

National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Collaborative Science Program 2024

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## NOTICE OF 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) Collaborative Science Program 2024

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NOS-OCM-2024-2008212

Federal Assistance Listings Number: 11.419, Coastal Zone Management Administration Awards

Dates: Letters of Intent (LOIs) must be received by the Office for Coastal Management by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on December 1, 2023. Full proposals must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on February 9, 2024.

Funding Opportunity Description: The purpose of this document is to advise the public that NOAA is soliciting applications to administer a 5-year, applied research program that supports collaborative research in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS).

This funding opportunity will provide support for the grantee to develop and administer a comprehensive national program that funds extramural collaborative science projects to address the system-wide research and management needs of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, while being responsive to local and regional reserve priorities and those of NOAA. The NERRS collaborative science program is intended to deliver highly credible and relevant information to the coastal management community by incorporating user input into the design and implementation of research projects, ensuring that the outcomes support the needs of stakeholders. This program will also increase the capacity of the NERRS management, research, education, stewardship, and coastal training sectors to transfer information and skills to end-users and more effectively support coastal and estuarine resource management. A NERRS collaborative science program has been in existence for fifteen years, and this is the fourth competition for the five-year program. This funding opportunity is intended to support the administration of the collaborative research program and is not intended to directly support individual research projects or short term activities focused on specific local coastal and estuarine issues. Eligible funding applicants are: non-federal institutions of higher education, other non-profits, state, local, Indian Tribal Governments, and commercial organizations. Federal agencies and employees are not allowed to receive funds under this announcement but may serve as collaborators or project partners.

The NOAA Office for Coastal Management (OCM) encourages applicants and awardees to support the principles of diversity and inclusion when writing their proposals and performing their work. Diversity is defined as a collection of individual attributes that together help organizations achieve objectives. Inclusion is defined as a culture that connects each employee to the organization. Promoting diversity and inclusion improves creativity, productivity, and the vitality of the climate research community in which OCM engages.

## FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

## I. Funding Opportunity Description

## A. Program Objective

Congress passed the Coastal Zone Management Act in 1972 that established the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS). The NERRS is a network of 30 coastal sites across the contiguous U.S., and in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico that are managed in a partnership between NOAA and the coastal states to provide opportunities for long-term research, education, and interpretation.

The goals of the NERRS are to: (1) ensure a stable environment for research through long-term protection of National Estuarine Research Reserve resources; (2) address coastal management issues identified as significant through coordinated estuarine research within the System; (3) enhance public awareness and understanding of estuarine areas and provide suitable opportunities for public education and interpretation; (4) promote Federal, state, public and private use of one or more Reserves within the System when such entities conduct estuarine research; and (5) conduct and coordinate estuarine research within the NERRS, gathering and making available information necessary for improved understanding and management of estuarine areas. NOAA provides funding and national guidance, and each site is managed by a lead state agency or their designee or by a university, with input from local partners.

The purpose of this Notice Of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is to support a national-level collaborative science program that, through a cooperative agreement with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management (OCM), will administer funding and support the reserves and their prospective research partners to address system-wide NERRS research and management needs, while being responsive to local and regional reserve priorities, and those of NOAA. This funding opportunity is not requesting proposals for individual research projects or short term activities focused on specific local coastal and estuarine issues.

Collaborative science is defined in the context of this NOFO as a process that integrates intended users of the science in all aspects of a research project, from problem definition to project implementation. NOAA's goal in funding a NERRS collaborative science program is to increase the capacity of reserves to effectively develop, share, and communicate knowledge and information to the coastal management community. By incorporating user input and stated needs into the design and implementation of research projects, the activities supported by this program better meet the interests and needs of stakeholders.

The collaborative science program will encourage applicants to utilize the best available natural and social science approaches that allow local, state, or federal resource management to make informed decisions about managing complex estuarine ecosystems. NERRS system-wide priorities for applied research include:

Community Resilience and Adaptability – Understanding how communities rely on and engage with estuarine systems, particularly aspects of human dimensions and cultural ecosystem services, and what behavior changes may enhance resilience to changes to those systems.

Habitat Adaptability – Investigating options for improving estuarine habitat resilience and migration, including response to habitat stressors (e.g., sea level rise, marine debris, invasive species, coastal development, native species displacement, climate change); processes for identifying, prioritizing, and restoring sites; and monitoring and evaluating success.

Watershed Dynamics – Understanding the impacts to water quality and quantity from land use, eutrophication, and contamination in estuarine ecosystems and the options for management and mitigation; investigating drivers of change on the watershed scale and impacts to biogeochemical cycles and substrates.

Change Analysis – Investigating and understanding marsh health through research using long-term monitoring data and information, originating from programs such as the NERRS System-wide Monitoring Program and associated monitoring efforts; conduct estuary condition analyses.

By administering funding for collaborative science that can address NERRS system-wide, regional, and local priorities and by effectively leveraging and sharing research methodologies and results, this program will increase the capacity of the NERRS management, research, education, stewardship, and coastal training sectors to effectively support coastal and estuarine resource management.

