the Nation of Communities of Learners of Underrepresented Discoverers in Engineering and Science (INCLUDES) program, participated in a pilot Navigating Home program in 2022. Previously, she had to leave Guam to pursue a master's in sustainability solutions at Arizona State University. Through the Navigating Home Early-Career Fellowship, she was able work with the Guam Energy Office on energy transition grants.

"Leaving the island was necessary for my master's program, but it's always in the back of my mind to come back and do something for the island and really give back," Leon Guerrero said.

During a recent launch event, incoming UOG President Anita Borja Enriquez recognized the outflow of talent as many UOG graduates have sought career opportunities beyond Guam. She voiced optimism the Navigating Home program will help attract, retain, and empower more individuals to contribute their talents on the island.

"As we think of students and graduates who call Guam home – who don't want to leave and who are looking for opportunities – I think this is a beautiful model that we can replicate across other sectors – the social sciences, health care, education, and so forth," Enriquez said.

Several government agencies have joined as program partners, including Guam Energy Office, Guam Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Statistics and Plans, Guam Coastal Management Program, Guam Department of Agriculture, and Guam Department of Administration.

The next fellowship period is from August 2023 to July 2024. Applications are now open. Interested individuals can access the application form through this link: <https://rb.gy/fn0wi>.

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Photo captions:

2023-navigatinghome1:

The University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant announces the start of the 2023 National Science Foundation Navigating Home Early Career

Fellowship Program on Wednesday, July 19, at the Robert F. Kennedy Library on campus. From left, Assistant Professor of Secondary Education Cheryl Sanguenza, UOG Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant Director Austin Shelton, Lieutenant Gov. Josh Tenorio, outgoing UOG President Thomas Krise, incoming UOG President Anita Borja-Enriquez, Guam Energy Office Director Rebecca Respicio, and NSF INCLUDES workforce fellow Morgan Leon Guerrero.

2023-navigatinghome2:

Austin Shelton, Director of the UOG Center for Island Sustainability and Sea Grant, speaks at the unveiling of the 2023 National Science Foundation Navigating Home Early Career Fellowship Program on Wednesday, July 19, at the Robert F. Kennedy Library on campus.

2023-navigatinghome3: Incoming UOG President Anita Borja Enriquez, speaks at the unveiling of the 2023 National Science Foundation Navigating Home Early Career Fellowship Program on Wednesday, July 19, at the RFK Library. Enriquez says the program can help encourage local talent to stay or return to their island home.