

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Ocean Service (NOS), National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Coastal Hypoxia Research Program (CHRP)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOS-NCCOS-2007-2000702

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.478, Center for Sponsored Coastal Ocean Research - Coastal Ocean Program

Dates: Anticipated Publication Date: 6/1/2006

: The deadline for receipt of proposals at the NCCOS/CSCOR office is 3 p.m., EST, [insert 90 days from publication date.]

Funding Opportunity Description:

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

Hypoxia or depleted concentrations of dissolved oxygen is a common water and habitat quality issue that can severely impact aquatic ecosystems. Although hypoxia can occur naturally, it is often a symptom of degraded water quality resulting from anthropogenic activities (e.g. nutrient pollution). Over the last few decades there have been increases in the frequency, duration, and aerial extent of hypoxic events with hypoxia now recognized as one of the most significant threats to fisheries production and aquatic ecosystems worldwide.

Over half of the U.S. estuaries experience hypoxic conditions, many on a seasonal basis. The NCCOS/CSCOR has a long-term research program investigating the causes, consequences and prediction of the large, seasonal hypoxic zone in the northern Gulf of Mexico (NGOMEX). The purpose of the CSCOR's Coastal Hypoxia Research Program (CHRP) is to provide support for these same issues in other regions of the U.S. experiencing hypoxia.

The ultimate goal of the CHRP is to improve the capability of coastal zone managers to effectively prevent or reduce the ecological and economic impacts of hypoxia. Mitigation of this problem requires a fundamental understanding of the causes and effects of hypoxia, and the availability to managers of forecasting tools to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation strategies. The objectives of the CHRP therefore are to provide research results and modeling tools which will be used by coastal resource managers to assess alternative management strategies for preventing or mitigating the impacts of hypoxia on coastal ecosystems and to make informed decisions regarding this important environmental phenomenon. Determining the causes of hypoxia, developing the capability to predict its occurrence in response to varying levels of anthropogenic stress, and evaluating the subsequent ecological, economic, and social impacts are necessary to assess potential management alternatives.

B. Program Priorities

The numbering of priorities is not intended to indicate preference of one priority over another.

Program Priority: Priorities

Proposals for funding under this announcement will be accepted for hypoxia research in U.S. Great Lakes, estuaries, and coastal ocean regions, exclusive of the "dead zone" in the Gulf of Mexico over the Louisiana continental shelf. The NOS/NCCOS/CSCOR has an ongoing research program, NGOMEX, investigating the causes, consequences and prediction of the large, seasonal hypoxic zone over the Louisiana continental shelf. The purpose of this announcement is to solicit proposals for regions that have, at least in part, anthropogenically-driven hypoxic zones that are of great concern to the coastal management community. Proposals should include a justification for the study region, in terms of its ecological and/or socioeconomic significance, and a clear statement of the management concern and the agencies, institutions or programs that would act on the information developed through this research.

Explicit identification of the end user group(s) (e.g. specific agencies and programs) and expected policy framework under which these results may be utilized, is required. Thus, proposals must include objectives that directly link scientific questions to management needs and are tractable within the time frame and budget proposed. To ensure continued interaction with, and attention to, the critical management issues, the project team must include a management agency that has committed to using the results of this research

Potential research topics to be addressed by proposals submitted to this announcement include:

" Quantifying the effects of specific natural and anthropogenic factors on the spatial and temporal extent of hypoxia development. An integrative, watershed approach is encouraged for these studies, accounting for inputs to the region and the processes occurring within the region. Research should include evaluation of the effects of alternative management actions on the magnitude of hypoxia.

" Quantifying through predictive multidisciplinary ecosystem models the ecological and socioeconomic impacts of hypoxia, including an evaluation of the effects of alternative management strategies on ecosystem function and living resource populations.

" Developing predictive models with broad application to a diversity of coastal systems that evaluate susceptibility to hypoxia formation, including emphasis on how this tool will be used by managers to more effectively focus monitoring, protection, and restoration efforts.

