

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Funding Opportunity Title: National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Land Acquisition and Construction Program for Fiscal Year 2012

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NOS-OCRM-2012-2003103

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.420, Coastal Zone Management Estuarine Research Reserves

Dates: Complete grant applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, December 2, 2011. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Estuarine Research Reserve System consists of estuarine areas of the United States and its territories which are designated and managed for research and educational purposes. Each reserve within the system is chosen to represent a different bio-geographic region and to include a variety of ecosystem types in accordance with the classification scheme of the national program as presented in 15 CFR Part 921. By funding designated reserve agencies and universities to conduct land acquisition and construction projects that support the NERRS purpose, NOAA will strengthen protection of key land and water areas, enhance long-term protection of the area for research and education, and provide for facility and exhibit construction that meet the highest sustainable design standards possible.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

NOAA provides funding to designated reserve agencies for acquiring additional property interests and for construction projects that serve to strengthen protection of reserve key land and water areas; to enhance long-term protection of the areas for research and education; and provide for facility and exhibit construction. Each reserve supports a wide range of beneficial uses of ecological, economic, recreational, and aesthetic values which are dependent upon the maintenance of a healthy ecosystem. The sites provide habitats for a wide range of ecologically and commercially important species of fish, shellfish, birds, and other aquatic and terrestrial wildlife. Each reserve has been designed to ensure its effectiveness as a conservation unit and as a site for long-term research and monitoring. In maintaining their effectiveness, the reserves may find it necessary to expand their boundaries through strategically planned land acquisitions and/or to develop or enhance their reserve facilities to meet the demands of research, monitoring, and education program objectives.

B. Program Priorities

Projects eligible for funding must be identified in construction and/or acquisition plans within current NOAA approved Reserve management plans in compliance with 15 CFR 921.33 (c). Acquisition projects that involve the potential to invoke eminent domain are not eligible for funding. Construction projects must occur on land under adequate state control either through direct state ownership or pursuant to a long-term lease between the reserve and the land owner 15 CFR 921.30 (d). Construction and/or acquisition plans require the following information:

1. A construction plan includes general descriptions of proposed projects and general cost estimates. Sufficient information should be provided for both major and minor proposed construction projects to clearly articulate requirements in the initial phase of the project 15 CFR 921.13 (a)(6).

2. An acquisition plan identifies the ecologically key land and water areas of the Reserve, ranks these areas according to their relative importance, describes the methods of acquisition, and includes a strategy for establishing adequate long-term state control over these areas sufficient to provide protection for Reserve resources to ensure a stable environment for research.

With the exception of lands to be acquired for reserve facility construction, priority will be given to projects that increase ecosystem resiliency and factor anticipated climate change effects. With regard to acquisition, priority will be given to those projects that address the following adaptation principles to: connect habitats allowing for habitat and species migrations; reduce existing stressors which hinder ability of species or ecosystems to withstand climatic events; protect key ecosystem features, eg. keystone species or habitats; and maintain diversity. With regard to construction projects, priority will be given to core facilities (National Estuarine Research Reserve Standard Reserve 2004) that are proposed in already disturbed areas outside of the 100 year flood zone and minimally disrupt the environment, conserve and protect water resources, incorporate sustainable design principles (National Estuarine Research Reserve Sustainable Design Guidelines), optimize energy performance and reduce the overall carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions. Core facilities are those facilities that support the primary mission and goals of the reserve and should be located near, and/or within, the reserve boundary, preferably in the designated buffer area of the reserve.

Eligible costs associated with the priorities above include funds for administrative purposes related to acquisition and/or facility construction per 15CFR 921.3.1. Facility and acquisition planning alone may not constitute a proposal, but planning and administrative tasks may constitute up to 20% of facility and/or acquisition costs within the proposal. These planning efforts may address evaluation of sustainable features appropriate for reserve future facility needs and associated maintenance.

