

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: 2008 Regional Research, Information Planning and Coordination

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: OAR-SG-2008-2001255

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.417, Sea Grant Support.

Dates: Applications must be received by 4:00 EST, February 5, 2008.

Funding Opportunity Description: To continue the development of regional research and information plans for U.S. coastal, ocean, and Great Lakes areas, NOAA Sea Grant anticipates (depending on appropriations) making available about \$750,000 in FY 2008 for grants to regional planning teams in the following three regions: the Greater New York Bight region, the Mid-Atlantic region, and the Caribbean region.

It is expected that Sea Grant programs within each of these regions will work together and submit one proposal per region that covers a 2-5 year period. The objective is to use Sea Grant's university capabilities to facilitate discussions among the broad range of regional ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes stakeholders to help identify and prioritize critical resource management problems and associated research and information needs necessary for practical solutions.

Depending on appropriations and the number and quality of applications received, NOAA Sea Grant anticipates making three awards of between \$250,000 and \$400,000 each.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Sea Grant College Program (NOAA Sea Grant) was established by Congress to promote responsible use and conservation of the nation's marine and Great Lakes resources. Sea Grant carries out the NOAA mission of stewardship of our country's oceans and atmospheres through a broadly based network of universities.

To achieve balance among ecological, environmental, and social influences in our Nation's coastal, ocean and Great Lakes regions, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has committed in its Strategic Plan (available at http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/pdfs/Strategic_Plans/Strategic_Plan_2006_FINAL_04282005.pdf) to adopting ecosystem-based approaches to management. The transition to ecosystem approaches must be incremental and collaborative, and to accomplish that goal will require an enhanced level of coordination among local and regional stakeholders and state and federal agencies. Decision-makers will require an understanding of how specific ecosystems are affected by human activities and natural phenomena. The ability to forecast and evaluate the results of potential management decisions will depend on fully integrated observations, and the availability of modeling tools to interpret and synthesize the data.

Given the broad array of management-critical problems to be addressed, and the limited resources that can be brought to bear; effective planning and prioritization of research and information needs will be critical to guide the scientific and management communities ('Bridging Boundaries through Regional Marine Research,' National Research Council, 2000; 'An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century,' U.S. Ocean Commission Report, 2004). The NOAA Strategic Plan calls for integrating the concerns, priorities, and expertise of all citizens and sectors in the management of coastal and marine resources.

To focus resources where there is the greatest opportunity for change, the U.S. Ocean Action Plan (2004, <http://ocean.ceq.gov/actionplan.pdf>) committed the Joint Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology to develop a national ocean research priorities plan and an implementation strategy. This will be a valuable step forward, but given the necessary broad scope of a national plan, there will need to be complementary and parallel planning efforts to address more specific issues at the regional level.

About 15 years ago, the Regional Marine Research Program (RMRP) was established

to set priorities for regional marine and coastal research in support of efforts to safeguard the water quality and ecosystem health of ten ocean and coastal regions around the U.S. (the Great Lakes region was not included, but was covered under separate legislation). For each of the ten RMRP regions, research plans were developed by regional committees that involved an array of regional stakeholders and were chaired by Sea Grant Directors. These regional plans serve as useful examples of a well-designed planning process and sources of carefully considered priorities for research toward NOAA's goals. RMRP activities, however, were in most regions limited to planning only, not implementation.

In 2006, the NOAA Sea Grant issued its first Federal Funding Opportunity announcement for Regional Research, Information Planning and Coordination grants for eleven regions: the ten RMRP regions, plus the Great Lakes region. Proposals from eight regions resulted in the award of seven Regional Research, Information Planning and Coordination grants (two regions proposed to work together under a single grant).

This Federal Funding Opportunity announcement is intended to provide support to develop regional research and information plans in the three regions that did not receive grant support in 2006. These three regions are:

1. the Greater New York bight region, composed of the marine and coastal waters off the States of Massachusetts (south of Cape Cod), Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, from Cape Cod to Cape May;
2. the Mid-Atlantic region, composed of the marine and coastal waters off the States of New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina, from Cape May to Cape Fear; and
3. the Caribbean region, composed of the marine and coastal waters off Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands.

Regional Sea Grant Programs will facilitate the planning effort, which should be as inclusive as possible, involving a wide array of stakeholders. Participants could include, for example, state and federal agencies, universities, scientists, local government, industry, and non-governmental organizations. Existing regional organizations such as the Regional Fishery Management Councils and the Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS) Regional Associations, as well as major NOAA programs, laboratories, and joint institutes within each region, should be included in the planning process. For issues which cross regional boundaries, the appropriate set of stakeholders should be included, and the efforts coordinated among the regions.

This activity supports the following NOAA strategic mission goals:

- Protect, Restore and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through Ecosystem-Based Management

- Understand Climate Variability and Change To Enhance Society's Ability To Plan and Respond
- Serve Society's Needs for Weather and Water Information
- Support the Nation's Commerce With Information for Safe, Efficient, and Environmentally Sound Transportation

B. Program Priorities

Each region will be expected to: 1) Establish a regional coordination group to oversee the planning and implementation of the research and information strategy; 2) Conduct a bottom-up needs assessment with broad user and stakeholder input; 3) Identify research and information gaps; 4) Develop a research and information plan for the region that prioritizes actions according to management-critical needs; 5) Develop coordination mechanisms to ensure the transfer of technology and information to the appropriate end users; and 6) Provide an ongoing platform for coordination, collaboration, and resource sharing among participants.