Proposals must clearly articulate how the research results will be provided (e.g. as publications, websites, models, workshops) within the time frame of the proposal and used by coastal managers to improve their ability to make informed decisions and assess alternative management strategies. Proposals must demonstrate the adequacy of data sources for calibration and verification of any models to be developed. Proposals must also demonstrate how the proposed study complements or builds on previous and ongoing work in the region. Proposals for studies whose results can be usefully extended to other regions are strongly encouraged.

Priority Order: 1

C. Program Authority

: 33 U.S.C. 1442 and Pub.L. 105-383 title VI, Nov. 13, 1998, 112 Stat. 3447

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Funding is contingent upon availability of Federal appropriations. NOAA is committed to continual improvement of the grants process and accelerating the award of financial assistance to qualified recipients in accordance with the recommendations of the Business Process Reengineering Team. In order to fulfill these responsibilities, this solicitation announces that award amounts to be determined by the proposals and available funds typically not exceed \$500,000 per project per year with project durations from 2 to 5 years. It is anticipated that 3 to 6 total projects will be funded. Support in out years after FY 2007 is contingent upon the availability of funds.

Applicants are hereby given notice that funds have not yet been appropriated for this program. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if this program fails to receive funding or is cancelled because of other agency priorities. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. If one incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, one would do so solely at one's own risk of these costs not being included under the award.

Publication of this notice does not obligate any agency to any specific award or to obligate any part of the entire amount of funds available. Recipients and subrecipients are subject to all Federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to Federal financial assistance awards.

B. Project/Award Period

Full proposals may cover a project/award period of up to 5 years, but shorter-term project proposals that fully address program priorities are also encouraged. Multi-year awards may be funded incrementally on an annual basis, but, once awarded, those awards will not compete for funding in subsequent years. Each award requires a project description that can be easily divided into annual increments of meaningful work representing solid accomplishments.

The following is a description of multi-year awards for those applicants subsequently recommended for award. Multi-year awards are awards which have an award/project period of more than 12 months of activity. Multi-year awards are partially funded when the awards are approved, and are subsequently funded in increments. One of the purposes of multi-year awards is to reduce the administrative burden on both the applicant and the operating unit. For example, with proper planning, one application can suffice for the entire multi-year award period. Funding for each year's activity is contingent upon the availability of funds from Congress, satisfactory performance, and is at the sole discretion of the agency. Multi-year funding is appropriate for projects to be funded for 2 to 5 years. Once approved, full applications are not required for the continuation out years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Funding instruments available are project grants and cooperative agreements.

(1) Research Project Grants: A research project grant is one in which substantial

programmatic involvement by the Federal government is not anticipated by the recipient during the project period. Applicants for grants must demonstrate an ability to conduct the proposed research with minimal assistance, other than financial support, from the Federal government.

(2) Cooperative Agreements: A cooperative agreement implies that the Federal government will assist recipients in conducting the proposed research. The application

should be presented in a manner that demonstrates the applicant's ability to address the research problem in a collaborative manner with the Federal government. A cooperative agreement is appropriate when substantial Federal government involvement is anticipated. This means that the recipient can expect substantial agency collaboration, participation, or intervention in project performance. Substantial involvement exists when: responsibility for the management, control, direction, or performance of the project is shared by the assisting agency and the recipient; or the assisting agency has the right to intervene (including interruption or modification) in the conduct or performance of project activities.

(3) NOAA will review the applications in accordance with the evaluation criteria. Before issuing awards, NOAA will determine whether a grant or cooperative agreement is the appropriate instrument based upon the need for substantial NOAA involvement in the project.

(4) In an effort to maximize the use of limited resources, applications from non-Federal, non-NOAA Federal and NOAA Federal applicants will be competed against each other.

