

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NMFS-HCPO-2009-2001511

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.441, Regional Fishery Management Councils.

Dates: Proposals must be received by 5 p.m. eastern time on November 3, 2008.

Funding Opportunity Description: The NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans (CRFMPPG) provides funding to the Regional Fishery Management Councils for projects to conserve and manage coral reef fisheries, as authorized under the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. Projects funded through the CRFMPPG are for activities that 1) provide better scientific information on the status of coral reef fisheries resources, critical habitats of importance to coral reef fishes, and the impacts of fishing on these species and habitats; 2) identify new management approaches that protect coral reef biodiversity and ecosystem function through regulation of fishing and other extractive uses; and 3) incorporate conservation and sustainable management measures into existing or new Federal fishery management plans for coral reef species. Proposals selected for funding through this solicitation will be implemented through a Cooperative Agreement. The role of NOAA in the CRFMPPG is to help identify potential projects that reduce impacts of fishing on coral reef ecosystems, strengthen the development and implementation of the projects, and assist in coordination of these efforts with Federal, state, territory or commonwealth management authorities and various coral reef user groups. Funding up to \$1,050,000 is expected to be available for CRFMPPG Cooperative Agreements in FY 2009. These funds will be divided equally among the Atlantic and Pacific to maintain the geographic split required by the Act. The NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program anticipates that awards will range from \$175,000-\$525,000.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

Pursuant to the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (Act), and subject to the availability of funds, the Secretary of Commerce through the NOAA Administrator is authorized to provide matching grants of financial assistance for coral reef conservation projects through the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program (Program). Proposals must address the goals and purposes of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (Act 16 U.S.C. 6401, 6403, P.L. 106-562) and address coral reef conservation priorities identified below.

NOAA published the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program Implementation Guidelines (Guidelines) in the Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 76, page 19396, on Friday, April 19, 2002. The Guidelines provide broad eligibility criteria for coral reef conservation activities, and also created six program categories under the Program for awarding financial assistance. The Guidelines can be found at: <http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov/>. This solicitation announces availability of funding for one of those six categories: Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans.

The principal objectives of the Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grant Program (CRFMPPG) are to support programs and projects by the Regional Fishery Management Councils (Councils) to conserve and manage coral reef fisheries by (1) reducing the adverse impacts of fishing and other extractive uses on coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and (2) incorporating conservation and sustainable management measures into existing or new Federal fishery management plans (FMPs). This program will support projects and activities by the Councils with responsibilities for fishery management plans that include coral reefs or fishery resources that depend on coral reef ecosystems, as established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 et seq.). Successful projects will be those that have a high probability of reducing adverse impacts of extractive uses. These projects should be directed towards activities that provide better scientific information, increased coordination, better enforcement of fishery regulations, and new management approaches that protect coral reef biodiversity and ecosystem function through regulation of fishing and other extractive uses. First priority will be given to proposals for coral reef activities in the Council's jurisdiction. Proposals for complementary activities of high conservation value within state waters that are fully coordinated with appropriate state, territory or commonwealth management authorities will also be accepted.

For fisheries activities affecting state or territorial fisheries resources and habitats,

including workshops, management forums, fisheries independent and dependent research, and other conservation, management and enforcement initiatives, letters of support for the activity from the relevant state or territorial government organization is required. Proposed activities should be in addition to those currently supported by NMFS and should not replace support for existing Council staff. The CRFMPGP will not support normal Council activities or responsibilities, or activities that do not pertain directly to coral reefs and coral reef fisheries.

B. Program Priorities

For this solicitation, all applications must fall within at least one of the 7 categories:

- (a) identification, mapping, characterization, monitoring and protection of critically important habitats of coral reef fishes and associated spawning populations;
- (b) monitoring reef fish stocks;
- (c) identification of the adverse impacts of fishing gear and fishing methods and implementation of actions to reduce habitat damage;
- (d) assessment of the adequacy of current coral reef fishing regulations and revision of regulations as needed;
- (e) education and outreach efforts to recreational and commercial fishers;
- (f) enhanced enforcement of fishery regulations and/or no-take fishery resources;
- (g) ecosystem-scale studies and inclusion of ecosystem approaches into coral reef FMP's.