Through a cooperative agreement, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management may work with the successful applicant through activities such as consulting on program focus and priority setting; facilitating communications with partners to obtain input on program priorities; providing expertise in meeting planning and facilitation; information analyses; assisting with program management; and leveraging other resources and funding to further the program goals. Successful proposals will include an adaptive management approach that incorporates input from NOAA and from stakeholders to effectively administer funding and support reserves and their prospective research partners.

## B. Program Priorities

Proposals funded under this announcement must be focused on the system of 30 National Estuarine Research Reserves (see <https://coast.noaa.gov/nerrs/> for information

about the research reserve system) and the associated estuarine habitat, watersheds, and ecosystems that are adjacent to or that directly impact reserve-based natural resources. The successful applicant(s) will be an organization or group of organizations that will manage an applied research program to administer funding and provide support for coastal management research projects that actively engage intended users in the development of the questions to be addressed and in the implementation of the work. The applicant must demonstrate knowledge of the challenges and benefits associated with managing national-scale programs focused on coastal and estuarine ecosystem science and coastal resource management. A successful proposal must include an explanation of how the following activities will be accomplished and a strategy for soliciting input and feedback from NOAA and the reserve system to adaptively manage and administer the program.

In the first year of the award, establish a national program that will solicit, administer, and support competitive, peer-reviewed, collaborative natural and social science projects that directly address system-wide, regional, and local reserve management priorities. Project solicitations developed by the program shall address innovative applied research and the sharing of information within the reserve system. The program host responsibilities include:

- Designing project types to meet the needs of the NERRS for original research, data synthesis and trend analysis, planning, and knowledge exchange among reserves and partners

- Creating a robust yet simple application process that can address issues of reserve capacity shortages and partner burnout

- Leading a clear, credible, scientific review process that considers different knowledge systems (e.g., indigenous knowledge, institution-based knowledge, community knowledge).

- Convening review panels using experts with a range of experiences and expertise to evaluate projects.

- Conducting oversight of all aspects of awarded projects, including acquisition of permits that occur after projects commence

- Addressing structural and experience-based challenges to equitable distribution of awarded projects throughout the NERRS

- Collaborating with NOAA Office for Coastal Management Program Manager on all aspects of competitive processes

- Support sharing and transfer of research outcomes and monitoring information, as well as knowledge related to methodologies, best practices, lessons learned, and tool development, among the reserves and with stakeholders in the coastal management community.

- Increase the capacity of reserves to develop and participate in collaborative research projects and enhance their ability to communicate the outcomes of collaborative research projects to decision-makers. Activities to increase reserve capacity must include such things as: engaging undergraduate students and graduates (including NOAA OCM Margaret A.

Davidson Fellows) to support and contribute new and creative thinking on projects, advancing reserve expertise on collaborative processes, or providing training, opportunities, or resources for staff to translate and communicate project results to a diverse audience of decision-makers and managers.

Ensure connection with NERRS sector representatives, other collaborative science organizations, and estuarine science organizations to incorporate current thinking around all aspects of estuarine science and to help advise program host on implementation.

### C. Program Authority

Section 310 of the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, 16 U.S.C. 1456c. Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA Number: 11.419, Coastal Zone Management Administration Awards).

## II. Award Information

### A. Funding Availability

Total anticipated funding is approximately \$25,000,000 for five years. The anticipated federal funding per year is approximately \$5,000,000. Funding in FY 2024 and future years is subject to the availability of appropriations. It is anticipated that one multi-year award will be made with these funds and the total will be adjusted based on available funding.

Applicants must be in compliance with all existing NOAA grants or cooperative agreements and otherwise eligible to receive federal awards in order to be considered for funding under this competition.

Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to establish any specific partnership or to obligate available funds for partnership activities. There is no guarantee that funds will be available to make awards for this funding opportunity or that any proposal will be selected for funding. If an applicant incurs any costs prior to receiving an award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, it does so at its own risk of not being selected or of these costs not being included in a subsequent award. In no event will NOAA or the DOC be responsible for any proposal preparation costs. In addition, NOAA and DOC will not be responsible for any incurred project costs if this program fails to receive funding.

### B. Project/Award Period

The start date on proposals shall be on October 1, 2024.

Projects funded in FY 2024 shall have a performance period up to 60 months.

The project will be awarded as a multi-year award. Proposed projects should request funding for up to five years, and applicants must include project plans and budgets for each year of the project. When multi-year proposals are approved, funding initially will be provided for only the first year of the program. Once awarded, applications that request more than one year of funding will not compete for funding in subsequent years. Funding for years two through five is contingent upon availability of funds from Congress, satisfactory performance, and is at the sole discretion of the agency.

### C. Type of Funding Instrument

The funding instrument for these awards will be a cooperative agreement and NOAA will have substantial involvement in the project.

Examples of substantial federal involvement may include: consultation on program focus, priority setting, and evaluation; facilitating communications with partners to obtain input on program priorities; providing expertise in meeting planning, facilitation, and communications; information analyses; assisting with program management; and leveraging other resources and funding to further the program goals.

The specific roles will depend on negotiations with the federal agency and will be formalized as part of the cooperative agreement for the successful proposal.

