

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: Cooperative Research Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NMFS-SE-2009-2001417

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.454, Unallied Management Projects.

Dates: Applications must be received by 5 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time on September 9, 2008 to be considered for funding. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected/returned to the sender without further consideration.

Funding Opportunity Description: The CRP program provides financial assistance for projects that seek to increase and improve the working relationship between researchers from the NMFS, state fishery agencies, universities, and fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial). The program is a means of involving commercial and recreational fishermen in the collection of fundamental fisheries information. Collection efforts support the development and evaluation of management and regulatory options. This program addresses NOAA's mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through an Ecosystem Approach to Management."

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

CRP is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to increase and improve the working relationship between researchers from the NMFS, state fishery agencies, universities, and fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial). Congress has initiated the cooperative research funding to assist the NMFS to improve the confidence that both commercial and recreational fishermen have in the data and analyses performed in support of fisheries management. The authorizing statute for the Cooperative Research Program is 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(d).

The CRP has as its principal goal to provide a means of involving commercial and recreational fishermen in the collection of fundamental fisheries information to support the development and evaluation of management and regulatory options.

B. Program Priorities

You are encouraged to address one of the priority areas listed below as they pertain to Federally managed species or species relevant to Federal fisheries management plans, but proposals in other areas will be considered. If you select more than one priority, you should list first on your application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of your proposal. Projects should focus on the greatest probability of collecting data that aids in recovering, maintaining, or improving the status of stocks upon which fisheries depend; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success and long-term sustainability of fisheries; and/or generating increased values and opportunities for fisheries.

The main premise for a CRP project is to provide usable and relevant information to aid fishery researchers, scientists, and managers to make informed management decisions. As such, priority needs are for information which can be utilized for assessments in the future. The Southeast Data Assessment Review (SEDAR) Steering Committee has established a schedule of assessment priority species through the year 2013. Projects which focus on providing information pertaining to these species of concern may be given priority selection. Those species of concern are listed by Fisheries Management Council:

Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC): yellowtail snapper, spiny lobster, queen triggerfish, deepwater snappers, red hind, parrotfish, shrimp, and grunts, in the

Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council (GMFMC): king mackerel, red snapper, yellowedge grouper, tilefish, hogfish, gag grouper, red grouper, goliath grouper, vermilion snapper, yellowtail snapper, spiny lobster, shrimp, and grey triggerfish, in the Gulf of Mexico EEZ from the west coast of Florida through Texas.

South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC): king mackerel, greater amberjack, red snapper, Spanish mackerel, white grunt, red drum, golden tilefish, snowy grouper, hogfish, vermilion snapper, black seabass, speckled hind, gag, red porgy, Warsaw grouper, shrimp, and goliath grouper, in the South Atlantic EEZ from North Carolina to the east coast of Florida.

Projects will also be evaluated as to the likelihood of achieving the following priorities, with consideration of the magnitude of the eventual economic or social benefits that may be realized:

1. Commercial Finfish:

There are several priorities within this general category that pertain to the collection of catch, effort, size frequency, bycatch, and detailed data on fishing area by vessels in the commercial fisheries for finfish species.

a. Characterize the total catch (from all fleets affecting the stocks), including catch composition and disposition of the catch.

(1) Projects are needed to collect detailed information on the composition and disposition of bycatch and discards.

(2) Investigations are needed to determine more efficient methods to record catches accurately on a real-time basis during fishing operations (e.g. electronic logbooks).

(3) Projects are needed to develop methods to increase the amount of at-sea observations utilizing imaging systems.

(4) Projects are needed to utilize fully scientific observers on-board vessels as a means of collecting detailed catch, effort and disposition data. In cases where vessel space does not permit adding an observer, it may be possible to designate the captain or a crew member to record these data. Projects must specify the type of training and equipment that is required to assure that reliable data are collected.

(5) Data collection projects are needed to determine the effects on discard rates of increasing size limits or reducing possession limits. If discard mortality rates are high, changes in size or bag limits may unintentionally lessen conservation benefits. Discard mortality rates currently used in assessments are generally based on small

numbers of observations or are unknown. Research is needed to improve estimates of discard mortality rates and must account for the effects of fish size, gear, area, season and depth of fishing.

