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ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Funding Opportunity Title: NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NOS-NCCOS-2017-2004875

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.451, Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring, and Technology

Dates: A letter of intent (LOI) is required for this Announcement. The deadline for receipt of required LOIs at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science / NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program (NCCOS/RASP) office is 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on July 8, 2016. LOIs should be submitted by email to Laurie.Golden@noaa.gov. The deadline for receipt of full applications at the NCCOS/RASP office is 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on September 27, 2016. Applications should be submitted through grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>). LOIs and full applications received after the closing time and date will not be accepted.

NOAA will also accept paper applications subject to further details described in this Announcement that are postmarked or provided to a commercial carrier with tracking number and receipt on or before 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on September 27, 2016. Private metered postmarks will not be accepted. Applicants submitting by paper are responsible for tracking their applications and should notify the Associate Director (refer to Section VII) that they are submitting by paper.

Investigators are advised to submit full proposals well in advance of the deadline as a precaution against unanticipated delays. Applicants must register with grants.gov before submitting application materials, which requires a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number and registration in the System for Award Management (SAM) as prerequisites (refer to Section IV.G.1.). The entire registration process, including grants.gov, DUNS, and SAM, may take up to three weeks to complete. In addition, there may be up to a two business day lag before grants.gov validates or rejects submitted materials. Please plan ahead.

Funding Opportunity Description: The purpose of this document is to advise the public that NOAA/NOS/NCCOS is soliciting research applications for the NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program for projects from 1 to 3 years in duration. This funding opportunity is focused on living

coastal and marine resources and their habitats and requests proposals under two program priorities. One priority focuses on research and the other priority focuses on science application in the form of decision-support tools. Funding is contingent upon the availability of funds in the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund. It is anticipated that final recommendations for funding under this Announcement will be made in March, 2017, and that projects funded under this Announcement will have a June 1, 2017 start date. Total funding for this competition is approximately \$15 to \$17 million. Approximately 5 to 10 projects are expected to be funded for a total of approximately \$12 million under the research priority. Approximately 5 to 10 projects are expected to be funded for a total of approximately \$5 million under the decision-support tool priority.

Electronic Access: The NOAA Restore Act Science Program website (<http://restoreactscienceprogram.noaa.gov/>) furnishes supplementary information. Applications should be submitted through [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) (<http://www.grants.gov>).

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The mission of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) RESTORE Act Science Program is to carry out research, observation, and monitoring to support, to the maximum extent practicable, the long-term sustainability of the ecosystem, fish stocks, fish habitat, and the recreational, commercial, and charter-fishing industry in the Gulf of Mexico. NOAA was authorized to establish and administer the Science Program, in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), by the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf States Act of 2012 (RESTORE Act) (Public Law 112-141, Section 1604).

In May 2015, the Science Program released its science plan, which explains how the legislative requirements of the RESTORE Act led to the Science Program's mission and goal, how the Science Program is managed, and the Science Program's approach to coordinating with the other science and restoration programs active in the region. The plan also establishes ten long-term priorities for the Science Program. These ten long-term priorities were shaped and refined by extensive engagement with stakeholders, reflect common priorities from existing regional science needs assessments, are connected to identified management needs, and fit within the legislative boundaries for the Science Program.

This Announcement is targeted to fund proposals that address two of the Science Program's long-term priorities, both of which concern living coastal and marine resources and their habitats:

- Comprehensive understanding of living coastal and marine resources, food web dynamics, habitat utilization, protected areas, and carbon flow; and
- Decision-support tools to assist resource managers with management decisions planned to sustain habitats, living coastal and marine resources, and wildlife.

The Program Priorities section (I.B.) of this Announcement details the specific areas of research and the types of projects that are eligible for funding. For this Announcement, living coastal and marine resources are defined as living organisms, including wildlife, that are found in the coastal and marine environment (fresh, estuarine, nearshore, and offshore waters) or coastal lands and that are also of concern or importance to humans.

In developing proposals, proposers should keep in mind the Science Program's long-term outcomes, as described in the science plan. The first outcome is the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem being understood in an integrative, holistic manner. This means focusing on the connections between individual species, habitats, or ecosystem processes and the cause-and-effect relationships that govern the strength of those connections. The second outcome is using this comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem to guide resource management, including restoration. This 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.

B. Program Priorities

This funding opportunity is focused on living coastal and marine resources and their habitats and requests proposals under two program priorities. One priority focuses on research and the other priority focuses on science application in the form of decision-support tools. Applicants must clearly identify which one of the two priorities their proposal addresses.

1. Research Priority

There is a recognized need to improve our understanding of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem to advance the scientific foundation for improved fisheries and other living coastal and marine resources management. For example, assessing the current populations of coastal and marine species and identifying factors limiting their growth and reproduction across different habitats would allow the construction of population-habitat relationships, which is an important step in developing adaptive management frameworks. Improving our understanding of predator-prey relationships and the role of lower trophic levels in supporting higher trophic level production would inform population assessments for managed species and protected resources. Similarly, increasing our understanding of food web dynamics and advancing the state of the science for multi-species models are also areas of need that would improve the scientific underpinnings of population assessments and ecosystem models. To move towards ecosystem management, it is important to understand how the cumulative impact of multiple stressors can alter habitat and how humans and living coastal and marine resources use that habitat and interact with one another. In addition, determining how habitat quantity and quality and physical oceanographic parameters impact juvenile recruitment would reduce the uncertainty in predicting trends in population size for coastal and marine species. With regards to monitoring and habitat use, improving the capabilities and technology for monitoring living coastal and marine resources and their use of different habitats would contribute to long-term improvements to the quantity and quality of data for population assessments and ecosystem models, ultimately improving their

reliability and utility.

To address these needs for understanding and further develop the scientific foundation for living coastal and marine resource management, this Announcement invites proposals in these specific areas of research:

- (a) The movement of living coastal and marine resources between and among habitats, including measurements of habitat connectivity and/or population connectivity;
- (b) Use of habitat by living coastal and marine resources expressed as quantified habitat-specific vital rates, habitat thresholds, and/or habitat-specific production estimates;
- (c) The recruitment of juvenile fish to fisheries, particularly the factors governing strong recruitment successes and failures;
- (d) Food web structure and dynamics, trophic linkages, and/or predator-prey relationships, especially projects that develop and/or apply new techniques or technologies such as, but not limited to, compound-specific isotopic analysis and approaches for increasing the efficiency of gut content analysis such as automated visual or genetic identification;
- (e) The impact of multiple stressors on food web structure and dynamics and/or habitat quality and quantity and the implications for living coastal and marine resources; and
- (f) The connections between restored habitat and surrounding habitats and the living coastal and marine resources that use those habitats including connections between terrestrial habitat restoration and surrounding or linked aquatic and marine habitats and vice versa.