Proposed projects/activities must support development or improvement of coral reef fishery or ecosystem management plans or contribute to the identification of specific actions to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources and mitigate habitat damage caused by destructive fishing gears or methods.

The priorities are not listed in any particular order and each is of equal importance.

Details of the 7 categories are as follows:

a. Identification, mapping, characterization, monitoring and protection of critically important habitats of coral reef fishes and associated spawning populations: Studies that identify, map and characterize fisheries habitat (including essential fish habitat, habitat areas of particular concern, and spawning aggregation sites) in U.S. coral reef ecosystems, assess the condition of the habitat, and determine the spatial extent of fishing activities. Special priority will be given to studies associated with coral reef areas that are currently, permanently, or seasonally closed to fishing, or that may merit inclusion in an expanded network of no-take ecological reserves. Eligible activities include multi-beam or sidescan sonar mapping and ground truthing, habitat characterization, and monitoring of such areas, including deeper coral reefs, banks and beds.

b. Monitoring reef fish stocks: Monitoring reef fish stocks in existing no-take marine reserves and reference sites on coral reefs in the Council's jurisdiction to understand the status of fishery resources and effects of fishing, and to evaluate the effectiveness of reserves. Projects can include targeted assessments of coral reef fishery stocks for which overfishing is strongly suspected, improved means of data collection from harvesting activity for both target and non-target species, and compilation of existing background information on currently unassessed coral reef fishery stocks. Fishery independent and fishery dependent monitoring should focus on efforts that will improve stock analysis for species of concern that may qualify for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing, high value fisheries species, species targeted for the aquarium trade, ecologically important species (e.g., herbivores) and other indicator species. Projects could also include socioeconomic monitoring of fisheries, implementation of observer programs and mechanisms to improve reporting of catch for both food and aquarium species.

c. Identification of the adverse impacts of fishing gear and fishing methods and implementation of actions to reduce habitat damage: Studies, workshops, or consultations with fishermen and other stakeholders to identify and reduce adverse effects of fishing on coral reefs, with emphasis on the effects of specific gear types and inappropriate fishing techniques that contribute to habitat destruction, overfishing and damage to non-target species through bycatch. Projects can include evaluations of the impacts of gear types, and the identification of additional gear and anchoring restrictions.

d. Assessment of the adequacy of current coral reef fishing regulations and revision of regulations as needed: Studies, workshops, or consultations with resource managers, fishermen, local and National governments, and other stakeholders to assess the adequacy of current fishing regulations within the Council's jurisdiction, and to identify new regulations that are needed for commercial and recreational coral reef fisheries. This could include assessment of coral reef regulations for commercial and recreational fisheries in state waters, if these complement Federal FMPs and regulations.

e. Enhanced enforcement of fishery regulations and/or no-take fishery resources: Activities geared towards improving enforcement capacity for fisheries regulations, especially in remote locations and marine protected areas. Projects could involve efforts conducted with federal, State and non-government partners to develop and expand vessel monitoring systems, radar systems and other surveillance programs; workshops to assist enforcement officers in understanding FMPs, recent amendments to these plans and associated regulations; and training efforts to improve the ability of enforcement officers to identify managed species.

f. Education and outreach efforts to recreational and commercial fishers: Enhanced education and outreach to recreational and commercial fishermen specifically targeted to reduce the adverse impacts of fishing on coral reef ecosystems. Activities could include development of web-based educational tools, outreach brochures, videos and other materials to inform the public of existing and revised fisheries regulations.

g. Studies to understand and incorporate ecosystem-scale considerations into coral reef fishery management plans: Studies needed to understand ecosystem effects of fishing on coral reefs, including: field research and development of models to improve our understanding of larval pathways, trophic interactions and ecosystem impacts associated with fishing, and habitat impacts associated with certain types of fishing gear and practices

C. Program Authority

Authority for the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program is provided by Section 6403 (Coral Reef Conservation Program) of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (16 U.S.C. 6401 et seq).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

This solicitation announces that approximately \$1,050,000 is expected to be available for cooperative agreements in support of coral reef conservation activities for Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans (CRFMPGP) in FY 2009. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon Fiscal year 2009 Congressional appropriations. The NOAA Coral reef Conservation Program anticipates that typical project awards will range from about \$175,000 to \$525,000; NOAA will not accept proposals for over \$525,000 under this solicitation. Equal funding will be provided to the Atlantic and Pacific, up to a maximum of \$525,000 for activities in the Western Pacific, and a maximum of \$525,000 for activities in the South Atlantic, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Activities approved by NOAA will be awarded as new cooperative agreements through the NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation (HC). The number of awards made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested for each project, the merit and ranking of the proposals, and the amount of funds made available to the Program by Congress. The funds have not yet been appropriated for this program, and 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.