(6) Data collection projects are needed to improve life history information on commercial finfish species. Improved information about the age-structure of the catch (both retained and discarded), based on otolith or other hard-part aging techniques, will provide insight on a stock's resilience to fishing. Improved information on the reproductive characteristics of the stock will provide information to refine estimates of long-term biological productivity of the stock.

(7) Projects are needed to examine the feasibility of using genetic methods for tag and recapture of exploited species.

b. Monitoring stock abundance through study-fleet applications. This type of cooperative research requires long-term commitment in terms of funding and application.

(1) One objective is to develop a consistent sampling methodology that will permit monitoring of the relative abundance of a fishery resource over time. An initial step for such a project is to develop sampling designs and protocols for sampling fleet catches to estimate relative abundance, including standardization of fishing power of individual vessels.

(2) Projects are needed to develop methods to determine appropriate sampling designs and pilot studies to estimate recruitment to selected fisheries. An example is the development of a recruitment index for Young-of-the-Year gag or red grouper in the Gulf of Mexico.

c. Projects are needed to develop and test gear and fishing strategies designed to reduce or eliminate unintended catch.

d. Fishing Capacity Investigations: There appears to be a wide disparity between the current capacity of regional fishing fleets and the productivity of regional stocks. Cooperative research to optimize the capacity of regional fishing fleets is needed. A number of possibilities ranging from Individual Quota Systems to Vessel Capacity Control programs should be considered. It is likely that regional/fishery differences may require different approaches.

e. Monitor the effects of closed Marine Protected Areas: Research is needed to measure the response of marine resources to creation or expansion of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Projects should utilize fishermen's knowledge of critical habitat of harvested species.

(1) Projects are needed to assess the impacts of time/area closures in the Southeast Region that have been designated to protect finfish spawning aggregations and/or concentrations of sub-legal fish.

(2) Projects are needed to collect fine-scale catch-effort data to define the spatial and temporal dimensions of MPAs.

2. Caribbean Fisheries:

a. Habitat and fisheries:

(1) Research and data are needed to estimate the social and economic impacts that are associated with MPA closures. Currently the Caribbean has five seasonal closures in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for spawning aggregations of fish and one no-take zone consisting of an annual closure. The size of these areas is small compared to MPAs established on the mainland, but constitute a significant portion of the fishing grounds in the Caribbean. Although research has been conducted on the biological impacts of several no-take zones, little, if any research has been done to estimate the impacts of closures on fishing communities.

(2) Projects are also needed to investigate the biological and socioeconomic effects of alternating either temporal or spatial closures of MPAs.

(3) Cooperative projects between scientists and industry members are needed to enhance studies of the effectiveness of MPAs. Industry members can provide useful information concerning siting of MPAs, especially relating to spawning aggregations and nursery grounds of juvenile fishes. In addition, mark and recapture experiments can employ industry members, especially concerning recovery of tags.

b. Corals:

(1) Research is needed to determine the impact on coral reefs from commercial fishing operations. Industry participation is needed to determine the impacts of gear on coral reefs.

(2) Research is needed to determine the impacts on coral reefs from recreational fishing activities. Information on recreational fishing activities is sparse and there are approximately 60,000 recreational vessels in the Caribbean. Research should focus on diving, recreational boating and anchoring on coral reefs.

3. Recreational and Charter Fishery:

a. Socioeconomic research:

(1) Research is needed to determine the number of recreational fishermen and related trips.

(2) Data needs to be collected to identify the socioeconomic characteristics of the recreational and charter boat industries.

(3) In addition to data collection activities, research is needed to determine the economic benefits and costs associated with recreational fishing.

b. Research on Management Alternatives: Investigations should include benefits and costs to the stocks, as well as socioeconomic benefits/costs to participants in the fishery.

(1) Investigations are needed to determine more efficient methods to record catches accurately on a real-time basis during fishing operations (e.g. electronic logbooks).

(2) Projects are needed to utilize observers on-board vessels as a means of collecting detailed catch, effort and disposition data. Designate the captain or a crew member to record these data. Projects must specify the type of training and equipment that is required to assure that reliable data are collected.