Applicants must select one or more of the six specific areas of research for this priority and clearly identify them in their proposal.

Proposals that clearly describe how the research will be applied, relate to a challenge(s) facing resource managers, and detail a path for communicating their research results to the management community will be given priority. Integrating resource managers into the research team, particularly in the planning of the research and in the designing of an outreach approach, is encouraged. Applicants may propose projects that will inform current or planned restoration activities.

The proposed research must be conducted in the Gulf of Mexico or its watersheds. The Gulf of Mexico is defined as the ocean basin bounded by the United States along its northeastern, northern, and northwestern edges; Mexico on its southwestern and southern edges; and Cuba on its southeastern edge. This definition of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem includes the estuarine and marine environments of the basin's continental shelf and its deepwater environments. If the proposed research will occur in a watershed, which includes freshwater wetlands and uplands, then it must focus on a process, habitat, or species that has a direct,

significant, and quantifiable impact or connection to the Gulf of Mexico.

2. Decision-Support Tool Priority

The ability to produce usable science is greatly enhanced when researchers understand and are responsive to the interests and needs of end users; similarly, the application of new knowledge is more likely when end users are aware of the capabilities of science to address a problem and actively seek to incorporate research findings into management plans and decision processes.

Resource management decisions in the Gulf of Mexico are more likely to be effective when informed by an understanding of how different components of the ecosystem interact including how stressors may work in concert to alter biological, chemical, and physical processes. For this type of understanding to inform resource management, it must be delivered to resource managers and organized in a way that allows the knowledge to be integrated into the current management planning or decision making process. A decision-support tool facilitates this integration and can provide a means for accounting for complexity and uncertainty.

In a general sense, a decision-support tool is any guidance, procedure or analysis tool, or any combination of these, that is used by resource managers to support a decision. Decision-support tools can take the form of a data integration platform; conceptual or numerical models for identifying and predicting the impacts of stressors or interactions among components of the ecosystem; and/or structured decision making, decision frameworks, integrated assessments or other similar approaches which, in an organized manner, develop and evaluate alternatives often assisting stakeholders to work productively together on decisions involving uncertainty and trade-offs. Regardless of the form of the tool, to be effective its development, application, and maintenance must be driven by the needs of the resource manager and focused on a current management decision or a near-term management challenge.

This Announcement invites proposals that will provide resource managers with decision-support tools to assist in the management of living coastal and marine resources and their habitat, including restoration planning and the social, behavioral, and economic components of human use. The tool should inform a current or near-term management decision or challenge that has been identified as a priority by the management community and for which there is a clear path for the adoption and use of the tool by a resource manager.

Proposals should define the current or near-term management decision or challenge being

addressed and describe the decision-support tool and how it will be applied to the decision or challenge. The proposal should clearly describe the process by which collaboration will occur between the tool developer and the end user(s) and how the end user(s) will be trained on the tool. Proposals should also address the resources available to support operation and maintenance of the tool after the period of performance for the project has ended given that funding may not be requested for long-term operation and maintenance of the tool. The proposal should also address the flexibility of the tool to environmental change. Strong proposals will complete the transfer of the tool from developer to end user during the period of performance and integrate specified end users in all project stages, from design to execution to maintenance. End users may serve as the lead investigator on a proposal.

Proposals focused on improving an existing decision-support tool with an identified and documented resource manager user base actively using the tool will be given priority. Examples of improving existing decision-support tools can include, but are not limited to, the collection and integration of additional data, the integration or refinement of models, applying the tool to a new management area, and increasing the spatial or temporal scale or resolution of a tool to better address the needs of resource managers. Other examples of tool improvement may include training for or capacity building within the user community to further the use of a tool, or the addition of new stakeholders to a decision-making or planning process.

Proposals seeking to develop a new decision-support tool rather than improve an existing one will be considered; however, they must clearly demonstrate that the new tool is not duplicative of an existing tool and would be of great utility and value to the management community. They must also comply with the other requirements described above.

The current or near-term management decision or challenge being addressed must occur in the Gulf of Mexico or its watersheds. The Gulf of Mexico is defined as the ocean basin bounded by the United States along its northeastern, northern, and northwestern edges; Mexico on its southwestern and southern edges; and Cuba on its southeastern edge. This definition of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem includes the estuarine and marine environments of the basin's continental shelf and its deep water environments. If occurring in a watershed, which includes freshwater wetlands and uplands, the tool must apply to a management issue that has a direct, significant, and quantifiable impact on the management of the Gulf of Mexico.

C. Program Authority

Public Law 112-141, Section 1604, the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Science, Observation, Monitoring and Technology Program; 33 U.S.C. § 1321 note.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Funding is contingent upon availability of funds in the Gulf Coast Restoration Trust Fund. It is anticipated that total funding for this funding opportunity will be approximately \$15 to \$17 million. Approximately 5 to 10 projects are expected to be funded for a total of approximately \$12 million under the research priority. Approximately 5 to 10 projects are expected to be funded for a total of approximately \$5 million under the decision-support tool priority.

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce (DOC) be responsible for application preparation costs. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not obligate 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 applications may cover a project/award period from 1 to 3 years.

During the period of performance of projects funded under this Announcement, regardless of the funding mechanism used, Science Program personnel will analyze financial statements and progress reports for each continuing project, and will have dialogue with the principal investigators (PIs) and authorized representatives of the recipient institutions to discuss progress and expected time lines for the remaining award period.

It is anticipated that projects funded under this Announcement will have a June 1, 2017 start date.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Funding instruments available are grants and cooperative agreements.

- Grants: A grant is financial assistance that does not anticipate substantial programmatic involvement by the federal government during the period of performance. Applicants for grants must demonstrate an ability to conduct the proposed research with minimal assistance,

other than financial support, from the federal government.