Research proposals selected for funding from non-Federal researchers will be funded through a project grant or cooperative agreement. Research proposals selected for funding from non-NOAA Federal applicants will be funded through an interagency transfer, provided legal authority exists for the Federal applicant to receive funds from another agency. PLEASE NOTE: Before non-NOAA Federal applicants may be funded, they must demonstrate that they have legal authority to receive funds from another Federal agency in excess of their appropriation. Because this announcement is not proposing to procure goods or services from the applicants, the Economy Act (31 U.S.C. section 1535) is not an appropriate basis. Support may be solely through NCCOS/CSCOR or partnered with other Federal offices and agencies.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, other non-profits, state, local, Indian Tribal Governments, commercial organizations and Federal agencies that possess the statutory authority to receive financial assistance.

NCCOS/CSCOR will not fund any Federal FTE salaries, but will fund travel, equipment, supplies, and contractual personnel costs associated with the proposed work.

(1) Researchers must be employees of an eligible entity listed above; and proposals must be submitted through that entity. Non-Federal researchers should comply with their institutional requirements for proposal submission.

(2) Non-NOAA Federal applicants will be required to submit certifications or documentation showing that they have specific legal authority to receive funds from the Department of Commerce (DOC) for this research.

(3) NCCOS/CSCOR will accept proposals that include foreign researchers as collaborators with a researcher who has met the above stated eligibility requirements.

(4) Non-Federal researchers affiliated with NOAA-University Joint Institutes should comply with joint institutional requirements; they will be funded through grants either to their institutions or to joint institutes.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Competition: Coastal Hypoxia Research Program (CHRP)

There is no cost sharing requirement for this competition.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Each proposal must also include the twelve elements listed under Proposal Submission/Required Elements, (a)-(l) or it will be returned to sender without further consideration.

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential adverse impact on the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of environmental permits must be received by the Program Officer prior to funding. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they have sufficient environmental documentation to allow program staff to determine whether the proposal is categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis, or whether an Environmental Assessment is necessary in conformance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. For those applications needing an Environmental Assessment, affected applicants will be informed after the peer review stage; and will be requested to assist in the preparation of a draft of the assessment (prior to award).

Failure to apply for and/or obtain Federal, state, and local permits, approvals, letters of agreement, or failure to provide environmental analysis where necessary (i.e. NEPA environmental assessment) will also delay the award of funds if a project is otherwise selected for funding.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Applications submitted in response to this announcement are strongly encouraged to be submitted through the Grants.gov Web site. The full funding announcement for this program is available via the Grants.gov Web site: <http://www.grants.gov>. This announcement will also be available at the NOAA Web site: <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Eamd/SOLINDEX.HTML> or by contacting the program official identified below. You will be able to access, download and submit electronic grant applications for NOAA Programs in this announcement at <http://www.grants.gov>. The closing dates will be the same as for the paper submissions noted in this announcement. NOAA strongly recommends that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through Grants.gov.

Applicants should contact the program office for non-electronic submission instructions.

Facsimile transmissions and electronic mail submission of full proposals will not be accepted.

To apply for this NOAA federal funding opportunity, please go to www.grants.gov, and use the following funding opportunity # NOS-NCCOS-2007-2000702

www.noaa.gov

B. Content and Form of Application

This document requests full proposals only. The provisions for proposal preparation provided here are mandatory. Proposals received after the published deadline (refer to DATES) or proposals that deviate from the prescribed format will be returned to the sender

without further consideration. Information regarding this announcement and additional background information are available on the NCCOS/CSCOR home page <http://www.cop.noaa.gov/>.

1. Proposals

Refer to IV. Application and Submission Information for further application submission details.

2. Required Elements

For clarity in the submission of proposals, the following definitions are provided for applicant use: Funding and/or Budget Period - The period of time when Federal funding is available for obligation by the recipient. The funding period must always be specified in multi-year awards, using fixed year funds. This term may also be used to mean "budget period". A budget period is typically 12 months. Award and/or Project Period - The period established in the award document during which Federal sponsorship begins and ends. The term "award period" is also referred to as project period in 15 CFR 14.2(cc).