B. Project/Award Period

Projects for a period of 12 or 18 months from the approved start date of the project will be considered under the CRFMPGP. In general, the earliest start date for projects will be October 1, 2009. Funding for subsequent years will require submission of a new application, which will compete with other project proposals submitted during the subsequent budget period. If an applicant wishes to continue work on a project funded through this program beyond the project period, and obligated award funds have not been expended by the end of the period, the applicant must submit a request for a no cost extension through www.grantsonline.gov prior to the end of the award. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond the 12 or 18 month award period is at the total discretion of NOAA.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will be funded through a 12 or 18 month cooperative agreement. Substantial involvement by NOAA staff can include 1) the development of projects and activities for support under this solicitation that contribute to better management of coral reef fisheries, 2) assistance with permitting and coordination with other state, territorial or federal activities, 3) tracking the progress of activities through site visits and progress report evaluation, 4) involvement in public meetings and workshops, and 5) developing protocols to evaluate the success of specific activities

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are limited to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, and the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing or matching is required under this program. The Administrator has waived the matching requirement for the Fishery Management Councils as discussed in Section VII of the Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program Implementation Guidelines (Federal register Vol. 67, No. 76, page 19396, Friday, April 19, 2002.). This waiver is based on the fact that the Councils are funded solely by awards from the U.S. Federal Government, and therefore, do not have the ability to generate matching funds.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Permits and Approvals It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state, and local government permits and approvals for the proposed work. It is the applicant's responsibility to request and obtain any necessary permits or letters of agreement prior to award from the appropriate government agencies. Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential adverse impact on the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of environmental permits must be included in the proposal package. 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 to conform to the requirements of NEPA. For those applications needing an environmental assessment, applicants will be informed after the peer review stage and will be requested to assist in the preparation of the assessment. Final approval of the award and authorization for expenditure of funds are dependent on the applicant obtaining the necessary permits and approval of the NEPA analysis by NOAA. Failure to apply for and/or obtain Federal, state, and local permits, approvals, letters of agreement, or failure to provide environmental analyses where necessary (i.e., NEPA environmental assessment) will delay or prevent the award of funds for projects that have been preliminarily selected for funding.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Contact Liz Fairey, 301-713-3459 or by e-mail at liz.fairey@noaa.gov for questions regarding submission requirements and to obtain electronic copies of all Federal forms. Technical point of contact for NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grants Program is Jennifer Koss, 301-713-3459, extension 195 or e-mail at Jennifer.koss@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application

Each application should include: 1) Federal application forms specified above 2) Cover sheet 3) Project Summary 4) Narrative Project Description 5) Narrative Budget Summary 6) Curriculum vitae of primary project personnel 7) Relevant

letters of support 8) Copies of all necessary permits, or an indication that the applicant has applied for permits 9) Other relevant attachments important to the overall understanding and evaluation of the proposed project

For each proposal, the entire application (not including federal forms and letters of support) should not exceed 30 pages. This limit applies to the narrative project description, narrative budget summary, descriptions of qualification, letters of support and no more than five pages of other attachments, and should use 12-point font on letter size paper.