Construction and habitat restoration activities identified in the approved management plan are eligible for funding per 15 CFR 921.31. Per this announcement, funding may be proposed for preserving historic or culturally significant structures, preparing a site for facility construction, and/or as a living exhibit, e.g. demonstration project.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the NERR program is provided by 16 U.S.C. 1461 (e)(1)(A)(i),(ii), and (iii).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

This funding opportunity announces that approximately \$1.69 million is available to designated reserve agencies or universities for construction and acquisition projects in fiscal year 2012. It is anticipated that approximately 1-3 projects may be funded. Awards will be issued as competitive grants. It is anticipated that the awards will run for up to three years. In the past, funding for land acquisition and construction awards has ranged in amount from approximately \$20,000 to \$3 million.

B. Project/Award Period

Applicants may submit applications covering a 12 to 36- month period with an anticipated start date(s) as early as June 1, 2012 or as late as November 1, 2012.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

The funding instrument is a grant to the individual applicant.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are NERR lead state agencies or universities in coastal states. Eligible applicants should have completed all requirements as stated in the NERRS regulations [CITE 15CFR921] Title 15--Commerce and Foreign Trade, Chapter IX--National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce, Part 921--National Estuarine Research Reserve System Regulations, http://nerrs.noaa.gov/Background_Regulations.html.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

The amount of federal funds requested must be matched by the applicant: 30 percent total project match for construction awards and 50 percent total project match for land acquisition awards. Cash or in-kind contributions directly benefiting the project may be used to satisfy the matching requirements. If using Reserve land acquisition banked match, a list of the banked match, indicating when the land was banked, must be included with the application. Applicants must identify all match sources and amounts equal to that requested above. Projects without match or with highly speculative match will not be considered.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Applicants who are selected for land acquisition and construction funding will be required to meet land acquisition grant programmatic special award conditions that will be included as part of each grant.

Eligible projects are those indicated in approved management plans per 15 CFR 921.33 (c). Construction projects must be proposed on land under adequate state control. Acquisition projects that involve the potential of invoking eminent domain are not eligible for funding. Applicants who are selected for land acquisition and/or construction funding will be required to submit semi-annual progress reports to ERD.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

For program and application information, contact Nina Garfield of ERD at 301-563-1171 ext. 171, or fax 301-713-4012, or via internet at Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Proposal Content: The application should include (a) detailed project description including milestone schedule, (b) budget narrative including (federal and non-federal costs per object class category commensurate with SF424A or C (administrative costs up to 20% are allowable), (c) NOAA funds requested, (d) source of match (50 percent for acquisition, 30 percent for construction), (e) importance of project to reserve, (f) detailed information on environmental impacts regarding proposed activities, (g) summary of NOAA funds provided for construction/acquisition from FY08-FY11 with summary of progress. Proposals should be no less than three pages and no more than fifteen pages. Proposals must use one inch margins and 12 point font. Schematics such as maps, surveys, floor plans, etc may be included in an appendix.

a. Description of the proposed work and whether funds are sought for less than the whole project (include information if part of CZMA Section 312 evaluation). The

description should align with budget categories and fully explain the scope of work including preparatory work, planning, design elements, sustainable features, etc. The description should address how the project will be resilient in the face of climate change and/or reflect climate change related outreach. For facility retrofits, a description of the cost savings and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions as a result of the sustainable design features should be included. See Section B. Program Priorities.;

b. Budget narrative describing all costs laid out in the SF424A and/or C with detailed descriptions of work to be performed. Cost categories for construction include: project planning and design; administrative and legal expenses; architectural and engineering costs; project inspection fees; site work; demolition and removal costs; equipment costs; and other construction tasks breakdown such as structural (i.e., windows, doors, roofing, flooring), carpentry, plumbing, heating, electrical. For acquisition costs: personnel involved in the project; land acquisition fees; travel, equipment, supplies, and contractual;

c. NOAA funds requested;

d. Identification of the source of match (50 percent for acquisition, 30 percent for construction);

e. Importance of the project to your reserve including specific reference within the current NOAA approved reserve management plan. Applicants must identify the page number in the approved management plan where the project is identified.;

f. Provide detailed information on environmental concerns related to the activities to be conducted and locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected during and after the construction process (e.g., a description of the construction footprint and associated short and long-term impacts, 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). Note that as part of the National Environmental Policy Act, this information will be reviewed to determine whether a Categorical Exclusion or Environmental Assessment is required. If an assessment is required, applicants will be required to support development of the assessment and cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any

identified adverse environmental impacts of the proposal.;

g. NOAA funds received in FY08 through FY11 for land acquisition and construction projects and summary of progress on past projects;