(3) Research is needed to determine the effects of seasonal closures and MPAs on the recreational and charter boat industries as well as spawning stocks and recruitment.

(4) Research is needed to determine the impacts of bag and size limits on species that are important to recreational and charter boat industries. Projects should emphasize the effects of alternatives size limits.

(5) Research is needed to determine discard mortality rates. At-sea observers on recreational and charter boat trips are one way to perform this type of research and should be considered.

(6) Catch/Effort Data: Projects are needed to improve catch and effort data for private recreational fishermen. The projects should identify sample sizes, including number of intercept interviews and dock samples, required to achieve standard statistical levels of accuracy and precision.

c. Habitat Research:

(1) Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of artificial reefs. Projects should examine the value of artificial reefs to fishing communities, and estimate associated economic impacts.

(2) Research is needed to determine the impacts and effects of harmful algal blooms, such as red tide, on recreational and charter boat fisheries.

(3) Investigations are needed to determine essential fishery habitat for certain species such as gag and goliath grouper.

(4) Research is needed to characterize the distribution and location of essential reef fish habitat (particularly natural rocks and reefs) on the West Florida Shelf. There is a need to circumscribe those areas for future acoustic mapping in order to efficiently and

effectively conduct targeted fishery-independent surveys.

4. Commercial Shrimp Harvest:

Social and economic impact of fluctuations in domestic shrimp values:

(1) Research is needed on the effects on the domestic shrimp fishery of shrimp imports from foreign countries.

(2) Research is needed to determine the social and economic impacts of imports on fishermen and fishing communities. Research should include impacts on communities and the industry as a whole.

Identifying Non-Trawlable Areas: Research is needed to investigate how habitat enhancements of non-trawlable areas could benefit shrimp fisheries. For example, artificial reefs could be established in non-trawlable areas and the impacts on shrimp and finfish populations could be evaluated. Such research should determine if enhancements would increase habitat for juvenile and adult fish, i.e. red snapper.

Quantification of Effort: Research is needed to improve shrimp effort data. Projects need to consider recommendations derived from negotiations with the shrimp industry. Areas of concern are insurance for at-sea observers, acceptable gear and protection of confidential data collected by the project.

Bycatch Reduction Device Testing Protocols: There is a need to develop more efficient methods to certify finfish bycatch reduction devices. Protocols should benefit both the resource and the shrimp industry.

Quantification of Bycatch Rates: Statistical research is needed to ensure that extrapolation of the results of individual trawl bycatch surveys to the fleet are statistically valid. The procedures should account for the total range of conditions found in all major fishing areas. The research should estimate the number of scientific fishery observers that should be employed to collect bycatch information for prevailing conditions and areas. The project should describe the statistical accuracy and precision of estimates for each major fishing area in addition to the total fishing area. This is critical to improving stock assessments, especially in the Gulf of Mexico.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the CRP is provided by the following: 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(d).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2009 for projects. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon Fiscal Year 2009 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Regional Office estimates awarding projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$400,000. The average award is \$150,000. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds.

B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards may be for a maximum period of up to 24 months.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a cooperative agreement. NMFS is substantially involved as a partner in the cooperative research activities with the recipient. Substantial involvement includes planning, scheduling, conducting, and analyzing proposed project activities and frequent contact with the grantee to help solve technical problems/situations as they arise during performance of the award

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, and state, local, and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the CRP is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

Applicants who are not commercial or recreational fisherman must have commercial or recreational fishermen participating in their project. There must be a written agreement with a fisherman describing the involvement in the project activity.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through grants.gov. If applicants do not have internet access, applications may be requested from: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format Requirements:

All pages must 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 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirement when printed out.

2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

a. Signed Title Page: The title page (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through grants.gov satisfy this requirement.

b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B.

c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V.

Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes.

d. Literature Cited: If applicable.

e. Budget and Budget Justification: There should be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF-424 budget forms. Indicate matching funds if provided in a separate column. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.

f. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant).

g. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through www.grants.gov

h. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:

1. Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

2. Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

3. Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

4. Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA) that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the

proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

5. Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

6. Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance. If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

7. Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the impact.

8. Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

9. Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares.

Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project. The NMFS partner will assist the applicant to develop a design for the project to assure that the outcome will provide suitable, scientific data and results to support needed fisheries management information.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on September 9, 2008 to be considered for funding. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected/returned to the sender without further consideration. Applications submitted through www.grants.gov will be accompanied by an automated receipt of the date and time of submission. Hard copy applications will be hand stamped with time and date when received.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a Federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. The Federal share of indirect costs proposed must not exceed 25 percent of the total direct costs identified on NOAA Form 424A Budget Information. The indirect rate is fixed at 25 percent in order to maximize the funds available for actual research and to allow applicants to recover a reasonable indirect cost.

Construction is not an allowable activity under this program. Therefore, applications will not be accepted for construction projects.

F. Other Submission Requirements

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: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by three or more appropriate private and/or public sector experts to determine their technical merit. These reviewers will provide individual evaluations of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given. These reviewers provide comments and assign scores to the applications based on the following criteria, with the points shown in parentheses:

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (40 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal assist industry and address issues that are important to regional fishery management?

2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

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. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal clearly identify and describe, in the project outline and statement of work, scientific methodologies and analytical procedures that will adequately address project goals and objectives?

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (no points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

4. Project costs (20 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate

with the project needs and time frame. For this program, this includes: Does the budget appropriately allocate and justify costs?

5. Outreach and education (no points):

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. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

B. Review and Selection Process

When we receive applications we will screen them to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. We do not have to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause your application to be rejected so that you would have an opportunity to correct them. However, should we do so and provide you information about deficiencies, or should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it.

If your application does not conform to these requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Following the technical review, we will determine the score for each individual review and average the individual technical review scores to determine the final technical score for each application. Then, we will rank applications in descending order by their average technical scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the CRP Panel. Each member of the CRP Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel members recommending the proposal for funding. In

the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that best meet immediate research needs.

C. Selection Factors

The CRP Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on 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/federal agencies
4. Program priorities and policy factors
5. Applicant's prior award performance
6. Partnerships with/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.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for award to the Grants Officer who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications generally are recommended within 150 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards average 90 days after each project is selected and after all NMFS/applicant negotiations of cooperative activities have been completed. The earliest start date of awards is about 180 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. Unsuccessful applications will be returned to the applicant.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office and the NMFS Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA Grants Officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin.

The award will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the PI of the project either electronically or in hard copy. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposals were not selected for recommendation by the Program Office.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Department of Commerce Grants and Cooperative Agreements Notice

Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in 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). A copy of the notice may be obtained at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/search.html>

Limitation of Liability

Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216--5--TOC.pdf>, NEPA Questionnaire, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.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 applicants_ 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 cooperation 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 as assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

Financial reports are to be submitted to the NOAA Grants Officer identified in the award and Performance (technical) reports are to be submitted to the Federal Program Officer. Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, program and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Program reports should include progress on identified milestones. Electronic submission of performance reports is preferred. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive evaluation report 90 days after the project end date.

All data collected as part of the project must be submitted to the NMFS partner. Project data must be edited and verified as accurate by the applicant prior to being submitted to NMFS.

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Robert Sadler, State/Federal Liaison Branch, (727) 824-5324, or Robert.Sadler@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

We will award cooperative agreements for a maximum period of up to 24 months. The award period depends upon the duration of funding requested in the application, the decision of the NMFS selecting official on the amount of funding, the results of post-selection negotiations between the applicant and NOAA officials, and pre-award review of the application by NOAA and DOC officials. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is about 180 days after the date of publication of this notice. You must also be available to respond to questions during the review and evaluation of the proposal(s).

If you are selected to receive a grant award for a project, you must:

1. Manage the day-to-day operations of the project, be responsible for the performance of all activities for which funds are granted, and be responsible for the satisfaction of all administrative and managerial conditions imposed by the award.
2. Keep records sufficient to document any costs incurred under the award, and allow access to these records for audit and examination by the Secretary of Commerce, the Comptroller General of the United States, or their authorized representatives; and submit financial status reports (SF 269) to NOAA Grants in accordance with the award conditions.