## III. Eligibility Information

### A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible funding applicants are: non-federal institutions of higher education, other non-profits, state, local, Indian Tribal Governments, and commercial organizations. Federal agencies and employees are not allowed to receive funds under this announcement, but may serve as collaborative project partners. If federal agencies are collaborators, applicants are expected to provide detail on the planned level of federal engagement in the application. Examples might include, but are not limited to partnership services; serving in a review capacity; or participating in priority task teams, working groups, or leadership teams.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management employees and contractors are not permitted to assist in the preparation of applications for any application. Letters of support from NOAA Office for Coastal Management employees or contractors are not allowable and will not be included among the application materials considered by merit reviewers. NOAA Office for Coastal Management staff listed in this funding opportunity are available to provide general

information on programmatic goals and objectives, ongoing NERRS programs/activities, and funding priorities.

DOC and NOAA support cultural and gender diversity and encourage women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications to this program. In addition, DOC and NOAA are strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. DOC and NOAA encourage applications involving any of the above institutions to apply.

The lead applicant on any proposal will be responsible for ensuring that allocated funds are used for the purposes of, and in a manner consistent with this program, including any funds awarded to an eligible sub-awardee.

#### B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost sharing is not required and inclusion of voluntary committed cost sharing is prohibited. There is no matching requirement.

#### C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Each organization may submit no more than one application for consideration under this competition. Construction grants will not be awarded under this announcement. A construction award is an award in which the major purpose of the project or program is construction.

### IV. Application and Submission Information

#### A. Address to Request Application Package

The standard SF-424 application package is available online at <http://www.grants.gov>. If this is not feasible, an application package may be requested from Christopher Kinkade, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East West Highway Silver Spring, MD 20910, Office phone: (401) 366-4880 or e-mail [Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov](mailto:Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov).

#### B. Content and Form of Application

Letters of Intent:

For Letters of Intent (LOI), applicants should follow the LOI and proposal application requirements stated in this announcement or LOIs and proposal applications will not be considered.

The LOI process is a critical step to determine if proposed programs are well suited for this specific competition. A LOI is required before submitting a full proposal. The goal of this process is to streamline the review process by only encouraging proposals that strongly align with the program goals and objectives. The Office for Coastal Management will respond to each LOI by email informing the lead Principal Investigator (PI) whether or not they are encouraged to submit a proposal. We anticipate sending responses by approximately 12/15/2023. If the lead PI does not receive an email by 12/15/2023 the applicant should contact Chris Kinkade (Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov) and request the status of the LOI. The results of the LOI review will be released to the lead PI only. The proposal submission deadlines in this announcement will apply to everyone.

While a LOI is required prior to submitting a full proposal to this NOFO, applicants may choose to submit a proposal even if they are not encouraged by NOAA to do so after NOAA reviews and provides feedback on the LOI.

The LOI should provide a concise description of the proposed work and its relevance to program objectives. The LOI should include the components listed below. Please note that only LOIs that strongly align with the program objectives and goals will be encouraged to submit a proposal.

The LOI should include the following information on a cover page:

- (a) Identification of the NOAA Office for Coastal Management as the LOI target;
- (b) Project title;
- (c) Names, affiliations, and contact information for lead principal investigators (PIs) (NOAA will communicate with the lead PI on the status of the LOI);
- (d) Names and affiliation for the principal investigator and all co-PIs;
- (e) Funding type identified as a cooperative agreement;
- (f) Proposed project start and end dates; and
- (g) Funding request by year (as appropriate).

The body of the LOI should be no more than 4 pages, single-spaced, at a font size of 11 points or larger. A font size of less than 10 points may be used for mathematical formulas or equations, figures, table or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters. However, PIs are cautioned that the text must still be readable. Margins must be at least one inch in all directions.

The body of the LOI must include the following components:

- (a) Statement of the Purpose: State the intent, goal, and outcome of proposed work.
- (b) Approach: Briefly describe the approach that will be taken for: (1) establishing a

national program that will solicit, administer, and support competitive, peer-reviewed, collaborative natural and social science projects that directly address NERRS system-wide, regional, and local reserve management priorities; (2) supporting sharing and transfer of research outcomes and monitoring information, as well as knowledge related to methodologies, best practices, lessons learned, and tool development among the reserves and with stakeholders in the coastal management community; and (3) increasing the capacity of reserves to develop and participate in collaborative research projects and enhancing their ability to communicate the outcomes of collaborative research projects to decision-makers.

(c) Budget summary: Provide an overview of funding requested and brief details on how funds will be used.

#### Full Proposals:

For submission of an application (i.e., a full proposal), a complete standard NOAA financial assistance application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. All application materials should be single-spaced, with a legible font size of 11 points or larger and margins of at least one inch on all sides.

The complete application package should include the following forms and documents and should be grouped as follows:

(1) Project Description plus appendices and (2) Federal forms and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) information.

The Project Description, as described in components 3a.- 3g below, should be limited to no more than a total of 20 pages. The project description should also include a title page and a table of contents, but these pages will not count toward the 20-page limit for the project description.

