

Script for Webinar on Full Application Stage of Federal Funding Opportunity 2019 (FFO-2019)

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Good morning/afternoon. These webinars are being recorded and one of the recordings will be posted to our website after September 18.

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Tracy could you please start the recording.

Good morning/afternoon, my name is Julien Lartigue and I am the director of the NOAA RESTORE Science Program.

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We are holding this webinar for those who submitted pre-proposals to our current funding competition to explain the purpose of the pre-proposal review and explain the most common feedback we provided. If you submitted a pre-proposal, you may find it useful to have the response we sent you on hand when I review the common feedback we provided.

This webinar is also an opportunity for us to clarify certain requirements for the full application and answer questions about the full application merit review process.

Our goal is to be as clear and consistent as possible in the feedback we are providing to those who submitted pre-proposals. We also want to make sure the instructions in the funding announcement for the full application are clear.

I will take questions at the end of this roughly 20 minute presentation, but I will not answer specific questions about individual pre-proposals or our response to them. Those questions are best directed and answered in one on one conversations with Frank Parker, the federal program officer for this competition, or myself. If you wish to have such a conversation, please contact one of us and we can schedule a time to meet. Our contact information will be on the last slide.

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Let's begin by reviewing the parameters for this competition.

This is a ten year competition focused on long-term trends in Gulf of Mexico living coastal and marine resources. Your project should be motivated by a clear resource management need and the results from your project should be applied to address that need. You will only apply for the

first five years of funding now, but you should do so from the perspective of your entire 10 year plan.

The priority for this competition is to identify, track, understand, and/or predict trends and variability in living coastal and marine resources and the processes driving them. This priority has two equally important parts – 1) exploring trends and variability in a living coastal or marine resource and 2) investigating the process or processes that may be driving the trend. You must address both aspects of the priority for your full application to be competitive.

There are also three areas of emphasis for this competition. You must explicitly identify one or more areas of emphasis and then address it within the context of the overall priority.

The first area of emphasis is work on one or more trends in multiple living coastal or marine resources..

The second area of emphasis is how weather or climate events may drive trends in one or more living coastal or marine resource.

The third area of emphasis is how trends in living coastal and marine resources relate to economic activity assessed using either market or non-market measures.

Again, you must explicitly identify at least one area of emphasis and then address it within the context of the overall priority, which is to identify, track, understand, and/or predict trends and variability in living coastal and marine resources and the processes driving them.

Only include areas of emphasis that you plan to address in the first five years. If you state you are addressing an area of emphasis, the reviewers will expect you do to so and evaluate your application accordingly. Your application will score poorly if you identify an area of emphasis and do not fully address it.

Your project must be driven by a management need. It is important that you clearly document that need -- who needs what information, and how will that information be used within a management context. The findings or products from your project must also be transferred to specific resource managers so they can use them, and your application must describe a process for the transfer. It must also describe how that information is expected to be used by the management community. The more specific you can be the better.

Please consider including resource managers on your project team. We strongly recommend that you talk early and often with the resource management community.

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In the context of this competition, the Science Program considers a resource manager an individual or group of individuals with decision-making authority over the use, conservation, or restoration of one or more living coastal or marine resources within the area they manage.

Resource management can take many forms, including wildlife and fishery management, federal and state rule-making and permitting, conservation practices by private landowners, place-based management, and restoration planning.

Just because an individual works for an organization with management responsibilities doesn't necessarily make them a resource manager. The key is their role or their organization's role in the decision making process.

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In total, the Science Program received 163 pre-proposals for this competition.

Each pre-proposal was reviewed by the Science Program for alignment with the funding announcement. This was not a review of quality. I repeat, this was not a review of quality, only whether the proposed work aligned with the priority and other parameters for this competition, such as relevance to resource management.

Each pre-proposal received one of four responses...

Eleven pre-proposals were **STRONGLY ENCOURAGED**, which means, that these pre-proposals substantively responded to all required elements as described in the funding announcement.

Fifty-six pre-proposals were **ENCOURAGED WITH MINOR MODIFICATIONS**, which means that these pre-proposals substantively responded to most of the required elements as described in the funding announcement, but not all of them. Often a lack of clarity in the budget or deficiencies in the decadal plan resulted in a pre-proposal receiving this designation. To be competitive at the full application stage, we strongly recommend these project teams address the specific comments they received.

Forty pre-proposals were **DISCOURAGED UNLESS MAJOR MODIFICATIONS ARE MADE**, which means that these pre-proposals did not substantively respond to some of the required elements as described in the funding announcement. Often a tenuous link to the priority or areas of emphasis, lack of clarity in relevance to resource management, or a weak plan for transitioning the findings or products resulted in a pre-proposal receiving this designation. As a result, these pre-proposals would not be competitive at the full application stage without significant changes. Should any of these project teams choose to develop a full application, we strongly recommend they address the specific comments they received.