- Cooperative Agreements: A cooperative agreement is used in financial assistance when substantial involvement is anticipated between the federal government and the recipient during the period of performance and is appropriate when the federal government will assist recipients in conducting the proposed project. 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. The application should be presented in a manner that demonstrates the applicant's ability to address the project in a collaborative manner with the federal government. The recipient can expect substantial agency collaboration, participation, or intervention in project performance.

NOAA will review the applications in accordance with the evaluation criteria (refer to Section V.A.). 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. If a cooperative agreement is determined to be the appropriate instrument, the Science Program's Associate Director or their designee will participate in important activities, which may include evaluation and selection of applicants for sub-award funding; education about and discussion of project activities; participation in meetings; guidance on the Science Program's philosophy, directions, and priorities; and project strategy discussions.

In an effort to maximize the use of limited resources, applications from non-federal, non-NOAA federal and NOAA federal applicants will be evaluated in the same competition. If the grantee is at an institution that has a NOAA cooperative institute (CI), they are allowed to submit applications that reference the CI by attaching a cover letter to the application stating their desire to have the application associated with the CI. This letter should specify the name of the CI, the CI cooperative agreement number, and the NOAA-approved research theme and task that applies to the proposal. The application will use the Facilities and Administrative (F&A) rate associated with the main CI agreement. If the application is selected for funding, NOAA will notify the university that a separate award will be issued with its own award number. However, the award will include two Special Award Conditions (SACs): (1) the existing University/NOAA Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) would be incorporated by reference into the terms of the competitive award, and (2) any performance report(s) for the competitive project must follow the timetable of the funding program and be submitted directly to the funding program. Report(s) will be copied to the CI's administrator when due, to be attached to the main cooperative agreement progress report as an appendix.

This will allow the CI to coordinate all the projects submitted through the CI, since the terms of these awards will specify that this is a CI project via the MOA.

An intra-agency transfer will be used for NOAA applicants selected for funding. PLEASE NOTE: Non-NOAA federal applicants will be funded through an inter agency transfer, provided they demonstrate that legal authority exists for the federal applicant to receive funds from another agency. Support may be solely through the Science Program or partnered with other federal offices and agencies. The policies described in this Announcement applicable to federal assistance awards do not apply to intra- and inter agency transfers of funds. For more information, contact the agency officials provided in Section VII.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education; non-profit institutions; state, local, and tribal governments; for-profit organizations; and U.S. territories that possess the statutory authority to accept funding for this type of work.

Federal agencies that possess the statutory authority to accept funding for this type of work may also apply. Federal agencies are strongly encouraged to collaborate with partners from a non-federal eligible entity. If you have additional questions, contact Laura Golden at (240) 533-0285.

Science Program funding opportunities will not be used to hire and fund the salaries of any permanent federal employees. Federal award recipients may use their funding to cover travel, equipment, supplies, and contractual personnel costs associated with the proposed work.

PIs are not required to be employed by an eligible entity that is based in one of the five Gulf of Mexico States (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas); however, PIs that are not employed by or associated with Gulf of Mexico-based eligible entities are strongly encouraged to collaborate with partners from a Gulf of Mexico-based eligible entity.

Foreign researchers may participate by submitting a sub-award through an eligible U.S. entity.

The DOC and NOAA support cultural and gender diversity and encourage women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications to the Science Program. In addition, DOC/NOAA is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black

colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. DOC/NOAA encourages applications involving any of the above institutions to apply.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

None

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

A letter of intent (LOIs) is required to apply for this Announcement. Any applicant that submits a full application, but did not submit a LOI by the deadline will not be considered and the full application will be returned to the applicant without review.

Each application must substantially comply with the 17 elements listed under Required Elements in Section IV.B.3.(1)-(17), or it will be returned to sender without further consideration. A checklist with the required and requested application elements can be found in Section VIII.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application materials are available at <http://www.grants.gov> as part of the electronic application package, which includes the federal forms. For a preview and for paper applications, these forms can be accessed at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/forms/sf-424-family.html#sortby=1>. A paper copy of the application materials is available by request through:

Laura Golden
1305 East West Hwy
SSMC 4, Station 8219
Silver Spring, MD 20910

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Letter of Intent (LOI)

A Letter of Intent (LOI) is required to apply for this Announcement. The purpose of the LOI process is to provide information to potential applicants on the relevance of their proposed project to the program priorities described in this Announcement in advance of preparing a full application. Full applications will be encouraged only for LOIs deemed relevant;

however, the final decision to submit a full proposal is made by the investigator. The LOI should provide a concise description of the proposed work and its relevance to the targeted competition. The LOI should be two to three pages in length (no more than three pages), single spaced in 12-point font with 1-inch margins and must include in order the components listed below. If the below components are not included, the LOI may not be considered.

- (1) Identification of the competition that is being targeted;
- (2) Identification of which one of the two program priorities is being addressed and, in the case of the research priority, the specific area or areas of research;
- (3) Specification of a tentative project title;
- (4) Name(s), phone number(s), email address(s) and institution(s) of all PIs, and specification of which individual is the lead PI;
- (5) Approximate cost of the project;
- (6) Statement of the issue the proposal plans to address and its relevance to the targeted competition; and
- (7) Brief summary of the methods to be used including the approach for transferring project findings and/or outputs (e.g., products) to end users (preferably at least half a page).

The Science Program's Associate Director will conduct a review of each LOI to determine whether it is responsive to the program priorities as detailed in Section I.B. of this funding opportunity. Letters or emails to encourage or discourage a full application will be sent to the lead PI for each LOI within approximately three weeks after the LOI due date. The final decision to submit a full application will be made by the applicant, regardless of the recommendations of the Associate Director regarding the LOI. Late LOIs will not be considered and their associated full applications cannot be submitted.

2. Application

The provisions for preparing full applications provided here are mandatory. Applications received after the published deadline (refer to Section IV.D.2.) or applications that deviate from the prescribed format will be returned to the sender without further consideration. Information regarding this Announcement and additional background information is available on the Science Program home page (<http://restoreactscienceprogram.noaa.gov/>). An example application can be found at http://coastalscience.noaa.gov/funding/docs/sample_application.pdf and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are also available on the Science Program's website.

For clarity in the submission of applications, 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. This term may also be used to mean budget period. A budget period is typically 12 months.