Each proposal must include the following twelve elements or it will be returned to sender without further consideration. The Summary, Title Page, Abstract, Project Description, References, Biographical Sketch, Current and Pending Support, and Collaborators List must be in 12-point font with 1-inch margins. The twelve elements are as follows:

(a) Standard Form 424. At the time of proposal submission, all applicants requesting direct funding must submit the Standard Form, SF-424, "Application for Federal Assistance," to indicate the total amount of funding proposed for their institution for the whole project period. This form is to be the cover page for the original proposal. Multi-institutional proposals must include signed SF-424 forms from all institutions requesting direct funding. Original signatures are required on SF424 forms provided to a lead institution by a collaborating institution for grants.gov submission.

(b) Summary title page. The Summary title page identifies the project's title, starting with the acronym: CHRP 2007, and the PI's name and affiliation, complete address, phone, FAX and E-mail information. The requested budget for each fiscal year should be included on the Summary title page. Multi-institution proposals must also identify the lead investigator for each institution and the requested funding for each fiscal year for each institution on the title page. Lead investigator and separate budget information is not requested on the title page for institutions that are proposed to receive funds through a subcontract to the lead institution; however, an accompanying budget justification must be submitted for each subcontractor. For further details on budget information, please see Section (g) Budget of this part.

(c) One-page abstract/project summary. A project summary (abstract) is to be submitted at time of application, shall include an introduction of the problem, rationale, scientific objectives and/or hypotheses to be tested, and a brief summary of work to be completed.

The summary should appear on a separate page, headed with the proposal title, institution(s), investigator(s), total proposed cost, and budget period. It should be written in the third person. The summary is used to help compare proposals quickly and allows the respondents to summarize these key points in their own words. Project summaries of applications that receive funding may be posted on program related websites. Project summaries of applications that receive funding may be posted on program related websites.

(d) Project description. The description of the proposed project must be complete and divided into annual increments of work that include: identification of the problem, scientific objectives, proposed methodology, relevance to the CHRP 2007 program goals, and scientific priorities. The project description (including relevant results from prior support) should not exceed 20 pages in 12-point, easily legible font. Page limits are inclusive of figures, other visual materials, and letters of endorsement, but are exclusive of references, a milestone chart, and letters of collaboration from unfunded collaborators. This section should clearly identify project management with a description of the functions of each PI within a team. It should provide a full scientific justification for the research, rather than simply reiterating justifications presented in this document. It should also include:

(1) The objective(s) for the period of proposed work and their expected significance;

(2) The relation to the present state of knowledge in the field and relation to previous work and work in progress by the proposing principal investigator(s);

(3) A discussion of how the proposed project lends value to the program goals;

(4) Potential coordination with other investigators.

(e) References cited. Reference information is required. Each reference must include the names of all authors in the same sequence they appear in the publications, the article title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publications. While there is no established page limitation, this section should include bibliographic citations only and should not be used to provide parenthetical information outside of the 20-page proposal descriptions.

(f) Milestone chart. Provide time lines of major tasks covering the duration of the proposed project including provision of products to management entities identified in the proposal.

(g) Standard Form 424A. At time of proposal submission, all applicants are required to submit a SF424A Budget Form for each fiscal year increment. Multi-institution proposals must include a SF424A for each institution, and multi-investigator proposals using a lead investigator with a contractor/subgrantee approach must submit a SF424A for each contractor/subgrantee. Each contractor or subgrantee should be listed as a separate item. Describe products/services to be obtained and indicate the applicability or necessity of each to the project. Provide separate budgets for each subgrantee or contractor regardless of the dollar value and indicate the basis for the cost estimates. List all subgrantee or contractor costs under line item 6.f. contractual on the SF424A.

In order to allow reviewers to fully evaluate the appropriateness of costs, all applications must include a detailed budget narrative and a justification to support all proposed budget categories for each fiscal year. Personnel costs should be broken out by named PI and number of months requested per year per PI. Support for each PI should be commensurate with their stated involvement each year in the milestones chart (see Required Elements (f) Milestone chart).