Fifty-six pre-proposals were **DISCOURAGED**, which means that these pre-proposal were not relevant or did not substantively respond to the required elements as described in the funding

announcement. Often no connection to the priority or no clear relevance to resource management resulted in pre-proposals receiving this designation. We do not think that these pre-proposals would be competitive at the full application stage and provided the reviewer comments that led us to that determination. Again, this was not a quality review. A 'DISCOURAGED' rating does not mean that the Science Program views your work to be of poor quality, only that it did not fit this competition.

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Every project team who submitted a pre-proposal by the deadline is eligible to submit a full application regardless of which of the four responses they received.

Each project team is the best judge of whether their work can be adjusted to address any concerns raised in the pre-proposal review.

For example, your vision for your project may include a robust plan for the transfer to and use of research findings by the management community, but you simply did not describe that transition plan in your pre-proposal. In this case, adding the missing information would be a simple adjustment.

If you decide to submit a full application, you should think carefully about 1) how to address the priority and at least one area of emphasis as described in the funding announcement, 2) how the findings or products from your project could be applied by the Gulf resource management community, 3) the general guidance that all applicants received in their response letter, and 4) any specific comments you received in your response letter.

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I will now walk through the more common feedback we included in our response letters.

Several project teams received this feedback...

Quote...“It is unclear whether your pre-proposal addresses the priority for this competition, which is trends and variability in living coastal and marine resources and the processes that drive them.”...End Quote

You must address trends and variability in a living coastal or marine resource to fit within the scope of this competition. This means you are either measuring changes in a living coastal or marine resource over time or space or are using such measurements that have been or will be collected by others.

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Another frequent comment was...

Quote...“The pre-proposal does address trend(s) in living coastal and marine resources, but it is unclear whether it considers the processes driving the trend(s), which is part of the priority for this competition.”...End Quote

This comment speaks to the need to not only address trends and variability in living coastal and marine resources, but to also investigate at least one process that may be driving the trend you are exploring. You must address both aspects of the priority -- the trend and the processes driving it -- for your full application to be competitive.

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Another one of the more frequent comment was...

Quote...“The resource management issue statement in your pre-proposal may not reference how the project's findings or products could be used by a manager for an action or decision.”...End Quote

Your proposed work must be relevant to the resource management community in a real and tangible way. Full applications need to be explicit in how a project's findings or products could be used by a manager to inform a specific management action or decision.

Making a general statement about how the proposed work should be important to the resource management community is not enough. Strong full applications will be explicit in how specific findings or products from the project relate to one or more issues facing specific resource managers and how they will be applied.

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Another frequent comment I would like to review with you is the following...

Quote...“The transfer of findings and products from projects to the resource management community is a fundamental goal for all Science Program awards. While your pre-proposal contains a description of a process for the transfer and use of project findings by the resource management community, it could be significantly strengthened.”...End Quote

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to have a feasible plan for the transfer to and use of your findings and products by the management community.

To receive funding, a project team will need to make a convincing case that not only is their work relevant to the management community, but that they have a credible plan for its transition.

If there is not at least one resource manager that you know by name who right now can tell me that they are waiting for the findings or products from your work and think your transition plan is sound, then you need to take a step back. Please go make that connection before proceeding

any further with developing a full application. I can not emphasize this point enough. Talk to your resource manager or managers early and often.

Even if that resource manager is on your project team, you need to be explicit about the connection. You can not assume that the reviewers will recognize that one of your investigators is a resource manager.

Letters of support from resource managers that testify with specifics to the need for the findings and products and how they will be transitioned to and used by the manager are strongly encouraged.

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The last comment I would like to review with you has to do with the requirement to include a decadal plan.

Several project teams received this comment...

Quote...“The pre-proposal does not contain a sound decadal plan that describes the need for 10 years of continuous funding to address long-term trends and the processes driving them for living coastal and marine resources.”...End Quote

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Because the awards from this competition are for five years with the option for a non-competitive renewal for an additional five years, we are asking all project teams to lay out their plan for ten years of research and its application in their decadal plan. The plan is separate from the project narrative and is limited to no more than two pages.

In short, the decadal plan will explain why the work you are proposing can only be addressed with ten years of continuous funding, how you will keep the resource management community engaged for ten years, and how the first five years will relate to the second five years.

The rationale for ten years of continuous funding can stem from the research side of your project, for example, a longer term dataset will result in more comprehensive findings or more time will allow you to test additional hypotheses. The rationale can also be related to the application side of your project, for example, additional time will allow you to work iteratively with the management community to further improve a product developed during the first five years or adapt the product to the needs of additional resource managers at other locations.

This competition is not intended for projects that can be fully supported by more traditional two to three year grant awards.

One way to test the strength of your decadal plan is to ask yourself this question...

If you were awarded all of the funding now, could you complete the work in less than 10 years? The answer should be 'no' and it should be clear from your decadal plan why this is so.