- Period of Performance - The period of time established in the award document during which federal sponsorship begins and ends. The term “award period” or “project period” may be used interchangeably with “period of performance.”

- Applications with subcontractors/subawards - Collaborative applications with only the lead institution requesting direct funding by NOAA. If funded, the lead institution will disburse funds to the subcontractor or sub-recipient institutions.

3. Required Elements

Each application must substantially comply with the following 17 elements or it will be returned to sender without further consideration. The summary, title page, abstract, project narrative, data management plan, references, biographical sketch, budget narrative, and collaborators list must be single spaced in 12-point font with 1-inch margins. The 17 elements are as follows:

(1) Standard Form 424: At the time of application 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 application and is the first required form in the grants.gov application package.

(2) Summary title page (one page maximum): The summary title page includes, in order, the project's title; the PI's name and affiliation, complete address, phone, and email information; and the requested funding amounts for each fiscal year with and without ship funding. Separate budget information is not requested on the title page for institutions that are proposed to receive funds through a subaward to the lead institution; however, an accompanying budget justification must be submitted for each subaward. For further details on budget information, please see elements 12 and 15 below. Applicants may suggest merit reviewers on a page after the summary title page.

(3) One-page abstract: The abstract should appear on a separate single page, headed with the

proposal title, institution(s), investigator(s), total proposed cost and budget period. The abstract shall include an introduction of the problem or issue, rationale, project objectives and/or hypotheses to be tested, and a brief summary of work to be completed. It should be written in the third person. Project abstracts of applications that receive funding may be posted on program related websites.

(4) Project narrative: The description of the proposed project must be no more than 12 pages. The project description must be thorough and clearly indicate the project's relevance to one of the two stated program priorities (refer to Section I.B.) by:

- (a) Identifying the program priority being addressed and, in the case of the research priority, the specific area or areas of research;
- (b) Describing the project's goals and objectives and the methods to accomplish them;
- (c) Describing how applicable and useable the findings and/or outputs of the proposed project will be for its intended end user(s) as well as the broader Gulf of Mexico resource management, scientist, and stakeholder community; and
- (d) Identifying the role(s) of each PI, including a designated lead PI, and all project collaborators.

(5) Data management plan: The data management plan must be no more than two pages in length and conform to the data management requirements detailed in Section IV.G.2.

(6) References cited: Each reference must include the names of all authors in the same sequence they appear in the publication, the article title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. 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 17 page proposal descriptions.

(7) Milestone chart: Provide timelines of major tasks throughout the duration of the proposed project.

(8) Biographical sketch: All PIs and co-PIs must provide summaries of up to two pages that include the following:

- (a) A listing of professional and academic credentials and mailing address;
- (b) A list of up to five publications most closely related to the proposed project and five other significant publications (additional lists of publications, lectures, etc. should not be included); and
- (c) A list of up to five archived datasets most closely related to the proposed project and five other significant archived datasets.

(9) Current and pending support: Describe all current and pending financial/funding support (e.g., federal, state, not-for-profit, industry) for all PIs and co-PIs, including unfunded collaborators making a substantial contribution to the research. Continuing grants must also be included. 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. A current and pending support form is available on the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS) website for your use:

<http://coastalscience.noaa.gov/funding/applicants/forms>. You must respond to the requirement whether or not you have any current and/or pending support.

(10) Permits: A list of all applicable permits that will be required to perform the proposed work. You must respond to this requirement element whether or not permits are required.

(11) Accomplishments from prior federal and state support: If any PI or co-PI identified on the project has received federal or state funding awards in the past five years for research relevant to this funding opportunity, information on the award(s) is required. The following information must be provided:

- (a) The award number, amount, and period of support;
- (b) The title of the project;
- (c) A summary of the results of the completed work;
- (d) Publications resulting from the award;
- (e) Archived datasets resulting from the award;
- (f) A brief description of outputs and outcomes; and
- (g) As appropriate, a description of the relation of the completed work to the proposed work.

(12) Budget narrative/justification: In order to allow reviewers to fully evaluate the appropriateness of costs, all applications must include a detailed budget narrative with 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 and percentage of time requested per year per PI. Support for each PI should be commensurate with their stated involvement each year in the milestones chart (refer to Section IV.B.3.(7)).

Any unnamed personnel (graduate students, postdoctoral 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 and 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. Applicants may include publication costs. For allowable data management costs, refer to Section IV.G.2. For additional information concerning each of the required budget categories and appropriate level of disclosure please see <http://coastalscience.noaa.gov/funding/applicants/requirements>.

A separate budget justification is required for each institution that is proposed to receive funds through a subaward or subcontract to the lead institution.

(13) CD 511 - Certification Regarding Lobbying: Lead institutions can submit these forms through the grants.gov CD511 document placeholder without a hard signature because electronic signatures are allowed on documents from the submitting institution. However, these forms submitted through grant.gov as “Optional Documents” must have valid (e.g., written) signatures that are provided to the lead institution for submission.

(14) SF 424B - Assurances - Non-Construction Programs: Lead institutions can submit these forms through the grants.gov SF 424B document placeholder without a hard signature because electronic signatures are allowed on documents from the submitting institutions. However, these forms submitted through grants.gov as “Optional Documents” must have valid (e.g., written) signatures that are provided to the lead institution for submission.

(15) Standard Form 424A: At time of application submission, all applicants are required to submit a SF-424A Budget Form, which identifies the budget for each fiscal year of the proposal. Place each fiscal year in separate columns in Section B of page 1 on the SF424A. NOTE: this revised 424A Section B format is a NOAA requirement that is not reflected in the Instructions for the SF 424A. The budget figures must correspond with the descriptions contained in the proposal. Multi-investigator applications using a subaward approach must submit a SF-424A for each subaward. Each subaward should be listed as a separate item.

Provide separate budgets for each subaward and contractor regardless of the dollar value and indicate the basis for the cost estimates. Describe products/services to be obtained and indicate the applicability or necessity of each to the project. List all subaward and contractor costs under line item 6.f. contractual on the SF-424A. Signed approval from the institution of each subaward and contractor must be provided. Indirect cost may not be applied to ship costs.