Any unnamed personnel (graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, technicians) should be identified by their job title, and their personnel costs explained similar to PI personnel costs above. The contribution of any personnel to the project goals should be explained. Travel costs should be broken out by number of people traveling, destination/purpose of travel, and projected costs per person. Equipment costs should describe the equipment to be purchased, and its contribution to the achievement of the project goals. For additional information concerning each of the required categories and appropriate level of disclosure please see http://www.cop.noaa.gov/opportunities/grants/other_instructions.html.

Any ship time needs must be clearly identified in the proposed budget. The applicant is responsible for requesting ship time through appropriate channels and for meeting all requirements to ensure the availability of requested ship time. Copies of relevant ship time

request forms (e.g. UNOLS ship request forms at <http://www.gso.uri.edu./unols/ship/mainmenu.html>. should be included with the proposal.

(h) Biographical sketch. All principal and co-investigators must provide summaries of up to 2 pages that include the following:

(1) A listing of professional and academic credentials and mailing address;

(2) A list of up to five publications most closely related to the proposed project and five other significant publications. Additional lists of publications, lectures, and the rest should not be included.

(i) Current and pending support. Describe all current and pending federal financial/funding support for all principal and co-investigators, including subsequent funding in the case of continuing grants. The capability of the investigator and collaborators to complete the proposed work in light of present commitments to other projects should be addressed. Therefore, please discuss the percentage of time investigators and collaborators have devoted to other Federal or non-Federal projects, as compared to the time that will be devoted to the project solicited under this notice.

(j) A list of all applicable permits that will be required to perform the proposed work.

(k) Provide one list that includes all collaborators, advisors, and advisees for each investigator (principal and co-principal investigators, post-docs, and subawardees), complete with corresponding institutions. Submit only one, combined and alphabetized list per proposal. Collaborators are individuals who have participated in a project or publication within the last 48 months with any investigator, including co-authors on publications in the resumes. Collaborators also include those persons with which the investigators may have ongoing collaboration negotiations. Advisees are persons with whom the individual investigator has had an association as thesis advisor or postdoctoral sponsor. Advisors include an individual's own graduate and postgraduate advisors. Unfunded participants in the proposed study should also be listed (but not their collaborators). This information is critical for identifying potential conflicts of interests and avoiding bias in the selection of reviewers.

(l) Proposal format and assembly. Proposals submitted via Grants.gov APPLY should follow the format guidelines below:

Attachments must be submitted in Adobe Acrobat PDF format to maintain format integrity. Please submit the required documents as described below.

Follow the instructions found on the grants.gov web site for application submission into the grants.gov system. All required forms that do not have specific placeholders in the "Mandatory Document" box must be submitted in the "Optional Form" box as "Other Attachments" and labeled with the document name. i.e. budget narrative, project description, milestone chart etc.

For multi institutional proposal: The SF424's of the additional institutions should be uploaded separately and labeled using the name of the institution/SF424 and then submitted in the "Optional Form" box as "Other Attachments." Combine all of the remaining required documents for the individual institution into one PDF file and submit the file labeled with the name of the institution. Repeat this procedure for each collaborating institution.

Save your completed application package with two different names before submission to avoid having to re-create the package should you experience submission problems. If you experience submission problems that may result in your application being late, send an e-mail to support@grants.gov and call the grants.gov help desk. Their phone number is posted on the grants.gov web site. The program manager associated with the RFA will use programmatic discretion in accepting late arriving proposals due to documented electronic submission problems. Please note: If more than one submission of an application is performed, the last application submitted before the due date and time will be the "official" version.