Project descriptions that exceed the 20-page limit will be shortened to 20 pages by removing pages at the end of Description of Program section (component 3c.) before it is forwarded to merit reviewers for evaluation. Pages excised from lengthy applications will not be reviewed or considered. Applications that are incomplete, unclear, or contain numerous typographical errors may not be understood effectively by reviewers, resulting in lower evaluation scores, so applicants are advised to review their application materials closely before they are submitted to the agency for consideration.

Appendices associated with the project description should be limited to materials that

directly support the main body of the proposal (e.g., resumes, references, detailed budget narrative, data sharing plans, letters of collaboration, letters of support, list of suggested reviewers, lists of data sources, and maps) (see component 5). Applicants must paginate their proposal, including any appendices. Appendices must not total more than 30 total pages. Standard Federal (SF) forms, information to complete forms, a detailed budget narrative, and NEPA and environmental compliance information should be submitted separately from the Project Description and associated appendices.

Federal forms from the SF-424 Form family should include the following forms as applicable:

- Application for Federal Assistance: Form SF-424
- Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: Form SF-424A (prior to award, a Form SF-424A for each year of funding will be required)
- Assurances for Non-construction Programs: Form SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: Form CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: Form SF-LLL (if applicable)

Federal forms, detailed budget narrative, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) information, and information provided (e.g., Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement) to complete the federal forms can be submitted separately, or combined and submitted in one PDF document.

Please keep in mind that the total electronic file size of the proposal narrative and appendices combined shall not exceed 10 megabytes. Files that are larger than ten megabytes may not be properly downloaded, uploaded, or received by the agency or the reviewers. Files that cannot be opened or downloaded will not be reviewed.

All applications should contain the following 13 components:

1. Title Page (Proposal Cover Sheet) which includes:

Project title

Proposed project period (start and end dates)

Type of project (i.e., grant or cooperative agreement)

Recipient name (must match registered name in System for Award Management; SAM.Gov.)

Recipient Unique Entity Identifier number (must match applicant information in System for Award Management; SAM.Gov)

Principal and other key investigators (names, organization, and contact information)

Financial representative (names, organization, and contact information)

Requested funding by year (as appropriate)

If the project is intended to be administered under an existing NOAA Cooperative Institute, state which Institute will administer the award

2. Project Summary. Provide a summary of the proposed project. The summary should contain the following sections and must not exceed two pages in length:

- a. Project name/title
- b. Requested funding by year (as appropriate)
- c. Brief project summary including objectives, expected results, and intended benefits and outcomes

3. Project Description.

All project descriptions (proposals) should include the following sections:

a. Goal and Objective(s). Describe the specific project goals for the 5-year collaborative science program and the objectives to be achieved. Goals and objectives must reflect the activities that will be accomplished in each year of the work plan included as part of the Approach (3.e., below). Recipients will be required to submit semi-annual progress reports in which progress against these goals and objectives will be reported. Sufficient detail should be provided to enable reviewers to evaluate the relevance and applicability of proposed work to program priorities described in Section I.B of this announcement, to determine the technical/scientific merit of the proposed work, to adequately review the qualifications of the applicants, and to assess whether the proposed scope of work raises any concerns with regard to federal policy considerations, such as those related to the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Historic Preservation Act, and Marine Mammal Protection Act.

b. Background and Program Overview. Provide sufficient information for NOAA and non-NOAA reviewers to independently assess whether the applicant's plan for establishing and implementing a collaborative science program will increase the capacity of the reserves and their prospective research partners to address NERRS system-wide research and management needs, as well as local and regional reserve priorities and those of NOAA. Describe how the program will engage the NERRS management, research, education, stewardship, and coastal training programs and use best practices for collaborative science to support their needs and priorities. Describe the logistical and human-based challenges and barriers to establishing and implementing the program and how these challenges will be met

and the barriers overcome. Describe how the applicant's knowledge of the challenges and benefits associated with managing national-scale programs focused on coastal and estuarine ecosystem science is relevant to this collaborative science program and how this knowledge will ensure success of the program. Describe how the project team will work with NOAA and the reserves to refine the focus of the system-wide priorities listed in this NOFO, as they apply to activities conducted by the program over the five-year award

c. Description of Program. Describe in detail how the proposed program will take an adaptive management approach to accomplish the following:

- i. Establish a national program that will solicit, administer, and support competitive, peer-reviewed, collaborative natural and social science projects that directly address system-wide, regional, and local reserve management priorities. Develop project solicitations that address innovative applied research and the sharing of information within the reserve system.
- ii. Support sharing and transfer of research outcomes and monitoring information, as well as knowledge related to methodologies, best practices, lessons learned, and tool development, among the reserves and with stakeholders in the coastal management community.
- iii. Increase the capacity of reserves to develop and participate in collaborative research projects and enhance their ability to communicate the outcomes of collaborative research projects to decision-makers.

d. Partnerships. Identify and describe any professional or technical partnerships that will be leveraged or created. Describe the roles of any partners and indicate any efforts or resources that will be leveraged to support the program. Letters of collaboration or support from partners that play a significant role in the program must be included in the appendices. If the program includes federal partners, the roles and responsibilities of the federal partners must be clearly identified.