(16) List of collaborators, advisors, and advisees: Provide ONE list that includes all collaborators, advisors, and advisees for each investigator (PI and co-PIs, postdocs, and subawardees), complete with corresponding institutions. Submit only one, combined and alphabetized list per application in an Excel spreadsheet using First Name, Last Name,

Institution for the column headings. 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 whom the investigators may have ongoing collaboration negotiations. Advisees and advisors do not have a time limit. Advisees are persons with whom the individual investigator has had an association as thesis or dissertation 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.

(17) Key Contact Form: At the time of application submission, all applicants must submit the Key Contacts form. This form can be found on the NCCOS website: http://coastalscience.noaa.gov/funding/docs/key_contacts_form.pdf. This form identifies the official applicant contacts.

4. Optional Elements

Applicants may include other materials as listed below in addition to the 17 required elements; these elements are encouraged, but not required:

(1) Letters of support or commitment: Please include any letters of support or commitment as applicable. In particular, consider providing letters from individuals and/or partners confirming contributions to and support for the project, such as team members included in the project but not funded in the budget; end users who will be engaged throughout the project and will use the findings and/or outputs; and individuals or groups that provide access to data or other needs for the project. End users should describe in their letters of support how they anticipate using project findings and/or outputs (e.g., products).

(2) Indirect rate agreement: Please provide the indirect rate agreement for the lead institution and each institution that is proposed to receive funds through a subaward or subcontract to the lead institution.

5. Application Format and Assembly

Applications submitted via grants.gov using the "Apply" function should follow these format guidelines:

Attachments must be submitted in Adobe Acrobat PDF, text document, Excel, or Word 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 from subcontracts or subawards should be combined for each institution into a single file and uploaded in the Optional Form box as Other Attachments.

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 (1-800-518-4726). The Science Program's Associate Director will use programmatic discretion in accepting applications due to documented electronic submission problems. 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.

NOTE: Permits, accomplishments, biographical sketches, and the collaborators list must also be supplied to the lead institution in order for them to be combined within the lead application information.

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 should be received by the federal program office prior to release of 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 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis, or whether an Environmental Assessment is necessary in conformance with requirements of the NEPA. 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 (e.g., NEPA environmental assessment) may delay the award of funds if a project is otherwise selected for funding.

C. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to build the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency

Act, 16 U.S.C. 6106 Note, to the extent applicable, any applicant awarded in response to this Announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), which may be accessed online at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Applicants are also required to use the Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and will be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Part 25, which may be accessed online at: <http://go.usa.gov/3SNae>.

D. Submission Dates and Times

1. Letter of Intent (LOI)

A Letter of Intent (LOI) is required for applying to this Announcement. The deadline for receipt of a LOI for this Announcement is 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on July 8, 2016. LOIs should be submitted by email to Laurie.Golden@noaa.gov.

LOIs received after the deadline will not be reviewed. Any applicant that submits a full application, but did not submit a LOI by the deadline will not be considered and the full application will be returned to the applicant without review.

2. Full Application

The deadline for receipt of full applications at the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science / NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program (NCCOS/RASP) office is 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on September 27, 2016. Applications should be submitted electronically through [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) (<http://www.grants.gov>). Applications received after the deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without further consideration. Investigators submitting applications via [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) are advised to submit well in advance of the deadline.

If use of [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) is not feasible, an applicant is concerned about possible problems associated with the [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) system, or [grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) is unable to accept an application electronically in a timely fashion, an applicant may submit a paper copy of their application. Paper applications must include all application elements described in this Announcement, including an SF-424 form with original ink or valid electronic signature and date from an Authorized Organization Representative, and must be stamped with an official U.S. Postal Service postmark or provided to a commercial carrier with tracking number and receipt before 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on September 27, 2016. Private metered postmarks will not be accepted. Applicants submitting by paper are responsible for tracking their applications and should notify the Science Program's Associate Director (refer to Section VII) that they are submitting by paper.

Late-arriving paper applications will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that:

- (a) The application was provided to a delivery service with delivery to the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, 1305 East-West Highway, SSMC4, Mail Station 8219, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910;
- (b) Delivery was guaranteed by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on the specified closing date; and
- (c) The application was received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time no later than two business days following the closing date. The applicant is responsible for notifying the Science Program's Associate Director (refer to Section VII) of its submission. If an applicant is not notified of receipt of its application by NOAA, the applicant is responsible for contacting the Associate Director and providing documentation that demonstrates the application was provided to the delivery service ahead of the deadline.

E. 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.

F. Funding Restrictions

1. General Funding Restrictions - Indirect Costs: If an applicant has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a federal agency they may choose to negotiate a rate with the DOC or use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 10% of Modified Total Direct Costs (as allowable under 2 C.F.R. §200.414). The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06 (effective Dec 2014). Ship costs may not be included in indirect cost calculations unless ship costs are calculated within the indirect cost rate of the institution. The Science Program will not pay for ship overhead expenses otherwise. If indirect costs are applied, an approved indirect cost agreement will be required before an application can be recommended for funding. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is Lamar Revis, Grants Officer, NOAA Grants Management Division, 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, lamar.revis@noaa.gov.

The Science Program will not fund start up or operational costs for private business ventures and neither fees nor profits will be considered as allowable costs.

2. Funding Restrictions specific to the RESTORE Act

The RESTORE Act stipulates the eligible activities for the Science Program and what the funds may NOT be used for. Per the Act, “The funds ...may not be used for any existing or planned research led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, unless agreed to in writing by the grant recipient.” NOAA has interpreted this language and will apply the criteria below for all research proposed to the Science Program under this Announcement. Final determination of the eligibility of the proposed research will be made by the Program.

If the research being proposed is captured within any of the following three categories, then it is NOT eligible for funding by the Science Program:

- (a) Substantially part of work that is currently tracked in NOAA Line Office Annual Operating Plans (AOPs), any grant or other funding mechanism documentation, or other budgetary or program management documents (using appropriated funds); or
- (b) Substantially part of work that has been proposed in a NOAA budget formulation program change summary (regardless of success) or other budget formulation documents at the NOAA Line Office level since July 2012 (using appropriated funds); or
- (c) Substantially duplicative of efforts implemented by NOAA (i.e., conducted by NOAA federal scientists or contract scientists on behalf of NOAA using appropriated funds).

