

RYAN O'CONNOR, PHD

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SUMMARY

Strategic research leader with 8 years conducting field-based, mixed-methods research across complex multi-touchpoint systems. Expert at applying qualitative and quantitative methods to map user journeys across diverse stakeholder populations, translating insights into data-driven solutions and partnering with cross-functional teams to drive real-world impact. Proven track record delivering actionable research under tight timelines, with research driving solutions adopted by partners at the US Navy, FEMA, California Coastal Commission, local governments, NGOs, private industry, and universities. Skilled at balancing user needs with operational, regulatory, and business requirements to develop and execute agile and effective research programs.

RESEARCH METHODS AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

Research: Mixed-methods design, field studies, contextual inquiry, in-depth interviews, surveys, focus groups, journey mapping, critical user journeys, concept testing, rapid iterative research

Analysis & Tools: R (statistical modeling, data visualization), NVivo, Qualtrics, Power BI, GIS, qualitative coding, thematic analysis, behavioral data synthesis

Leadership: Research program management, research operations, cross-functional collaboration, executive stakeholder communication, team mentorship (20+ researchers), research roadmap development

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Postdoctoral Research Scientist & Program Manager | June 2025 – Present

Stanford University, Doerr School of Sustainability

- Lead field-based journey mapping research on home health decision-making, using interviews, focus groups, and follow-up surveys to document how multiple user types (renters and purchasers) navigate the same processes differently.
- Partner with leaders in business, academia, and civil society to scope research questions, prioritize projects, and deliver insights that shape strategy across multiple concurrent initiatives, developing educational and outreach programs to improve user experience.
- Execute rapid research cycles in partnership with government and community stakeholders, balancing rigor with fast-paced decision-making needs to develop data-driven insights that drive locally relevant impacts.
- Manage end-to-end research operations: screening, recruiting, scheduling, and coordinating field logistics across multiple study sites and multiple methodological approaches.

Doctoral Researcher & Lab Manager | Sept 2021 – June 2025

Stanford University, Social Ecology Lab

- Led field-based research program across California coastal communities, conducting on-the-ground interviews, observations, and contextual inquiry to investigate locally relevant research questions.
- Mapped critical user journeys across multi-touchpoint governance systems, identifying friction points and alignment opportunities where different stakeholder groups interact with the same processes differently.
- Translated research into frameworks for effective community engagement and stakeholder education adopted by National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, California Coastal Commission and local governments, demonstrating ability to influence institutional change across scales.
- Partnered with legal, policy, and technical teams to integrate user perspectives into governance processes, successfully advocating for user-centered solutions to executive leadership.
- Managed \$3M+ research portfolio and built team of 20+ researchers, developing capabilities in field research and cross-functional collaboration.

Research Consultant | Nov 2024 – Aug 2025

Stanford Center for Just Environmental Futures

- Delivered rapid-cycle research (pulse surveys, listening sessions) under compressed timeline to inform strategic development of school-wide initiative, contributing to institutional charter and communications development.
- Synthesized diverse stakeholder input into actionable recommendations and programmatic direction.

Research Program Manager | Sept 2018 – Sept 2021

AECOM Technical Services – Supporting FEMA & Technical Mapping Advisory Council

- Led national-scale field research across a multi-touchpoint system with significant physical elements—mapping how individual homeowners, local regulators, state emergency managers, and tribal nations navigate federal insurance and compliance operations differently and where opportunities existed to enhance and standardize user experience.
- Partnered with policy, engineering, and operations teams to inform solutions balancing regulatory compliance with usability. Designed and launched early-stage products implementing innovative approaches to risk communication, analyzing users' responses, perceptions, and comprehension to iteratively improve future iterations.
- Conducted on-the-ground research including site visits, stakeholder interviews, and contextual observation of user interactions with flood mapping products and insurance governance processes across diverse geographic and demographic contexts.
- Mapped critical user journeys and identified friction points where regulatory requirements created usability barriers for different stakeholder segments, informing improved approaches to regulatory processes.
- Delivered insights under aggressive program timelines, scoping research that prioritized actionable outcomes that improved user experience over methodological perfection.
- Managed \$5M+ portfolio within \$1.1B federal program, supervising team of 4 and coordinating research operations across multiple workstreams.

Policy Research Officer | May 2017 – Sept 2018

United States Navy, Fleet Forces Command

- Conducted field-based survey research with logistics officers aboard 30+ ships at sea, collecting data from users across various stages of deployment and resupply timelines to inform predictive models.
- Designed reporting frameworks analyzing operational patterns, translating insights into policy recommendations that improved resource allocation.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Interdisciplinary Social Science | June 2025

Stanford University, Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment and Resources

B.A., Environmental Sciences | May 2017

University of Virginia

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS | [GOOGLE SCHOLAR LINK](#)

- O'Connor, R.**, De Leo, G., Ardoin, N. (2025). Community scientists provide knowledge and public education and help enforce environmental regulations in social-ecological systems. *Communications Earth & Environment* 6, 91 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43247-025-02066-x>
- O'Connor, R.**, Ardoin, N., De Leo, G. (2025). Effects of anthropogenic noise on marine mammal abundances informed by mixed methods. *npj Ocean Sustainability*, 4(1), 11. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44183-025-00113-w>
- O'Connor, R.**, Bowers, A., Spalding, A., Ardoin, N. (2024). Power and participation: A systematic review of marine protected area engagement through participatory science methods. *Marine Policy*, 163, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2024.106133>
- O'Connor, R.**, McKinley E., Spalding, A. (In Revision, 2025). Towards a strong future for ocean social science. In Revision at *Nature*.