e. Approach. Provide a work plan that identifies specific tasks to be accomplished each year of the program. The work plan must also clearly address data management requirements for any data generated by the program, and the steps that will be taken to achieve efficient and effective data access and archive that is compliant with federal regulations. The designated NOAA Data Management Center for the NERRS Collaborative Science Program is the NERRS Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO; <https://cdmo.baruch.sc.edu/>). Funding recipients are expected to submit data and data management plans to the CDMO, which will provide public access and permanent archiving of data generated by the program. Resources for data sharing or archiving have already been identified by NOAA OCM. Proposals should not include such costs. See Section B.5.d. below for more information about data sharing and data management plans.

f. Task Outcomes or Products - Identify and describe the anticipated Collaborative Science Program products or outcomes. Explain how they will benefit the reserves and the broader coastal resource management community and describe performance measures that will be used to evaluate success. This narrative should include information on dissemination of the findings and results from projects and other activities supported by the program to resource managers, local communities, and other stakeholders as appropriate. This narrative must include information on how the program will be evaluated for success.

g. Milestone Schedule. Display timelines for major tasks, target milestones for important intermediate and final products, and key program outcomes.

#### 4. Budget Narrative and Justification

In order to allow reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of all costs, applications should include a detailed budget narrative and a budget justification broken out by individual task. The budget narrative submitted with the final application should match the dollar amounts included on all required forms and clearly link to the project narrative. Please explain each calculation and provide a narrative justification to explain expenditures for each budget category. The budget narrative should describe, by category of expenditure, the total funding needed to accomplish the objectives described in the project description for the entire award period. Please explain how categorical costs are derived in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to determine if costs are 'allowable and reasonable' according to the cost principles referenced in 2 CFR 200, Subpart E. Budget narrative categories should correspond to the standard object class categories listed in Section B of the SF-424A. For additional details, please review the budget guidance provided at: <https://coast.noaa.gov/funding/forms.html>

Applicants should include detailed budget information regarding all known contracts and subawards, and indicate the basis for the cost and price estimates in the narrative. Describe activities to occur or products or services to be obtained and indicate the applicability or necessity of each to the project. Each subaward should include form SF-424A. Detailed budget information includes:

Name of identified qualified subrecipient or contractor, affiliation, contact information, and method of selection. For “to be determined,” describe plans for selection. Information must include the name and location (city, state, and Congressional district) of the entity receiving the funds and the location of the primary place of performance under the contract or sub award.).

Period of Performance. Include the dates for the performance period. If it involves a number of tasks, include the performance period for each task.

Scope of Work. List and describe the specific activities or tasks to be performed.

Criteria for Measuring Accountability: Include an itemized line item breakdown as well as total contract/award amount. If applicable, include any indirect costs paid under the contract/award and the indirect cost rate used.

Itemized Budget. Include categories used in program budget for subrecipients or cost-based contractors. If applicable, include any direct cost paid under the subaward or contract and the indirect cost rate used.

All subawards and contracts must be made consistent with the requirements of 2 CFR 200.331-200.333 for subawards, and 200.317-200.327 for procurements.

For any equipment, a description of the item and associated costs or price is required, including a description of how it will be used in the project. Note that equipment is defined as tangible personal property (including information technology systems) having a useful life of more than one year and a per-unit acquisition cost which equals or exceeds the lesser of the capitalization level established by the non-federal entity for financial statement purposes, or \$5,000. See 2 CFR 200.1 Equipment, 2 CFR 200.313, and 2 CFR 200.317-327.

Non-federal applicants should identify, if this information is known when submitting the grant application, who they plan to request that NOAA transfer equipment or property ownership titles to after the project ends. The decision on grant ownership requests will be made by the Grants Officer during the grant closeout process.

The cost or price, purpose, and method of selection for identified and planned acquisition contracts should be thoroughly justified in the Budget Narrative. Describe products or services to be obtained and indicate the applicability or necessity of each to the project. Procurements are subject to policies described in 2 CFR 200.317 - .327. For “to be determined,” describe plans for selection.

The budget narrative should also provide, to the extent possible, detailed information on travel, including costs, a description of anticipated travel, destinations, the number of travelers, and a justification of how the requested travel is directly relevant to the successful completion of the project. If actual trip details are unknown, applicants should state the basis for the proposed travel charges. Applicants should allocate travel funds for any coordination meetings at regional or national levels.

If a foreign air carrier is anticipated to be used for any portion of travel, prior approval is

required under the DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions, Section K.03.c.,

<https://www.commerce.gov/oam/files/2020-doc-standard-terms-and-conditions-0>

and therefore, such travel should be included in the proposal to avoid having to request prior approval after the project starts. Applicants may factor in travel costs for participation in an annual NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) workshop for recipients.

Refer to component 13 below in this Section regarding treatment of Indirect Costs in the Budget Narrative.