G. Other Submission Requirements

1. Submission through Grants.gov

The standard NOAA funding application package is available at grants.gov (www.grants.gov). Electronic application packages are strongly encouraged to be submitted through the “Apply” function on grants.gov. Applicants must register with grants.gov before any application materials can be submitted. To use grants.gov, an applicant must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number and be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) (both of which require periodic renewals). Applicants can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS request line at 1-866-705-5711 or online at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>. Applicants can register for SAM online at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/SAM>; allow a minimum of five days to complete the SAM registration which will require the applicant’s Employer Identification Number (EIN). The entire registration process, including grants.gov, DUNS, and SAM, may

take up to three weeks to complete.

After electronic submission of the application through grants.gov, the person submitting the application will receive within the next 24 to 48 hours two email messages from grants.gov updating them on the progress of their application. The first email will confirm receipt of the application by the grants.gov system, and the second will indicate that the application has either been successfully validated by the system before transmission to the grantor agency or has been rejected because of errors. Only validated applications are sent to NOAA for review. After the application has been validated, this same person will receive a third email when the application has been downloaded by the federal agency.

Facsimile transmissions and electronic mail (“email”) submission of full applications will not be accepted.

2. Data Management

A) Data Management Guidance to Proposal Writers

(1) Responsible NOAA Official for questions regarding this guidance and for verifying accessibility of data produced by funding recipients: Frank Parker, Associate Director, NOAA RESTORE Act Science Program, frank.parker@noaa.gov, 240-533-0148.

Responsible NOAA Data Manager for questions regarding data management and implementing this guidance: Jessica Morgan, Scientific Data Coordinator, NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, nccos.data@noaa.gov, 240-533-0300.

(2) Data Accessibility: The Science Program requires that public access to grant-produced data be enabled as follows; a data management plan (refer to Section IV.B.3.(5)) submitted as part of an application should reflect one or more of the following options:

Option A: For the majority of oceanographic and ecological data, except those listed below, funding recipients are expected to submit data to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) for long-term preservation, which will provide public access, archiving, discovery metadata meeting NOAA standards and formats, and a Digital Object Identifier (DOI). The Science Program has held preliminary consultation with NCEI regarding these pending data.

Option B: For any other data not appropriate for submission to NOAA NCEI, funding recipients are expected to submit data to an appropriate data facility (i.e., NIH GenBank for genomics data), in consultation with the NOAA Data Manager, that preserves data, properly

manages archived data to assure their quality, mints DOIs, and makes archived data and related information available to users in a timely and efficient manner. Funding recipients should submit discovery metadata meeting NOAA standards and formats documenting these non-NOAA data archives to the Responsible NOAA Data Manager listed above.

Option C: For limited-release data that are limited by law, regulation, policy, security requirements, commercial or international agreements, or valid technical considerations, funding recipients may request permission not to make data publicly accessible from the Responsible NOAA Official listed above.

(3) Technical Recommendations: The Science Program is not offering specific technical guidance. Proposals are to describe their proposed approach. Use of open-standard formats and methods is encouraged. Definitions of data management terms are included here:

Environmental data are recorded and derived observations and measurements of the physical, chemical, biological, geological, and geophysical properties and conditions of the oceans, atmosphere, space environment, sun, and solid earth, as well as correlative data such as socio-economic data, related documentation, and metadata. Digital audio or video recordings of environmental phenomena (such as animal sounds or undersea video) are included in this definition. Numerical model outputs are included in this definition, particularly if they are used to support the conclusion of a peer-reviewed publication. Data collected in a laboratory or other controlled environment, such as measurements of animals and chemical processes, are included in this definition.

Sharing data means making data publicly visible and accessible in a timely (see below) manner at no cost (or no more than the cost of reproduction), in a format that is machine-readable and based on open standards, along with metadata necessary to find and properly use the data. Data are to be made available in a form that would permit further analysis or reuse: data must be encoded in a machine-readable format, preferably using existing open-standard formats; data must be sufficiently documented, preferably using open metadata standards, to enable users to independently read and understand the data. Data should undergo quality control (QC) and a description of the QC process and results should be referenced in the metadata.

Machine-readable means the data are stored on a computer in a digital format whose structure is well described and the data can be read without the aid of a human. An open-standard format is one that does not require proprietary software to be read. Metadata is documentation that is machine-readable and structured according to an open-standard format that describes the data so that users can search for, access, read, understand, and use the data.

International Organization for Standardization (ISO) EXtensible Markup Language (XML) is an acceptable metadata format.

Timely means no later than publication of a peer-reviewed article based on the data, or two years after the data are collected and verified, or two years after the original end date of the grant (regardless of any extensions or follow-on funding), whichever is soonest, unless a delay has been authorized by the NOAA funding program.

(4) Resources: Science Program resources for data archiving at NOAA NCEI (Option A) have already been identified; proposals should not include such costs. For archiving at a non-NOAA data facility (Option B), those data archiving costs (if known) may be included in proposals. Proposals are permitted to include the costs of additional project-level data management, including: coordinating, organizing, documenting, formatting, or otherwise preparing datasets for submission to NOAA or non-NOAA data facilities; establishing and maintaining data access tools and services and related metadata; and managing non-digital data that are not required to be made publicly accessible, including laboratory notebooks, preliminary analyses, drafts of scientific papers, plans for future research, peer review reports, communications with colleagues, or physical objects, such as laboratory specimens.

B. Data and Publications Sharing Requirement

(1) Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discoverable by and accessible to the general public in a timely fashion (refer to Section IV.2.A.(3)), free of charge or at no more than the cost of reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely-used or open-standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely-used or international standards.

(2) Proposals submitted in response to this Announcement must include a data management plan of up to two pages describing how these requirements will be satisfied. The data management plan should be aligned with the data management guidance (refer to Section IV.2.A.) provided by NOAA in the Announcement. The contents of the data management plan (or absence thereof), and past performance regarding such plans, will be considered as part of proposal review. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project, the tentative date by which data will be shared, the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content, methods for providing data access, approximate total volume of data to be collected, and prior experience in making such data accessible. The costs of data

preparation, accessibility, or archiving may be included in the proposal budget unless otherwise stated in the guidance (refer to Section IV.2.A.). Accepted submission of data to the NCEI is one way to satisfy data sharing requirements; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, which will be covered by the Science Program, particularly for large or unusual datasets.

(3) NOAA may, at its own discretion, make publicly visible the data management plan from funded proposals, or use information from that data management plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data.