In addition to the twelve required elements, it is requested that the SF424B, CD511 and the indirect rate agreement be provided upon application submission. These forms can be uploaded into the "Optional Form" box under "Other Attachments" in grants.gov.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Anticipated Publication Date: 6/1/2006

The deadline for receipt of proposals is 3 p.m. EST, [insert 90 days from publication] (Note that late-arriving hard copy applications provided to a delivery service on or before [insert 90 days from publication], with delivery guaranteed before 3 p.m., EST on [insert 90 days from publication] will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the application was provided to the delivery service with delivery to the address listed below guaranteed by the specified closing date and time; and, in any event, the proposals are

received in the NCCOS/CSCOR office by 3 p.m., EST, no later than 2 business days following the closing date.)

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, ?Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.? It has been determined that this notice is not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866. Pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553(a) (2), an opportunity for public notice and comment is not required for this notice relating to grants, benefits and contracts. Because this notice is exempt from the notice and comment provisions of the Administrative Procedure Act, a Regulatory Flexibility Analysis is not required, and none has been prepared. It has been determined that this notice does not contain policies with Federalism implications as that term is defined in Executive Order 13132.

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs: Regardless of any approved indirect cost rate applicable to the award, the maximum dollar amount of allocable indirect costs for which DOC will reimburse the recipient shall be the lesser of (a) the line item amount for the Federal share of indirect costs contained in the approved budget of the award or (b) the Federal share of the total allocable indirect costs of the award based on the indirect cost rate approved by a cognizant or oversight Federal agency and current at the time the cost was incurred, provided the rate is approved on or before the award end date. NCCOS/CSCOR will not fund start up or operational costs for private business ventures and neither fees or profits will be considered as allowable costs.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Proposals must include evidence of linkages between the scientific questions and management needs, such as the participation of co-investigators from both scientific and management entities. Proposals previously submitted to CSCOR FFOs and not recommended for funding must be revised and reviewer or panel concerns addressed before resubmission. Resubmitted proposals that have not been revised will be returned without review.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the program goals: This ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities (30 percent). For this competition, this includes the degree to which the proposal addresses the specific "Program Priorities" section and the degree to which the proposed work will develop products leading to improved management of hypoxia and impacted living resources in the targeted regions.

2. Technical/scientific merit: This assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives (30 percent). For this competition, proposals will be judged on soundness of scientific principles and the likelihood that it will lead to outcomes that represent substantial impact or progress in their fields. The proposed work should have focused objectives and a complete and technically sound strategy for project design, methodologies, data management, data analysis, and development of products in support of the objectives.

3. Overall qualifications of applicants: This ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project (20 percent). For this competition, this includes the capability of the investigator and collaborators to complete the proposed work as evidenced by past research accomplishments, previous cooperative work, timely communication, and the sharing of findings, data, and other research products.

4. Project costs: The Budget is evaluated to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame (10 percent).

5. Outreach and education: NOAA assesses whether this project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources (10 percent). For this competition, the applicant must demonstrate clear connections to management entities that will use the results of the proposed work and define the specific products, outcomes and timing of the proposed work that will be used in achieving this goal.

B. Review and Selection Process

Once a full application has been received by NOAA, an initial administrative review is conducted to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the application.

All proposals will be evaluated and scored individually in accordance with the assigned weights of the above evaluation criteria by independent peer mail review and/or by independent peer panel review. Both Federal and non-Federal experts may be used in this process. The peer mail reviewers will be several individuals with expertise in the subjects addressed by particular proposals. Each mail reviewer will see only certain individual proposals within his or her area of expertise, and score them individually on a scale of one to five, where scores represent respectively: Excellent (5), Very Good (4), Good (3), Fair (2), Poor (1).

The peer panel will comprise 4 to 8 individuals, with each individual having expertise in a separate area, so that the panel, as a whole, covers a range of scientific expertise. The panel will have access to all mail reviews of proposals, and will use the mail reviews in discussion and evaluation of the entire slate of proposals. All proposals will be evaluated and scored individually. The peer panel shall rate the proposals using the evaluation criteria and scores provided above and used by the mail reviewers. The individual peer panelist scores shall be averaged for each application and presented to the program officer. No consensus advice will be given by the independent peer mail review or the review panel.