Applications submitted through www.grants.gov should include only three files in addition to the federal forms: 1) cover sheet, project summary and narrative; 2) the narrative budget and detailed narrative; and 3) all other attachments, including resumes, maps, letters of support and permits combined into one file. PDF is the preferred format.

a. Cover Sheet:

A cover sheet must be included for each application. The cover sheet must list (1) the project title, (2) applicant organization, (3) principal investigator or contact, (4) contact information, (5) specific priority or priorities to which they are responding, (6) geographic location of the project, (7) amount of grant funds requested, (8) project start date and project end date, and (9) a one paragraph summary of the scope of the project. Priorities are listed in 'Funding Opportunity Description, Section Program Priorities'. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list first the priority that most closely reflects the overall objective of the proposal, followed by additional priorities. Projects can start no earlier than Oct, 1, 2009.

b. Project Summary (1-page limit): Each application must contain a summary describing:

- (1) Status and magnitude of the issue(s) addressed in the jurisdiction where the project will occur.
- (2) Recent actions undertaken to address the issue(s).
- (3) How the project will be applied towards the goal of improving or amending FMP_s
- (4) Summary of the scope of work (specific tasks to be accomplished and proposed techniques).
- (5) Expected outcomes and how performance will be measured.
- (6) Anticipated partners.

c. Narrative Project Description (20 page limit). The Narrative should be no more than 20 pages long (in 12-point font) and must include a clear presentation of the proposed work. Each task within the project must be completely and accurately described. The narrative should include: (1) specific objectives, milestones, timelines, and performance measures for the period of the proposed work, and the expected outcomes; (2) relation to longer-term goals of improving or amending coral reef

FMPs; and (3) relation to other work planned, anticipated, or underway. Each project must be described as follows:

- i. Identification of issues(s): Identify the problem/issue(s) the project intends to address and describe its significance to the conservation of coral reefs.
- ii. Project objectives: Identify the CRFMGP objective, listed under A. Funding Opportunity Description, 2. Program Priorities, to which the project's objective(s) correspond. Objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; and, attainable within the time, money and human resources available. Projects should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures.
- iii. Project narrative: The project narrative is the scientific or technical action plan of activities that are to be accomplished during each budget period of the project. This should include detailed descriptions of activities including information on how these activities will help improve coral reef fishery management plans or reduce impacts to coral reef ecosystems, collaborators, milestones, and expected products resulting from a successfully completed project. A separate narrative should be presented for each activity described of the proposal.

The narrative should respond to the following questions: 1) What specific activities does the project include and how do these activities relate to the project's goals and objectives? 2) Who will be responsible for carrying out each activity? Highlight activities that will be conducted by co-investigators or cooperators, or by subcontractors, volunteers, and others designated as co-investigators or cooperators. If the work is subcontracted out, please provide documentation indicating how the contractor was chosen and evidence that multiple bids were solicited. 3) What specific methods or techniques will be applied to complete the activities? 4) What are the project milestones and timelines? List milestones, describing specific activities and associated timelines necessary to meet them. Describe the timelines in increments (e.g., month 1, month 2, etc.), rather than by specific dates. 5) What are the major outcomes, results, or products expected? Describe expected outcomes, results, or products that will directly relate to the CRFMGP objectives. Identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities, the potential impacts of this proposed project on the conservation of coral reefs, and how success will be measured. 6) What are the long term goals of the project? Describe how the proposed activities contribute to improvement of existing coral reef fishery management plans, development/improvement of a coral reef ecosystem management plan, contribute to the identification of specific actions to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources, or mitigate habitat damage caused by destructive fishing gears or methods? If the work is one component of a larger project (or the activity is a pilot project for a larger initiative), and proposed activities will continue after the end of the grant period, describe future activities and potential future funding sources (and other mechanisms) to continue the work. If the goal of the project is to build capacity for improved conservation, describe proposed plans to

ensure the activities continue into the future and how success will be evaluated.

List the programs (Federal, state, territorial or local governmental activities) this project would affect and describe how the project coordinates with relevant state, territorial, or local governmental and non-governmental agencies, and if applicable, NOAA regional activities.