The regional planning efforts are expected to consider the full scope of issues outlined in the U.S. Ocean Commission Report, but the final priorities may be more limited in scope. The research and information plans that result from these efforts must address the essential regional information requirements outlined in the Ocean Commission Report: research; data collection, monitoring, and observations; development of useful information products; and outreach, education, training, and technical assistance for decision makers. Potential investigators are encouraged to review Chapter 5 of the Ocean Commission Report for further guidance as to the content and intent of these plans.

Plans should include a clear statement of the major regional ocean and coastal management issues, an outline of existing scientific and informational resources, an analysis of the information necessary to address the critical issues, and a prioritized list of actions to be taken. In addition to addressing research needs, the plans should discuss how observational data and decision-support tools might be integrated with the research to best support the needs of the management community. Each plan will include a prioritized list of forecast products that would aid in the transition toward regional ecosystem-based management.

The plan should take into account existing plans and ongoing planning efforts by various regional and local organizations. Where there is already substantial ongoing activity, the planning efforts should be designed to add value to those efforts, for example by expanding the scope of existing plans, or by establishing priorities among

already identified needs.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the Regional Research, Information Planning and Coordination is provided by 33 U.S.C. 1121 et seq., as amended. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s): 11.417, Sea Grant Support

D. Cost Principles

N/A

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Depending on appropriations, a total of \$250,000 of federal Sea Grant funds will be made available for each eligible region over two years to cover the completion of a regional research and information plan (assuming appropriations are available).

Proposals may request up to an additional three years of staff support (up to \$50,000 per region per year) to help implement completed regional plans. The maximum support requested for an individual application is \$400,000, of which no more than \$250,000 can be for the first two years of the proposed project.

Additional support may be made available in subsequent competitions for regional research and outreach activities.

Approximately three awards will be made in FY 2008. It is expected that multiple Sea Grant Programs and institutions will be involved in each region, and that they will designate in their application a single managing Sea Grant Program, to whom the grant award would be made. All other participating Sea Grant Programs and institutions must be handled through subawards.

B. Project/Award Period

Awards are anticipated to start on June 1, 2008. Projects may last up to five years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through grants.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Proposals may be submitted only by the designated managing Sea Grant College or Institutional Program.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Matching funds equal to at least 50 percent of the Federal funding must be provided to support the proposed regional planning.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Applications are available through grants.gov, under Federal Funding Opportunity number OAR-SG-2008-2001255.

For those applicants without internet access, application forms can be acquired by contacting the individuals listed under section VII, Agency Contacts.

Electronic versions of Sea Grant 90-2 and 90-4 forms (OMB Control No. 0648-0362) can be accessed at <http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov/funding/forms.html>, or may be requested from the Agency Contacts listed in section VII.

B. Content and Form of Application

Failure to follow the provisions under 'Format Requirements' and 'Content Requirements' below will result in applications being rejected without review.

1. Format Requirements

Narrative attachments to an electronic application should be composed in Portable Document Format (PDF) or a common word processing format, and when printed out should meet all format requirements.

The number of pages in the application must be in accordance with the page limitations specified under 'Content Requirements.' All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 12-point font with one-inch margins on 8-1/2" x 11" paper. The project description may not exceed 15 pages, exclusive of title page, project summary, literature cited, budget information, current and pending support, resumes of investigators, and letters of support. No other appendices are permitted.

2. Content Requirements

The following information must be included:

a. **Signed Title Page:** The title page should be signed by the Principal Investigator and the institutional representative. Electronic signatures submitted through grants.gov satisfy this requirement. Identify the Principal Investigators and collaborators and the institutional representative by affiliation and contact information. List the total amount of Federal funds being requested for each budget period; for projects involving multiple institutions, the total should include all sub-recipient budgets.

b. **Project Summary:** It is critical that the project summary accurately describes the planning process being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. Applicants should use the Sea Grant Project Summary Form 90-2 (OMB Control No. 0648-0362).

c. **Project Description (15-page limit):**

(1) **Introduction/Background/Justification:** The applicant may wish to include in this

section: (i) Brief description of regional setting, management issues; (ii) Current planning efforts, including significant gaps in planning; (iii) Information that already exists to support regional planning; and (iv) Existing group(s) coordinating regional activities.