#### 5. Appendices

Only material that is submitted as a single package will be reviewed. Appendices must be limited to materials that directly support the main body of the proposal (for example, detailed budget information, data management plan, letters of collaboration, resumes, references, list of suggested reviewers, lists of data sources, and maps).

a. Mandatory detailed budget information, for example Standard Form (SF) -424As for each sub-award and contract. Information should include the name and location (city, state, and Congressional district) of the entity receiving the funds and the location of the primary place of performance under the contract or subaward.

b. Letters of Collaboration. All supporting letters from partner organizations that are instrumental to the project should be included in the application package. Letters must clearly indicate the level of commitment and/or collaboration. Letters of collaboration do not need original signatures.

c. Resumes. Provide resumes of the Principal Investigator for the project and any other key personnel critical to the success of the project. Ensure that resumes address qualifications relevant to conducting the proposed work. Resumes must be no more than two pages for each key investigator. Resumes longer than two pages will be shortened to two pages by removing pages at the end of the document. As a standard practice NOAA requires that resumes be on file and are maintained in the NOAA online grants management system for PIs of competitive awards.

d. Data Sharing Plan.

i. Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discoverable by and accessible to the general public, in a timely fashion (typically within two years), free of charge or at no more than the cost of

reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely-used or open-standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely used or international standards.

ii. Proposals submitted in response to this Announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages describing how these requirements will be satisfied. There is an optional fillable form for data management and sharing plans at:

[https://coast.noaa.gov/data/coasthome/funding/\\_pdf/forms/data-mgmt-sharing-plan-review-form.pdf](https://coast.noaa.gov/data/coasthome/funding/_pdf/forms/data-mgmt-sharing-plan-review-form.pdf). The Data Management Plan must be aligned with the Data Management Guidance provided by NOAA in this Announcement. The contents of the Data Management Plan (or absence thereof), and past performance regarding such plans, will be considered as part of proposal review. The costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving may be included in the proposal budget unless otherwise stated in the Guidance. Accepted submission of data to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) is one way to satisfy data sharing requirements; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, particularly for large or unusual datasets.

In the case of the NERRS Collaborative Science Program, the NERRS Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO) is designated as the Data Management Center and data generated by this program will be submitted to CDMO. Data management plans must include the following information: (1) types of environmental data and information to be generated during the course of the project, (2) how data will be collected, (3) approximate timing of data submissions to the CDMO, (4) standards to be used for data and metadata format and content, (5) procedures that will be used to ensure data stewardship and preservation, (6) prior experience in making such data accessible to the public, and (7) a statement that all data and metadata will be submitted to CDMO on a timely basis so that it can subsequently be made available via the CDMO online data information server at <http://cdmo.baruch.sc.edu>

iii. NOAA may, at its own discretion, make the Data Management Plan from funded proposals publicly visible, or use information from the Data Management Plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data.

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

publication by the journal.

NOAA's Administrative Order on the Management of Environmental Data Management and Information is available under:

[http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative\\_orders/chapter\\_212/212-15.html](http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_212/212-15.html)

More information about the NOAA Data Sharing Policy is available on NOAA's Environmental Data Management Committee website at:

[https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/nao\\_212-15.php](https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/nao_212-15.php)

#### v. Data Management Guidance to Proposal Writers

Responsible NOAA Official for questions regarding this guidance and for verifying accessibility of data produced by funding recipients: Chris Kinkade, Federal Program Officer, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, [Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov](mailto:Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov), 401-366-4880

**Data Accessibility:** The NOAA Office for Coastal Management requires that public access to grant/contract-produced data be enabled. Funding recipients are expected to submit data to the NERIS Centralized Data Management Office (CDMO). CDMO will provide public access, permanent archiving, and will be responsible for submitting data to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) at appropriate intervals.

**Technical Recommendations:** The NOAA Office for Coastal Management is not offering specific technical guidance. Proposals are to describe their proposed approach. Use of open-standard formats and methods is encouraged.

**Resources:** NOAA Office for Coastal Management resources for data sharing or archiving have already been identified; proposals should not include such costs.

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

#### e. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Environmental Compliance:

Under (NEPA), NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts of projects or proposals seeking funding from NOAA. After the application is submitted, NOAA may require additional information to fulfill NEPA and other compliance requirements. If NOAA determines that an environmental assessment is required, applicants may also be requested to assist in drafting the assessment. Applicants may 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. 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 applicants selected for funding must complete questions 1 - 19 of the Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Federal Financial Assistance Applicants accessible at [www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf](http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf) 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). Questions 20 - 53 are not required with the initial application because NOAA anticipates that most projects funded through this competition would not have impacts related to damage assessment and restoration or fisheries sampling and analysis.

Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA websites: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/> including NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <https://www.noaa.gov/organization/administration/nao-216-6a>

and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations under [https://www.osec.doc.gov/opog/dmp/daos/dao216\\_6.html](https://www.osec.doc.gov/opog/dmp/daos/dao216_6.html)

6. Standard Form 424 (SF-424): Application for Federal Assistance (7/2003 version or newer)

Applicants requesting Federal funding in this program must submit a copy of SF-424, 'Application for Federal Assistance'. If a hard copy final application is submitted, it must be signed and dated by the organization's authorized representative, and used as the cover page for the final application. An electronic signature and date stamp will automatically be included on SF-424 forms submitted via Grants.gov.