Describe how the project will be organized and managed. The lead organization and person listed as the technical contact should be identified as the principal investigator. The principal investigator may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the principal investigator, there must be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and principal investigator (e.g., applicant will be responsible for managing the grant funds and the principal investigator will be responsible for completing the project milestones on time and within budget, etc.).

d. Narrative Budget Summary:

Provide a detailed breakdown of costs by category (object class) and the corresponding direct and indirect cost totals. Indicate whether the project has been submitted for funding consideration elsewhere, and what amount has been requested or secured from other sources. A budget should be provided for the entire project, along with separate budgets for each of the activities described in the proposal. If components of a proposal are being conducted by a subcontractor, a detailed breakdown of the contract using the same object classes must be provided. Funds for salaries and fringe benefits may be requested only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the proposed project and whose salaries and fringe benefits are directly related to specific products or outcomes of the proposed project. Some indication of the total number of hours required to complete the activity and/or hourly rates must be provided. NOAA strongly encourages applicants to request reasonable amounts of funding for salaries and fringe benefits to ensure that your proposal is competitive. Proposals can include the support for a maximum of one full-time equivalent working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities.

We will not consider fees, fund-raising activities, travel for Federal employees, salaries for Federal employees, or profits as allowable costs in the proposed budget. The total costs of a project consist of all allowable costs you incur in accomplishing project activities during the project period. Project costs can only include support for activities conducted between the effective start date and end date of the award, and cannot include activities undertaken either before or after the agreed upon dates. Applicants will not be reimbursed for time expended or costs incurred in developing a project or preparing the application, or in any discussions or negotiations with us prior to the award.

e. Letters of Support of activities affecting local jurisdictions. For activities affecting

state or territorial fisheries resources and habitats, including workshops, management forums fisheries independent and dependent research, and other conservation, management and enforcement initiatives, letters of support for the activity from Applicant must provide evidence of support for the project by appropriate representatives of States or other government jurisdictions in which the project will be conducted.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be submitted to www.grants.gov by 5 PM EST on November 3, 2008 to be considered for funding. If grants.gov cannot be reasonably used, applications must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt by November 3, 2008. Applications postmarked or provided to a delivery service after that time will not be accepted for funding. Applications submitted via U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. In any event, applications received later than 15 business days following the postmarked closing date will not be accepted. There will be no extensions beyond these dates. If an application is not submitted through grants.gov or postmarked by the deadline listed above, it will not be reviewed or considered for FY 2009 funding. If internet access is unavailable, hard copies can be submitted to: Jennifer Koss, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation (F/HC), 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. ATTN: CRFMPGP Project Applications. Applicants submitted by mail are required to include original signed copies of the Federal financial assistance forms. Electronic copies of the project narrative and budget narrative are requested with the submission of a paper application. Please submit these to Jennifer.koss@noaa.gov.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this CRFMPGP are subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Specific information regarding Intergovernmental Review can be found above in Section IV. Application and Submission Information, D. Intergovernmental Review.

E. Funding Restrictions

a. Ineligible Projects: These funds are not intended to support normal Council activities or responsibilities. The following categories of activities or expenses are not eligible for funding: 1) Meetings and travel necessary to conduct normal Council business including regular Advisory Panel, Stock Assessment Panel or Scientific and Statistical Committee meetings, Environmental Impact Statement hearings; other

public hearings; Council meetings; etc. 2) Regular Council reports and information dissemination, including annual FMP reports, FMP amendments, public notices, advertisements, etc. 3) Council staff aside from a maximum of one full-time equivalent working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities. 4) Activities related to FMPs that do not directly include coral reef resources.

b. Pre-award Notification Requirements: The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification of Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register Notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696) is applicable to this solicitation.

c. Indirect Cost Rates: The budget may include an amount for indirect costs that are applied to specific activities or components of the proposal being conducted by external (non-Council) contractors, if the contractor has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. For this solicitation, the Federal share of the indirect costs must not exceed the lesser of either the indirect costs the applicant would be entitled to if the negotiated Federal indirect cost rate were used or 15 percent of the direct costs proposed.

d. Allowable Costs: Costs that are directly related and can be traced to the cost of carrying out the project, and that are within approved budget categories, may be charged to the award. Funds awarded may not necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment, supplies, and travel for activities specifically pertaining to the agreed upon elements of the proposal, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable." Funds can be used to support a maximum of one full-time position for an individual working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities identified in the proposal. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the Office of Management and Budget Circulars A-122, "Cost Principles for Nonprofit Organizations" is at 2 CFR, Part 230 2 ; A-21, "Cost Principles for Education Institutions" is at 2 CFR, Part 220; and A-87, "Cost Principles for State, Local and Indian Tribal Governments" is at 2 CFR, Part 225.