(4) Proposal submitters are hereby advised that the final pre-publication manuscripts of scholarly articles produced entirely or primarily with NOAA funding will be required to be submitted to NOAA Institutional Repository after acceptance, and no later than upon publication. Such manuscripts shall be made publicly available by NOAA one year after publication by the journal.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

A) Importance and Applicability (25 percent): This ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For purposes of this competition, the Science Program will evaluate applications based on the following:

- How well the proposed project aligns with the program priority selected by the applicant;
- How well the proposal reflects the applicant's comprehensive understanding of the issue(s) to be addressed; and
- How well the applicant proposes to contribute to our understanding and/or management of the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem.

B) Technical and Scientific Merit (30 percent): 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. For purposes of this competition, the Science Program will evaluate proposals based on the following:

- How clearly the proposal describes project goals and objectives;
- How feasible, scientifically sound, and/or innovative the methods are with respect to the proposal's goals and objectives;
- Whether the proposal demonstrates full compliance with all applicable federal, state, and

local environmental laws;

- How applicable and useable the outputs and/or products of the proposed project will be for its intended user(s); and
- Whether the proposal includes a data management plan including descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project, the tentative date by which data will be shared, the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content, methods for providing data access, and approximate total volume of data to be collected.

C) Overall Qualifications of Applicants (15 percent): This ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For purposes of this competition, the Science Program will evaluate applications based on the capability of the investigator and collaborators to complete the proposed work as evidenced by past research and science application accomplishments; previous cooperative work; and timely communication of findings, data, and other research products.

D) Project Costs (10 percent): The budget is evaluated to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the needs and time-frame of the proposed work. For purposes of this competition, the Science Program will evaluate the completeness of the budget narrative and how realistic the budget is for achieving the project's outcomes.

E) Outreach and Education (20 percent): NOAA assesses whether the proposed work provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For purposes of this competition, the Science Program will evaluate the applicant's proposed process for transferring project findings and/or outputs (e.g., products) to Gulf of Mexico end users (e.g., resource managers, scientists, and/or stakeholders) using the following:

- Whether the proposal identifies end users for the project's findings and/or outputs;
- How engaged the identified end users are in the project planning and/or implementation process;
- How effective the proposed plan, which may include training, is for transferring the project's findings and/or outputs to identified end users; and
- How well the applicant proposes to make project findings and/or outputs known and available to the broader Gulf of Mexico resource management, scientific, and/or stakeholder community.

B. Review and Selection Process

Once a full application has been received by NOAA, an initial administrative review is

conducted to determine if it is timely, responsive, and complete. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that can be easily rectified. Ineligible, incomplete, and/or non-responsive applications may be eliminated from further review. All applications that pass this initial administrative review will undergo merit peer review, which will include independent peer mail review and/or independent peer panel review. The Science Program's Associate Director is the federal program officer for this funding opportunity and is responsible for conducting the merit review process as described in this Announcement.

For peer mail review, proposals will be evaluated and scored individually by at least three professionally and technically qualified reviewers. Both federal and non-federal experts may be used in this process. Each peer mail reviewer will see only certain individual applications within their area of expertise and score them individually on a scale of 0 to 100 in accordance with the assigned weights of the evaluation criteria (refer to Section V.A.).

The peer mail reviewer applies a rating of 1 – 5 to each criterion (refer to Section V.A.), where the rating represents the reviewer's view of how well the applicant met the standards described for a particular criterion using the following scale:

- Poor (1): the applicant has not addressed the criterion adequately and/or it has substantial deficiencies;
- Fair (2): the applicant has minimally addressed the criterion and/or it has moderate deficiencies;
- Good (3): the applicant has addressed the criterion adequately and/or it has low deficiencies;
- Very Good (4): the applicant has addressed the criterion satisfactorily and/or it has no deficiencies; or
- Excellent (5): the applicant has addressed the criterion exceptionally well and/or is outstanding.

The total score (0-100) is then calculated using the weights and ratings for each criterion), as follows:

$$[(\text{Rating (A)} \times 25) + (\text{Rating (B)} \times 30) + (\text{Rating (C)} \times 15) + (\text{Rating (D)} \times 10) + (\text{Rating (E)} \times 20)]/5 = \text{Total score}$$

Total scores from each review are averaged, rounded to the nearest integer, and re-categorized as follows:

- Tier 1: total score of 90 to 100

- Tier 2: total score of 80 to 89
- Tier 3: total score of 70 to 79
- Tier 4: total score of 60 to 69
- Tier 5: total score of 0 to 59

Applications receiving an average total score in Tier 1, 2, or 3 will be sent forward to the independent peer panel review, where they will be evaluated and scored individually by the panelists. Applications receiving an average total score in Tier 4 or 5 (average total score of 0-69) will not be given further consideration and applicants will be notified of non-selection.

The peer panel will be comprised of several individuals with a range of professional and technical expertise such that the panel, as a whole, covers the range of topics addressed by the applications being reviewed. 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. The peer panel shall rate the proposals using the evaluation criteria and weights provided above and used by the mail reviewers. The individual peer panelists' scores shall be averaged for each application and presented to the Associate Director. If a full review (mail and panel) is conducted, only the panel scores will be used to rank each proposal. No consensus advice will be given by the independent peer mail review nor the review panel. The Science Program's Associate Director will neither vote, score, nor participate in discussion of the merits of any applications other than to ask clarifying questions and respond to programmatic questions from the reviewers.

The Associate Director will create a ranking of the applications to be recommended for funding based on the panel scores, selection factors (awards may not necessarily be made in rank order; refer to Section V.C.), and availability of funds for this competition. Following the merit peer review process, applicants recommended for funding may be asked to modify work plans or budgets and provide supplemental information required by the agency. In addition, applications rated by the panel in the Tier 1, 2, or 3 categories that are not funded in the current competition may be considered for funding without having to repeat the competitive review process.

Recommendations for funding, developed by the Associate Director, are sent to the Science Program's Director for review. The Director will solicit input from the Science Program's Executive Oversight Board on the broad portfolio of recommendations; there will be no review by the Executive Oversight Board of individual proposals. The Director then sends their final recommendations for funding to the Selecting Official, the Director of NCCOS, for final funding decisions.