2. Federal forms required: Applicants must complete all necessary federal financial assistance forms (SF-424, SF-424A (for non-construction), SF-424B (for non-construction), SF-424C (for construction), SF-424D (for construction), CD-511, and if applicable, Indirect Cost Rate Agreement). Forms must be accessed through the Grants.gov website.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Complete grant applications must be submitted by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, December 2, 2011.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are subject to Executive Order

12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Applicants should contact their State Single Point of Contact to find out about and comply with the State processes under EO12372. The names and addresses of the Single Points of Contact are listed in the Office of Management and Budget Web site <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

See Section I. for a description of funding restrictions.

F. Other Submission Requirements

There are no 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:

NOS/OCRM/ERD

Nina Garfield

1305 East West Highway, room 10505

Silver Spring, MD 20910

If possible submit applications electronically via grants.gov.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the program goals (30 percent): This ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this competition, this includes whether this project is identified as a priority in the approved reserve management plan or the last CZMA Section 312 evaluation of the reserve. Planned core facilities projects are given a higher score than those facilities not deemed as core. This criterion is used to evaluate whether the project is appropriate under the definition of acquisition (acquisition of real property) and/or construction (construction or enhancement of facilities or exhibits, or associated infrastructure). A higher score will be given to projects clearly within the definitions. Those projects outside of the definition will rank lower (e.g., projects for routine structural maintenance, floating classrooms, and vessels are outside the definition and would rate lower).

2. Technical/scientific merit (30 percent): This assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For this competition, this criterion is used to assess the opportunity gained by funding this project now and/or lost by not funding it now (e.g., availability of match or additional construction or land acquisition funds; option on a parcel of land; protection of a critical resource). Projects of greater immediacy are given a higher score. This criterion relates to whether the applicant is able to undertake the project. This criterion is used to determine how far along the acquisition process is (e.g., contact with landowners, negotiations, title options) or the planning process for facilities construction (plans, design, etc.). Projects that can reasonably be expected to be completed during the

proposed project award period will score higher. For acquisition projects, the type of acquisition being proposed (fee-simple, easement, etc.) should provide adequate state control of the property to be included in the reserve and increase the resiliency of the reserve ecosystem. For construction projects, those which have minimal impact to sensitive resources and incorporate sustainable features and/or construction techniques in core facilities will score higher. These include projects which demonstrate efforts to: optimize energy performance; protect and conserve water; enhance indoor environmental quality; or reduce the environmental impacts of materials. Examples of sustainable efforts:

Optimize Energy Performance

The proposed project (a) improves energy efficiency and reduces greenhouse gas emissions of current or proposed structures, through reduction of energy intensity or through the use of renewable energy and (b) to the extent feasible, implements renewable energy generation projects on its property.

Protect and Conserve Water

The project reduces indoor or outdoor water consumption.

Enhance Indoor Environmental Quality

The project employs low-emitting materials (such as materials and products with low pollutant emissions).

Reduce the Environmental Impact of Materials

The project (a) uses materials with recycled content or biobased content; (b) minimizes construction waste; (c) uses paper of at least 30 percent post-consumer fiber content; (d) reduces the quantity of hazardous chemicals and materials acquired, used, or disposed of by the facility, (e) increases diversion of solid waste as appropriate, and (f) maintains cost effective waste prevention and recycling programs at the facility.