Funds cannot be used to support (1) normal Council activities or responsibilities including regular Council reports and information dissemination, (2) meetings and travel necessary to conduct normal Council business, (3) Council staff involved in activities other than coral reef conservation projects outlined in the proposal, (4) Council activities related to fishery management plans that do not directly include coral reef resources, and (5) general supplies and equipment including office supplies, computers and computer programs. Pre-award costs are generally unallowable. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be October 1, 2009. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for proposed coral reef conservation activities.

F. Other Submission Requirements

The application process requires submission of a complete application, subject to the submission date and time listed below. Applications must include a cover sheet, project summary, the narrative description of the budget and proposed project, applicable supporting documentation, and completed Federal forms. Applications must follow the format described here. Failure to follow these requirements will result in the application being returned without review.

The required forms are as follows: 1) Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424 (9/03 version or newer) 2) Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: SF-424A 3) Assurances, Non-construction Programs: SF-424B 4) Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters: Drug Free Workplace Environment: CD-511 5) CD-512 (remains with applicant-do not submit as part of the application package)

Applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov, unless an applicant does not have internet access. In that case, hard copies with original signatures may be sent to:

Jennifer Koss, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, NOAA Fisheries, Office of Habitat Conservation (F/HC1), 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. ATTN: CRCGP Project Applications. Electronic copies of the project narrative and budget narrative are requested when submitting by mail (liz.fairey@noaa.gov), however e-mail applications submitted without a mailed hard copy with appropriate postal date stamp will not be accepted.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to proposals ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below.

Importance and Applicability of Proposal (Score = 0-30): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. Applications will be evaluated on clear identification of project goals and objectives and the ability to link those goals and objectives to project activities and the applicability of the project to the CRFMPPG

goals. Reviewers will consider: 1) Whether the proposed work contributes to improved understanding, conservation, management, or protection of coral reef fisheries and fish habitat in the U.S. waters and the Freely Associated States; 2) How significant the proposed work is, when considered in the context of the location of the activities and the application in a broader regional or national context; 3) To what extent the proposed activities contribute to improvement of existing coral reef fishery management plans, development/improvement of a coral reef ecosystem management plan, contribute to the identification of specific actions to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources, or mitigate habitat damage caused by destructive fishing gears or methods?; and 4) The need for the proposed coral reef activity in the jurisdiction; the contribution of potential outcomes, results, or products to coral reef fisheries conservation and management in that jurisdiction; and, the amount of collaboration with local, state and territorial governments.

Technical/ Scientific Merit (Score = 0-40): This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Applications will be scored based on their clear identification of performance evaluation methods and the suitability of those methods for evaluating the success or failure of the project in terms of meeting its original goals and objectives. Reviewers will evaluate: 1) The completeness and adequacy of detail in the project description and methodology, including a realistic implementation plan achievable in the 12 or 18 month project period, and sufficient detail to allow a NEPA analysis; 2) Overall technical feasibility, including whether the proposed approach is technically sound and uses appropriate methods that are likely to achieve project goals and objectives in relation to improving coral reef fishery/ecosystem management plans or reducing impacts to coral reef ecosystems; 3) Whether there are effective mechanisms to evaluate project success, including clearly stated coral reef fisheries conservation objectives and goals, the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results in the time line specified in the statement of work, and the inclusion of quality assurance considerations if data collection is proposed; and 4) The suitability of products and deliverables, including applicability to relevant audiences, innovativeness, extent of duplicity with previous work, and likelihood of producing high quality results and outcomes that benefit coral reef stakeholders and ecosystems.

Overall Qualification of Applications (Score = 0-10): This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. The overall qualifications of the project will be evaluated based on: 1) The capacity of the applicant and associated project personnel (and proposed contractors, if activities are subcontracted) to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as indicated by the qualifications and past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in designing, implementing and effectively managing and overseeing projects that benefit coral reef fisheries and fish habitat. Consideration will be made to previous awards received by the Principal Investigator and outcomes, results, or products resulting from such awards. 2) The facilities and/or administrative resources and capabilities

available to the applicant to support and successfully manage the restoration work, including the availability of NOAA or other technical expertise to guide the project to a successful completion. Applicants with demonstrated or potential NOAA involvement in or support for the proposed project may score higher on this criterion.