If the Director position is currently filled under an Intergovernmental Personnel Act agreement, the following procedure is in effect: (1) if the Director's home institution has no proposal in the recommended list developed by the Associate Director they will review selections of proposals to fund from the recommended list, and (2) if the Director's home institution has a proposal in the recommended list then they will be recused from participating in the selection process and the Associate Director will solicit input from the Science Program's Executive Oversight Board on the broad portfolio of recommendations and submit their final recommendations for funding to the Selecting Official.

In making final funding decisions, the Selecting Official will award in rank order from the peer-review process unless the proposal(s) is justified to be selected out of rank order based on a selection factor(s) (refer to Section V.C.).

When a decision has been made (whether an award or declination), verbatim anonymous copies of peer reviews and summaries of review panel deliberations, if any, will be made available to the applicant. Declined applications will be held for the required three years, in accordance with current retention requirements, and then destroyed.

The NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.205. In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA may consider items such as the financial stability of an applicant, quality of the applicant's management systems, an applicant's history of performance, previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities. Applicants should be in compliance with the terms of any existing NOAA grants or cooperative agreements and otherwise eligible to receive federal awards, or make arrangements satisfactory to the Grants Officer, to be considered for funding under this competition. All reports due should be received and any concerns raised by the agency should be timely addressed in order to receive a new award. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.207. In addition, NOAA reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final and there is no right of appeal.

C. Selection Factors

Proposals may be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

- 1) Availability of funding;
- 2) Balance/distribution of funds:
 - Geographically;
 - By type of institutions;
 - By type of partners;
 - By research areas; and
 - By project types;
- 3) Whether this project duplicates projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies or science initiatives;
- 4) Program priorities and policy factors (refer to Section I.B.);
- 5) Applicant's prior award performance;
- 6) Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups; and
- 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.

Awards may also be modified for selected projects depending on budget availability or according to the selection factors listed above. NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA program staff.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of applications will begin in September, 2016. Applicants should use a start date of June 1, 2017.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, issued by the NOAA Grants Officer electronically through NOAA's electronic grants management system, Grants Online. The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the appropriate business office of the recipient organization. It is available at <http://go.usa.gov/SNMR>. The Internet Explorer browser should be used with Grants Online.

The DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. A current version of this document is available at <http://go.usa.gov/hKbj>. These terms will be provided in the award package in Grants Online at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov>.

In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review award documents carefully before accepting a federal award to ensure they are fully aware of the relevant terms that have been placed on the award.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1) DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements: The DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register Notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf>.

2) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards: The Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, adopted by the DOC through 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, applies to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>.

3) Limitation of Liability: In no event will NOAA or the DOC be responsible for application preparation costs. Publication of this Announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. 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 or of not receiving an award. Recipients and subrecipients are subject to all applicable federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to federal financial assistance awards.

4) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by 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.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_216/216-6.html, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/nepa_documents/RedDont/G-CEQ-GuidanceRegulations.pdf. 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).

Applicants to be recommended for funding will be required to answer relevant questions from the "Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for NOAA Federal Financial Assistance Applicants" (Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Control No. 0648-0538). The Science Program will determine which questions are relevant to each specific proposal. Answers must be provided before the application can be submitted for final funding approval.

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.

5) Scientific Integrity: The Science Program adheres to the principles of scientific integrity. This policy can be found at <http://nrc.noaa.gov/scientificintegrity.html>.

6) Felony and Tax Certifications for Corporations: In accordance with current federal appropriations law, NOAA will provide a successful corporate applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representative making a certification regarding federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any federal law.

7) Access to Information, Confidentiality, and Proprietary Information: DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the DOC regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA.

Applications submitted in response to this Announcement may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information. Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law.

Proprietary or privileged information patentable ideas, trade secrets, privileged or confidential commercial or financial information, disclosure of which may harm the proposer, should be included in proposals only when such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project. Such information should be clearly marked in the proposal or included as a separate statement accompanying the proposal and should be appropriately labeled with a legend such as, "The following is [proprietary or confidential] information that [name of proposing organization] requests not be released to persons outside the Government, except for purposes of review and evaluation." While NOAA will make every effort to prevent unauthorized access to such material, it is not responsible or liable for the release of such material. Release of Recipient Proposal Information for a proposal that results in an award will be available to the public on request, except for privileged information or material that is personal, proprietary or otherwise exempt from disclosure under law. Appropriate labeling in the proposal aids identification of what may be specifically exempt. Such information will be withheld from public disclosure to the extent permitted by law, including the Freedom of Information Act. Without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure, NOAA will seek to limit disclosure of such information to its employees and to outside reviewers when necessary for merit review of the proposal or as otherwise authorized by law. Portions of proposals resulting in awards that contain descriptions of inventions in which either the Government or the recipient owns a right, title, or interest (including a nonexclusive license) will not normally be made available to the

public until a reasonable time has been allowed for filing patent applications. NOAA will notify the recipient of receipt of requests for copies of funded proposals so the grantee may advise NOAA of such inventions described, or other confidential, commercial or proprietary information contained in the proposal.

C. Reporting

Reporting requirements are described in 2 C.F.R. 200 and in the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. All performance (i.e., technical progress) and financial reports shall be submitted electronically through the Grants Online system unless the recipient does not have internet access. In that case, reports are to be submitted to the Science Program's Associate Director.

In addition, the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 16 U.S.C. 6106 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over \$25,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

Technical Program Information: Frank Parker, Associate Director and federal program officer, 240-533-0148, frank.parker@noaa.gov

Grants Administration Information: Laura Golden, NCCOS/CSCOR Grants Administrator, 240-533-0285, Laurie.Golden@noaa.gov

VIII. Other Information

Checklist for required and requested documents:

- SF-424
- Title page
- Abstract
- Project narrative
- Data management plan
- References
- Milestone chart
- Biographical sketch

- Current and pending support
- Permits (if none, indicate such)
- Accomplishments for prior federal and state support (if none, say so)
- Budget narrative and justification (one for the lead institution and each subaward and subcontract).
- CD-511
- SF-424B
- SF-424A (one for the lead institution and each subaward and subcontract)
- Alphabetized collaborator list (ONE Excel spreadsheet that lists for all)
- Key contact form
- Signed approval from subaward/contractor institutes
- Indirect rate agreement (requested)
- Letters of support (if applicable)

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