(2) Proposed approach to developing the regional research and information plan: Should include at least the following: (i) Who would be involved, including specific plans to engage regional stakeholders and to ensure close coordination and integration with existing research and management planning efforts; (ii) How the planning effort would be organized (e.g. leadership, committee structure, workshops, meetings, plans for coordination with NOAA staff); (iii) The process for developing and finalizing regional priorities; (iv) How the final plan would be written and the review process that would be used; and (v) Plans for developing support to implement the priority actions.

d. Literature Cited

e. Budget and Budget Justification: Although the first two years of the award is anticipated to be funded from a single year appropriation, completion of the regional research and information plan may extend for up to 2 years. There should be a separate budget for each year of the project, as well as a cumulative annual budget for the entire project. Applicants should use the Sea Grant Budget Form 90-4 (OMB Control No. 0648-0362). Subcontracts should have a separate budget page. Indicate matching funds if provided. Provide justification for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.

f. Current and Pending Support: Provide information on all current and pending Federal support for ongoing projects and proposals, including subsequent funding in the case of continuing grants. Include the proposed project and all other projects or activities using Federal assistance and requiring a portion of time of the principal investigator or other senior personnel. Describe the relationship between the proposed project and these other projects, and the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the projects must be stated. Similar information must be provided for all proposals already submitted or submitted concurrently to other possible sponsors.

g. Resumes (2 pages maximum per investigator).

h. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the standard application package available through grants.gov. Electronic versions of Sea Grant 90-2 and 90-4 forms can be accessed at <http://www.seagrants.noaa.gov/funding/forms.html>.

Because this opportunity only supports grants for research planning and coordination, which are activities categorically excluded from NEPA by NOAA Administrative Order 216-6, no additional NEPA information needs to be included in the application.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Full proposals must be received by 4:00 pm EST February 5, 2008. Submissions through grants.gov will have a date and time indicator on them. Submissions in hardcopy will be hand-stamped upon receipt. Applications that are not received by the deadline will not be reviewed.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, 'Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.'

E. Funding Restrictions

No special restrictions apply.

F. Other Submission Requirements

none

Applications are to be submitted through grants.gov, under Federal Funding Opportunity number OAR-SG-2008-2001255.

Applicants without internet access may submit a hard copy application, but must include documentation stating their lack of internet access. Hard copy applications (one UNBOUND original and one copy) should be submitted to: Mrs. Geri Taylor, National Sea Grant College Program, R/SG, Attn: Regional Research Competition, Room 11841, NOAA, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (phone number for express mail applications is 301-734-1066.)

Faxed or emailed applications will not be accepted.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The five evaluation criteria and weighting of the criteria are as follows:

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the program goals (20 percent). This ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, State, or local activities. For this competition, this criterion ascertains whether there are major issues in the region that can be dealt adequately with the proposed planning process. Will the planning and coordination process add value to ongoing efforts to address those regional issues?
2. Technical/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 this competition, this criterion assesses the quality of the proposed planning process including the adequacy of the needs assessment, the degree of stakeholder participation, the process for identifying potential actions and deciding on priorities, and the adequacy of the review process. Will there be a broad and open process that includes stakeholders at all levels within the region from a diversity of sectors, and will there be meaningful engagement with other regional organizations? Is there an effective plan for coordination and implementation of the regional plan?
3. Overall qualifications of applicants (20 percent). This ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For this competition this criterion ascertains whether the proposed planning team possesses the necessary education, experience, breadth, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project.
4. Project costs (10 percent). The Budget is evaluated to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. For this competition, this criterion also assesses whether the requested budget is consistent with the proposed activities.
5. Outreach and education (20 percent). NOAA assesses whether this project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For this competition, this criterion assesses the likelihood of substantial public engagement in the planning process. Will the plan be communicated effectively to stakeholders and potential sources of funding support?

B. Review and Selection Process

An initial administrative review is conducted to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the application.

All proposals will be subjected to peer review by the National Sea Grant Office based on the evaluation criteria listed above. Evaluation will be by a review panel of scientists and managers from government, academic, and/or the private sector, who will provide individual comments and ratings on the applications.

The Program Coordinator will review the ratings of the applications and the review comments and make recommendations to the National Sea Grant Director. The rating from the review process will be the primary consideration in deciding which of the proposals will be recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Officer. The Director shall select awards in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon any of the following factors described in the next section.

C. Selection Factors

The Sea Grant Director will award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding
2. Balance/distribution of funds
 - a. Geographically
 - b. By type of institutions
 - c. By type of partners
 - d. By research areas
 - e. By project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other Federal agencies

4. Program priorities and policy factors
5. Applicant's prior award performance
6. Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

For Selection Factor 4, the program priorities and policy factors are set out in Section 1.B. Selection Factor 5 includes reporting of results.

Applicants may be asked to respond to questions or modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. Subsequent grant administration procedures will be in accordance with current agency grants procedures. A summary statement of the evaluation by the review panel will be provided to each applicant.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, awards are expected to be made by June 1, 2008.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

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

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Limitation of Liability. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

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

C. Reporting

Financial reports and performance reports are to be submitted electronically to the NOAA grant accounting system, Grants Online, in accordance with the schedule and instructions set down in the award agreement.

VII. Agency Contacts

Contact Dr. Leon M. Cammen, Director, National Sea Grant College Program, 1315 East-West Highway, R/SG, Rm 11841, Silver Spring, MD 20910; tel: (301) 734-1088; e-mail: oar.hq.nsgo.competitions@noaa.gov

VIII. Other Information

none