Project Costs (Score = 0-10): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. The budget should reflect the ability of the work to be completed for the funding and timing proposed and a demonstrated need for funding. The itemized costs and the overall budget must be justified and allocated appropriately. Applicants must provide detailed budget information for activities that are subcontracted, including labor costs of contractors.

Outreach and Education (Score = 0-10): This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. The reviewers will evaluate whether information about or the findings of this work is disseminated to the appropriate user groups and if the proposed outreach/education methods appropriate for this type of work. Reviewers will evaluate: 1) Whether information about or the findings of this work is disseminated to the appropriate user groups and if the proposed outreach/education methods appropriate for this type of work and are likely to build understanding and instill a conservation ethic. 2) The potential of the project to foster long-term conservation, improved management, and community involvement in conservation and stewardship of coral reef fisheries and associated resources and habitats; 3) The level of support for the work, as demonstrated by letters from partners and relevant government agencies; and 4) The extent to which local partners are involved in the activities, including state and territorial government agencies (e.g., for activities addressing state or territorial fisheries management), and/or involvement of commercial and recreational coral reef fishers, as appropriate.

B. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 4 steps, including: (1) an initial evaluation by Program Staff within HC; (2) external technical review; (3) internal HC review; (4) and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., HC, Ecosystem Assessment Division Chief). The peer review step will involve at least 3 individual reviewers per application. The Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the numerical ranking of the applications, the evaluations by the peer reviewers, and the selection factors set in E.3. below.

Initial Evaluation of the Applications: The initial screening will ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements, clearly relate to the 2009 CRFMPGP objectives, and meet all of the eligibility criteria. Application packages will be screened to ensure that they were received by the due date (see

Submission Dates and Times); include the entire application package (cover sheet, project summary, the narrative description of the budget and proposed project, and the Federal forms); identify a Principal Investigator and provide current resumes or curricula vitae for both the Principal and Co-Investigators; identify one of the 7 project categories; include supporting documentation from relevant state or territorial governments; and include any relevant permit application cover letters, if applicable. Applications that pass this initial screening will be submitted for technical review.

Technical Review: Technical review is conducted by a minimum of three external reviewers. Each reviewer will individually evaluate and score applications (0-100 points) using the evaluation criteria provided in Section V, A above. This review will involve experts from both NOAA and non-NOAA organizations. The technical reviewers' ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the applications. No consensus advice will be given by the technical reviewers.

Internal HC review: The Program Officer and other HC staff will evaluate comments and scores provided by the peer-review process, and conduct a further analysis to identify any major issues, shortcomings or other problems with the application. The reviewer comments, composite project scores, rank order, and a summary of the concerns (if any) outlined through the peer-review process and internal review will be presented to the Selecting Official. The Selecting Official, in consultation with Program staff, will identify proposals that could be recommended for funding and possible corrections to the applications that would be needed prior to final selection. These comments will be returned to the applicant for consideration.

Final Selection. Based on these cumulative reviews, the additional selection factors described below, and the ability of the applicant to address any concerns outlined through the internal review process, the Selecting Official will make preliminary funding recommendations. Not all activities submitted under a single proposal may be deemed appropriate for funding, and the Selecting Official or Program Staff may recommend alternate activities as appropriate. For a proposal to be selected for funding, the applicant must modify objectives, work plans and budgets as outlined through the internal review process. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not among those recommended for funding.

C. Selection Factors

The Selecting Official, in consultation with the Program and HC staff, will select the applications to be recommended to NOAA GMD for funding and determine the amount of funds available for each approved proposal. Applications will be awarded in rank order of the technical review ratings, unless the proposal is justified

to be selected out of rank order based upon 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. Duplicity with other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.
4. Program priorities and policy factors as set forth in section A.2.
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.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Applicants that scored highly through the review process and are being considered for funding will be notified by January 30, 2009. Applicant may be requested to modify activities, budget or other components of the project, and possibly reduced funding levels, as recommended through the review process, and submit a revised application before final decisions are made. The earliest start date for projects will be October 1, 2009, dependent upon completion of all NOAA/applicant negotiations, NEPA analysis and documentation supporting cooperative agreement activities.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration and the specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, NOAA GMD, and NOAA HC staff.