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (25 percent): This ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary experience, training, administrative resources, and record of past performance on similar projects, to accomplish the project. This criterion is used to assess how the individual reserve performed in general (based on performance reports, 312 evaluations, previous or ongoing projects, etc.) and if they can support the project and have done so in the past by supplying the required match amounts (50/50 for acquisition projects and 70/30 for construction projects) Reserves with solid operating performance and the compliment of core staff (manager, education coordinator, and research coordinator) will generally be given a higher score than those without it. Performance in completing past

construction and acquisition projects will be considered. An exception may be where a particular construction or acquisition project is necessary to conduct core program activities. An applicant is only qualified to submit a proposal if they have an approved current management plan and adhere to eligibility requirements.

4. Project costs (15 percent): The budget is evaluated to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. This criterion is used to determine whether the cost estimates and budget are reasonable, realistic, and cost-effective for the proposed project. Higher evaluation scores will be given to projects that have realistic budgets and which demonstrate cost-sharing by the project proponent. Projects without or with highly speculative match will not be considered. Applicants must identify necessary match (50/50 for acquisition; 70/30 for construction) and its source and that it will be available at the time the award will be made.

5. Outreach and education (0 percent): NOAA assesses whether this project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources.

B. Review and Selection Process

ERD will conduct an initial administrative review to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the application and log the information into a system database. A minimum of three merit reviewers per proposal will be performed. The reviews will be conducted by technical experts within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. At least one of the reviews will be conducted by professional staff within the National Ocean Service (NOS) of NOAA. Reviewers are selected based on their technical knowledge of the types of projects submitted. All proposals will be evaluated, rated and ranked in accordance with the assigned weights of the evaluation criteria for funding listed above (section V.A.). The Estuarine Reserves Division Chief and program coordinator will oversee the review process. The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations.

C. Selection Factors

A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order 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 project types
3. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies
4. Program priorities and policy factors. These can be found in section I.B. above.
5. Applicant's prior award performance: Unsatisfactory performance by a recipient under prior Federal awards may result in an application not being considered for funding.
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 GMD

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Funding recommendations will be announced on or about March 1, 2012. Unsuccessful applications will be retained at ERD.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

It is anticipated that applicants will be notified of their recommendation or rejection for funding on or about March 1, 2012, via email. NOAA's Grants Management Division is the only entity authorized to provide a grant award. Therefore, once the applicant's above

mentioned federal financial assistance forms have been submitted and approved, GMD will make the grant award to the applicant by the requested start date.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2010), http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl, http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl

The Estuarine Reserves Division of NOAA reserves the right to immediately halt activity under the award if the recipient is not fulfilling the requirements of the project as outlined in the grant award. Non-compliance with a federally approved project may result in termination of the award.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The Department of Commerce Pre-award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements - The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696) are applicable to this section.

2. 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.

3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for grant proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed

information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6_TOC.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm).

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems).

In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

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.

C. Reporting

Applicants selected for funding will submit via Grants Online semi-annual performance reports 30 days after the completion of every six month period after the project start date and final performance reports 90 days after the project period ending date. Applicants will be provided with the guidelines for these reports upon receiving the award. Financial status reports are also required every six months. These reports should be submitted to NOAA's Grants Management Division through Grants Online.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over \$25,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

Administrative and Technical questions regarding the program and application process, please contact Nina Garfield, program coordinator, at NOAA/Estuarine Reserves Division, 1305 East-West Highway, N/ORM5, SSMC4, Station 10505, Silver Spring, MD 20910 or via phone: 301-563-1171 ext. 171, email: Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov, or fax: 301-713-4363. The program website can be accessed at www.ocrm.nos.noaa.gov/nerr.html. Other questions should be directed to Nina Garfield of ERD at 301-563-1171 ext. 171, or fax 301-713-4012, or via internet at Nina.Garfield@noaa.gov or Laurie McGilvray at (301) 713-3155 ext. 158, laurie.mcgilvray@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

To use Grants.gov, applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number and be registered in the Central Contractor

Registry (CCR). Allow a minimum of five days to complete the CCR registration. [Note: Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form.]

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to

begin the application process through [Grants.gov](https://www.Grants.gov).