

UConn-based project gets NSF grant to prepare for severe weather

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A project by the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation won a grant for over \$250,000 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) after the Trump administration disrupted the award process, according to the project's principal investigator. The project, called "Identifying Community Need-Based Adaptation and Resilience Priorities in the U.S. Northeast," is part of the first phase of NSF's Regional Resilience Innovation Incubators (R2I2) grant program. A second phase of the project will be accepting proposals this fiscal year, with anticipated funds for an annual \$3 million for up to five years, according to the grant website. James O'Donnell, the principal investigator of the project, said that for the Connecticut Institute for Resilience and Climate Adaptation (CIRCA) to receive the grant, an NSF program manager had to help align their R2I2 proposal with shifting federal priorities. "There was a review process that was novel by the [new] administration," O'Donnell said, explaining that CIRCA was notified about the review

when the NSF was making the award. "They were looking for proposals that were addressing the impacts of climate change, which they don't believe in, and were trying not to fund those." O'Donnell said that a key goal of the R2I2 grant was to make the scientific work done at the NSF more relevant to regular people without scientific backgrounds. To align CIRCA's proposal for the grant with new priorities of the Trump administration, he said all that was needed was a few last-minute grammar changes. "The NSF program manager said [CIRCA's] proposal had a lot of climate change in the title, and it was really about severe weather impacts," O'Donnell said, adding how the only thing changed was the title. He speculated that due to the small nature of the award, which has a maximum of \$500,000 for the first phase, the Trump administration was probably only scanning the titles. In addition to the small grant sizes in the R2I2 grant, O'Donnell said that storm repercussions could be another reason the Trump administration didn't disrupt the funding further. "The administration doesn't really prioritize climate

change, but they are aware that severe weather has negative impacts generally," O'Donnell said. "So, the climate change part got taken out." The first phase was comprised of 16 smaller awards that went to the planning and prioritization of solutions for regional climate-based challenges. Proposals for the second phase of R2I2 funding will be accepted based on a merit and performance review of the projects in the first phase, according to NSF's website. CIRCA, which combines research and regulatory expertise from UConn and the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, submitted its phase-one R2I2 proposal in Dec. 2024. The main mission of the project is to address climate adaptation needs like reducing flood risk, protecting vulnerable populations from heat related illness and preserving coastal infrastructure, according to the CIRCA website. CIRCA will use a 10-step implementation plan to deliver this mission. O'Donnell said one of these steps that he is least excited for is the selection process to prioritize a specific proposal for the second phase. O'Donnell explained how the amount of feedback CIRCA is getting on which challenges



Sign made to protest climate change. The University of Connecticut got a grant of over \$250,000 from the National Science Foundation.
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should be prioritized makes it hard to reach a consensus on what to focus on in the proposal. He mentioned two possible challenges that CIRCA could end up focusing on: coastal erosion and predicting precipitation increases. "If towns really think it's important to understand how effective a living shoreline technology is in reducing coastal erosion, then we can design experiments in mathematical models and monitoring programs," O'Donnell said.

A successful first phase of an R2I2 grant will also incorporate where workforce development is needed so programs can be created as soon as the second phase starts, according to O'Donnell. The end date for the first phase of the grant is estimated for Aug. 31, 2027, according to NSF's website. As the due date for the second proposal nears, O'Donnell said he's never disappointed when proposals to the NSF don't get funded because of how competitive they are.

Pope Leo XIV calls for the US and Cuba to partake in peaceful dialogue

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Amid escalating U.S. sanctions targeting oil shipments to Cuba, political leaders and Catholic Church officials are voicing reactions, with Pope Leo XIV and Cuban bishops urging dialogue to prevent further suffering for the Cuban people. According to the White House official government page, President Donald Trump signed an "Executive Order declaring a national emergency and establishing a process to impose tariffs on goods from countries that sell or otherwise provide oil to Cuba, protecting U.S. national security and foreign policy from the Cuban regime's malign actions and policies." This declaration followed the early-January ousting of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, a major Cuban ally. Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel said "[t]his new measure demonstrates the fascist,

criminal and genocidal nature of a cabal that has hijacked the interests of the American people for purely personal gain." Pope Leo XIV, according to a Reuters article, stated that he was concerned about tensions between the two countries and called for "sincere and effective" dialogue to prevent suffering for the Cuban people. According to OSVNews, on Jan. 31, the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Cuba stated, in a translated statement originally published on Iglesia Cubana, that the complete elimination of any possibility of oil entering the country raised serious concerns, particularly for the

most vulnerable populations. "The risk of social chaos and violence among the people of the same nation is real," said the bishops. "No Cuban of good will would rejoice at this." The bishops advocated for good communication as that's how people will understand each other, OSVNews further reported. The bishops further stated that in the presence of goodwill, there is a possibility to resolve issues in addition to truth and goodness. The pope stated in his Angelus Address, "I echo the message of the Cuban bishops, inviting all responsible parties to promote a sincere and effective dialogue, in order to avoid violence and every action that could increase the suffering of the dear Cuban people. May the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre assist and protect all of the children of that beloved land!"



Pope Leo XIV giving a sermon to the church. The Pope called for dialogue between the United States and Cuba amid rising tensions.
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Thursday, February 5, 2026

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