Successful applicants will receive notification from HC that the application has been

submitted to the NOAA GMD. Projects should not be initiated in expectation of federal funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA GMD. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds have not yet been appropriated for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

Award documents provided by the NOAA GMD may contain special award conditions limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements to fulfill. These conditions may also include other compliance requirements for the award as applicable.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Administrative Requirements Successful applicants that accept a NOAA award under this solicitation will be bound by Department of Commerce standard terms and conditions. This document can be found at <http://www.osec.doc.gov/oebam/pdf/ST&C-rev-1-2.pdf>.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Requirements 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.osec.doc.gov/bmi/daos/216-6.htm>, 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).

Applicants proposing coral reef conservation activities that cannot be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis or that are not covered by the Programmatic Environmental Assessment for the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program (PEA) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program will be informed after the peer review stage and may be requested to assist in the preparation of an environmental assessment prior to an award being made, or review a copy of an environmental assessment that covers

proposed activities if one exists. 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 PEA and FONSI can be found at:
<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/ead/PEAtableofcontents.htm>.

C. Reporting

Cooperative agreement recipients will be required to submit performance (technical) reports on a semi-annual schedule no later than 30 days following the end of each 6- month period from the start date of the award. The comprehensive final report is due 90 days after the award expiration. Performance reports should be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer (NMFS HC). The applicant must also submit a comprehensive final report, along with copies of all products that are developed under the award, within 90 days of the end of the award. Electronic submission of performance reports at www.grantsonline.gov is preferred. All financial reports shall be submitted in triplicate (one original and two copies) to the NOAA Grants Officer (NOAA GMD).

All progress reports must include a cover page with the 1) title of the grant, 2) organization, 3) NOAA award number, 4) period covered by the progress report, and 5) an abstract summarizing what was completed.

The narrative must include a summary of all activities completed during the reporting period, major accomplishments, and any issues hindering progress, with separate discussion for each of the projects, objectives and/or milestones as outlined in the proposal. The final report must include a cover page as described above, along with a detailed report on the results of the project. This must include discussion of 1) the major accomplishments, outcomes and results, 2) performance measures, 3) how the information was presented to stakeholders, 4) how the project contributed to coral reef conservation, and 5) recommendations on possible future actions to advance the outcomes of the project.

Copies of all materials (brochures, videos, DVDs, publications, reports, workshop proceedings, etc.) produced through the award, along with copies of any reports submitted by subcontractors as part of the award must be provided to the program office.

Financial reports cover the periods from October 1 -March 31 (due by April 30) and April 1 - September 30 (due by October 30), and should be submitted directly to the NOAA GMD as per instructions contained in official NOAA award documentation. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696). are applicable to this solicitation.

VII. Agency Contacts

Technical point of contact for NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grants Program is Jennifer Koss, 301-713-3459, extension 195 or e-mail at Jennifer.Koss@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

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 February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696). are applicable to this solicitation.

Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Recipients and sub-recipients are subject to all Federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to Federal financial assistance awards.

Paperwork Reduction Act

This notification involves collection-of-information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Forms 424, 424A, 424B, and SF-LLL and CD-346 has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under control numbers 0348-0043, 0348-0044, 0348-0040 and 03480046 and 0605-0001. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the PRA unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Executive Order 12866

It has been determined that this notice is not significant for purposes of Executive Order 12866.

Executive Order 13132 (Federalism)

It has been determined that this notice does not contain policies with Federalism implications as that term is defined in Executive Order 13132.

Administrative Procedure Act/Regulatory Flexibility Act

Prior notice and an opportunity for public comment are not required by the Administrative procedure Act or any other law for rules concerning public property, loans, grants, benefits, and contracts (5 U.S.C. 553(a)(2)). Because notice and opportunity for comments are not required pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 553 or any other law, the analytical requirements of the Regulatory Flexibility Act (5 U.S.C. 601 et seq.) are inapplicable. Therefore, a regulatory flexibility analysis has not been prepared, 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.