7. Standard Form 424A (SF-424A): Budget Information for Non-construction Programs (includes a separate form for each year of funding and for each proposed sub-award of \$25,000 or more)

Applicants are required to submit a SF-424A Budget Form to summarize the budget for the proposed scope of work. The first column of Sections A and B shows the federal funds requested, while the second column of Sections A and B shows the non-federal matching funds provided for the project. Total award funding is shown in the final column of Section B. Non-federal funding is broken out by source in Section C. Forecasted cash needs in Section D should be inclusive of all funding for the project. Federal and non-federal funds should be expended at a similar rate throughout the course of the project. Section E may be left blank. Section F summarizes the direct charges in line 21 and lists the indirect charges requested; please show the rate used in line 22. Please note that completion of the SF-424A form as described above represents NOAA's preference and may not be consistent with the instructions that accompany the SF-424A form. All budget figures should match the funding requested on the application cover sheet and correspond with the descriptions contained in the project and budget narratives.

All subawards should also be accompanied by a separate SF-424A form to fully document the proposed subaward budget.

8. Standard Form 424B (SF-424B): Assurances for Non-Construction Programs  
Applicants are required to submit a signed SF-424B, 'Assurances for Non-Construction Programs'.

9. Form CD-511: Certification Regarding Lobbying  
Applicants are required to submit a Form CD-511, 'Certifications Regarding Lobbying'.

10. Standard Form LLL (SF-LLL) Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (if applicable)  
If applicable, applicants may be required to disclose certain lobbying activities described in form SF-LLL.

11. Permits and Approvals  
It is the responsibility of the applicant to obtain all necessary federal, state, and local government permits and approvals for the proposed work. Applicants must provide a list of all known permits that will be required to perform the proposed work and an indication of the status of any permits needed (e.g., not yet applied, permit application submitted/pending, permit granted, etc.) or a statement indicating that no permits are necessary. You should include this required element even if permits are not required.

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 and

environmental assessment) will delay or prevent the award of funds for projects that have been preliminarily selected for funding.

For work proposed within National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks, National Seashores, and other federally designated managed areas, it is the responsibility of the applicant to request and obtain any necessary permits or letters of agreement from the appropriate government agencies prior to commencement of an award. For applicants who propose to conduct research or monitoring activities that may affect any coral species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act, you will likely need an Endangered Species Act Section 10(a)(1)(A) permit. For more information see: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/corals.htm>.

12. Match waiver request (if applicable)

Matching funds are not required for this NOFO

13. Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (if applicable)

The proposed budget may include an amount for indirect or Facilities and Administrative costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., utilities, rent, and insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and, therefore, cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. See 2 CFR 200.1 and 200.412-415.

A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect cost agreement with the federal Government should be included with the application package. If an award recipient does not have a current indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimis rate described at 2 CFR 200.414. Non-federal entities that do not have a current negotiated indirect (F&A) cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate at 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC). The de minimis indirect cost rate should be used for all federal awards. Non-federal entities may use this rate indefinitely, but may choose to negotiate an indirect (F&A) cost rate at any time. This de minimis rate option is not available to state and local governments, and Indian tribes.

If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate and plans to establish a new negotiated indirect cost rate agreement, documentation necessary to establish a rate must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award. See Section IV.E for more information on indirect cost rates and establishing a new indirect cost rate with the DOC.

In addition to the 13 standard elements described above, applicants may upload additional

supporting documentation to be included with the appendices (e.g., resumes and qualifications of applicants, letters of support or statements of collaboration) by using the 'Optional Form' box under 'Other Attachments' in Grants.gov during the application submission process.

For applications submitted in electronic format, acceptable formats are limited to Adobe Acrobat (.PDF) or Microsoft Word files.

#### C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

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, 31 U.S.C. 6106 Note. To the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the System for Award Management (SAM), which may be accessed online at <https://www.sam.gov/portal/public/SAM/>. Applicants are also required to use the Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System (DUNS), as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25 at <http://go.usa.gov/x9PYd>.

Applicants should: (1) Be registered in the federal SAM before submitting an application; (2) provide a valid DUNS number on an application; and (3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. The federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements. If an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the federal awarding agency is ready to make a federal award, the federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Applicants should allow a minimum of seven days to complete the SAM registration, although complete registration for SAM may take several weeks if problems arise.

Registration is required only once but must be renewed once a year.

Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov).

#### D. Submission Dates and Times

##### Letters of Intent.

The deadline for receipt of LOIs is 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on 12/01/2023. For LOIs submitted by email, the date and time indication of the receiving server will be the basis of determining timeliness. Note that receipt may be delayed if email servers are not functioning

efficiently. For hard copy submission of LOIs, these must be stamped with an official U.S. Postal Service postmark or provided to a commercial carrier with tracking number and receipt on or before 11:59 p.m. sender's local time on 12/01/2023. Private metered postmarks are unacceptable, and LOIs may not be considered if postmarked after this time. In the case of electronic submissions, emailed LOIs may not be considered if received by the Office for Coastal Management after 11:59 p.m. Eastern Time on 12/01/2023.