For reference - Section IV.B.3.5)

Decadal Plan: The decadal plan (i.e., 10 years) must be no more than two pages in length. It should provide: (a) a rationale for why the resource management issue(s) to be addressed by the application requires a decade of research and investment; (b) how the applicant(s) will engage the resource management community throughout the 10 years and how they should benefit from the findings and products from the research; (c) how the work accomplished in the first five years will generate hypotheses and inform the need for continued support in a subsequent five year period; and (d) an overview of the work planned for a subsequent five years that would complement and build upon the work proposed in the project narrative for the initial five years.

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In total, approximately \$15M over five years is available for approximately 6 projects.

You must ask for at least \$500K over five years and no more than \$7.5M over five years.

In developing your budget, please request what is needed to complete the research and its application in the first 5 years. Do not divide the amount of funding available by the expected number of awards and propose to that amount. There is no magic total budget amount that will increase your odds of receiving an award.

Return on investment is a factor that the reviewers will be asked to consider, so if you request a larger amount of the available funding, your project will be expected to have a potential management impact commensurate with the amount requested.

Some of you received the comment,

Quote...“Your budget, while within the required amounts, may be high relative to the anticipated outcomes from your project.”...End Quote

This pertains to the relative return on investment for your project. We are not saying the return on investment is low. We are only flagging it to make sure that if you are going to ask for a significant amount of the available funding that you make sure the return from your project is high.

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Lets now talk about a few more of the full application requirements.

Detailed instructions on what needs to be included in a full application are available in the full announcement for this competition. I will not be reviewing all of those instructions. Instead, I will

be clarifying a few of those instructions and highlighting at least one that may not be as common as others.

First, there are 18 required elements for a full application, one of which is a project narrative not to exceed 12 pages.

Second, the data management requirements for this competition and the detail with which we ask them to be addressed are consistent with the federal and NOAA policies for data stewardship (LINK: https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/documents/Data_Sharing_Directive_v3.0.pdf). Please read the relevant portions of the funding announcement carefully and include a strong data management plan in your full application. Reviewers will be asked to evaluate your data management plan. A short paragraph with generic statements about how you will archive your data is not sufficient.

Finally, full applications must include a listing of all 'current and pending support' and there is a link in the announcement to a website where you can access a WORD version of a form you can use to list this information (<https://coastalscience.noaa.gov/funding/applicants/forms>). You will likely need to edit the years listed on this form to align with the years for which you have current or pending support. If you have trouble doing so, please reach out to us and we can help.

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I would also like remind everyone that an individual may be listed as an investigator on no more than two full applications, and may only be the lead investigator on one of them.

Project teams are allowed to add or remove investigators from their pre-proposal to their full application, including changing the lead investigator. In doing so, please be certain that all the individuals listed on your full application are adhering to this requirement.

An investigator is an individual that is proposed to receive funding if the project is awarded or is substantially involved in the project.

There is no limit on how many applications an individual can be listed as a collaborator. The limit only applies to those listed as an investigator.

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All complete full applications received by the October 29 deadline will enter a merit review process.

The outcome of the pre-proposal review will have no bearing on the full application merit review. All full applications will start with the same score regardless of the results of the pre-proposal review.

The first step in the full application merit review will be an administrative review of the full application to assess its completeness and the eligibility of the applicant.

The second step will be an independent peer mail or panel review. The decision on whether to conduct an independent mail review as well as a panel review will depend on the volume of applications and their breadth. Either a high number of applications or a pool of applications that covers diverse subject matters may necessitate an independent mail review prior to a panel review.

All complete full applications that meet the minimum requirements will be reviewed by three technical experts and the results of these reviews will be shared with the applicants. The evaluation criteria that will be used by these reviewers is contained in section V of the funding announcement. If you decide to prepare a full application, please read this criteria carefully.

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As I mentioned earlier, full applications are due no later than October 29. I strongly encourage you to submit your full application well in advance of the deadline.

We anticipate making awards no later than June 2019 with projects having a projected start date of September 1, 2019. Please be aware that the environmental compliance process can be lengthy and project start dates may be delayed until environmental compliance actions are complete.

Our goal is to conduct a high quality merit review of the full applications and keep the time between when you submit full applications and when you learn the results of the competition to a minimum.

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You can find additional information about this competition on our website under the 'funding opportunities' tab and the 'open' drop down menu item.

(<https://restoreactscienceprogram.noaa.gov/funding-opportunities/open-funding-opportunities>)

There you will find an overview of the competition, frequently asked questions, a link to the full announcement on Grants.gov, and an example full application.

After September 18, you will find a recording of this webinar and right now you can find a recording of one of the webinars from June when we rolled out this competition.

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I also encourage you to reach out to us directly. Here is my contact information along with the contact information for Frank Parker who is the associate director and federal program officer for the Science Program.

If you or your sponsored programs office has questions about how to complete the required federal forms or about how to submit materials through Grants.gov, you should contact Laura Golden.

If you have questions or need guidance on the data management plan for your full application, I encourage you to reach out to Jessica Morgan who is the Scientific Data Coordinator for the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science or "NCCOS". She will also be overseeing the data management activities of the awards from this competition.

Thank you for taking time out of your day to attend this webinar and I will now be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Please enter those questions in the chat box.