The program officer will neither vote or score proposals as part of the independent peer panel nor participate in discussion of the merits of the proposal. Those proposals receiving an average panel score of "Fair" or "Poor" will not be given further consideration, and applicants will be notified of non-selection.

For the proposals scored by the panel as either "Excellent," "Very Good," or "Good", the program officer will (a) create a ranking of the proposals to be recommended for funding using the average panel scores (b) determine the total duration of funding for each proposal; and (c) determine the amount of funds available for each proposal subject to the availability of fiscal year funds. Awards may not necessarily be made in rank order. In addition, proposals rated by the panel as either "Excellent," "Very Good," or "Good" that are not funded in the current fiscal period, may be considered for funding in another fiscal period without having to repeat the competitive review process.

Recommendations for funding are then forwarded to the selecting official, the Director of NCCOS, for the final funding decision. In making the final selections, the Director will award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the selection factors listed below in C.

Investigators may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. When a decision has been made (whether an award or declination), verbatim anonymous copies of reviews and summaries of review panel deliberations, if any, will be made available to the applicant. Declined applications will be held in the NCCOS/CSCOR for the required 3 years in accordance with the current retention requirements, and then destroyed.

C. Selection Factors

Based on the panel, review scores, the program officer will provide a listing of proposals in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding.
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. Geographically
 - b. By type of institutions
 - c. By type of partners
 - d. By research areas
 - e. By project types
3. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.
4. Program priorities and policy factors.
5. Applicant's prior award performance.
6. Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups.
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the grants officer.

C. Selection Factors

Based on the panel review scores, the program officer will provide a listing of proposals in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding.

2. Balance/distribution of funds:

a. Geographically

b. By type of institutions

c. By type of partners

d. By research areas

e. By project types

3. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.

4. Program priorities and policy factors.

5. Applicant's prior award performance.

6. Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups.

7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the grants officer.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Anticipated Publication Date: 6/1/2006

Subject to the availability of funds, review of proposals will begin in October 2006. July 1, 2007 should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

The notice of award is signed by the NOAA Grants Officer and is the authorizing document. It is provided by postal mail or electronically through the Grants Online system to the appropriate business office of the recipient organization.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2004 (69 FR 78389) are applicable to this solicitation.

Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities,

and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems).

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

In conformance with the Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements section 15 CFR 14.36, any data collected in projects supported by NCCOS/CSCOR should be delivered to a National Data Center (NDC), such as the National Oceanographic Data Center (NODC), in a format to be determined by the institution, the NODC, and the Program Officer. It is the responsibility of the institution for the delivery of these data; the DOC will not provide additional support for delivery beyond the award. Additionally, all biological cultures established, molecular probes developed, genetic sequences identified, mathematical models constructed, or other resulting information products established through support provided by NCCOS/CSCOR are encouraged to be made available to the general research community at no or modest handling charge (to be determined by the institution, Program Officer, and DOC).

C. Reporting

All financial and performance (i.e. technical progress) reports shall be submitted electronically through the Grants Online system unless the recipient does not have internet access. In that case, hard copy financial reports are to be submitted to the NOAA Grants Officer and performance (technical) reports are to be submitted to the NOAA program officer. Financial reports are semi-annual and performance reports are annual.

VII. Agency Contacts

Technical Information. Alan Lewitus, Program Manager NCCOS/CSCOR, 301-713-3338/ext 178, Internet: Alan.Lewitus@noaa.gov

Business Management Information. Laurie Golden, NCCOS/CSCOR Grants Administrator, 301-713-3338/ext 151, Internet: Laurie.Golden@noaa.gov

VIII. Other Information

Collection of information requirements

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with a collection of information subject to the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act, unless that collection displays a currently valid OMB control number.

This notification involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Forms 424, 424A, 424B, and SF-LLL has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under control numbers 0348-0043, 0348-0044, 0348-0040 and 0348-0046.