#### Full Proposal Applications:

Full proposal applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by and validated by Grants.gov and eRA by 11:59 p.m. Eastern time on 02/09/2024. Applications received after the closing date and time will not be accepted. Note: Validation or rejection of an application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission, while eRA validates applications immediately.

If for any reason applicants are unable to submit their full proposal application through Grants.gov and eRA or are concerned about possible problems associated with the Grants.gov system, they may provide a paper copy of their full application by mail. Applications submitted by mail must include all relevant application elements described above, must include a SF-424 form with original ink or valid electronic signature and date from an authorized recipient organization representative, and must be stamped with an official U.S. Postal Service postmark or provided to a commercial carrier with tracking number and receipt on or before 11:59 p.m. Eastern time on 02/09/2024; private metered postmarks are unacceptable. Please address all mailed applications to: Christopher Kinkade, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East West Highway, SSMC4, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Paper applications received more than 3 business days after the deadline will not be reviewed. Applicants submitting by paper are responsible for tracking their applications.

Applicants should consider the possibility of winter storms and other unforeseen impacts from natural hazards that could affect their Internet access and use of Grants.gov on or before LOI and full application due dates. Applicants should be aware that localized hazardous weather or other situations beyond their control impacting their ability to submit LOIs or packages before deadlines may not result in changes to the LOI or application deadline.

#### E. Intergovernmental Review

Funding applications submitted under this competition are subject to Executive Order (EO) 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." It is the state agency's responsibility to contact their state's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and

comply with the state's process under EO 12372.

To assist the applicant, the names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed on the Office of Management and Budget's website: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/SPOC-list-as-of-2023.pdf>

## F. Funding Restrictions

### 1. Indirect Costs

Applicants are permitted to request indirect costs if their organization has an established Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with a federal agency that covers the period of the award. Applicants requesting indirect costs should submit a copy of their current and signed indirect cost rate agreement with their application package.

If an award recipient does not have a current indirect cost rate with any federal agency, the recipient may request to use the de minimis rate described at 2 CFR 200.414, as described in Section IV.B.12 of this Announcement. Alternatively, the negotiation and approval of a new rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the DOC. The U.S. Department of Commerce, Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions require that recipients within 90 days of the award start date, submit to the address listed below documentation (indirect cost proposal, cost allocation plan, etc.) necessary to perform the review.

Michele Mazzocchetti  
Grants Officer NOAA Grants Management Division  
1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor  
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910  
[Michele.Mazzocchetti@noaa.gov](mailto:Michele.Mazzocchetti@noaa.gov)

Indirect-cost-rate-agreement documentation is not required for subawardees. However indirect cost rates at the negotiated levels should be paid by the primary awardee. Under 2 CFR 200.414 "Indirect (F&A) Costs," any applicant that does not have a current negotiated indirect cost rate may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs which may be used indefinitely. Costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs, but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both pursuant to 2 CFR 200.403 "Factors affecting allowability of costs." If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a cooperator chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-federal entity may apply to do at any time. The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the DOC Standard Terms and Conditions Section B.06.

## 2. Ineligible projects:

The following projects will not be eligible for funding: (1) Activities that constitute legally required mitigation for the adverse effects of an activity regulated or otherwise governed by state or federal law; (2) Activities that constitute mitigation for natural resource damages under federal or state law; and (3) Activities that are required by a separate consent decree, court order, statute or regulation.

## 3. Cost Principles:

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project. Allowable costs are limited to costs necessary and reasonable to achieve the approved goals and objectives and are determined by reference to relevant Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements.

Recipients are subject to the 2 CFR 200, Subpart E “Cost Principles” and as well as any DOC implementing regulations that may be in effect at the time of award. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, fringe benefits, travel, equipment, supplies, and training, as long as the costs are determined to be necessary, reasonable, and allocable to the award.

## G. Other Submission Requirements

Letters of intent (LOI) shall be sent via email to [Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov](mailto:Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov). Insert "FY2024 NERRS Collaborative Science Program Letter of Intent" as the subject line of the email. If you do not have Internet access, a hard copy LOI must be submitted to the attention of Christopher Kinkade, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East West Highway, SSMC4, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

The standard NOAA funding application package is available at [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) (Grants.gov) by searching the Funding Opportunity Number or the Federal Assistance Listings number (11.419). Application packages, including all letters of collaboration, shall be submitted through the “Apply” function on Grants.gov. The Grants.gov site contains directions for submitting an application. Applicants must register with Grants.gov before any application materials can be submitted. To use Grants.gov and eRA, applicants must have a Unique Identity Identifier and be registered in the SAM.gov, which requires periodic renewals. Refer to Section IV.C. for details on receiving a unique identity identifier number and registering with SAM.gov.

## V. Application Review Information

### A. Evaluation Criteria

The Application evaluation criteria for full proposals for this program and weights for

each criterion are below.

Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the program goals. This ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities (total: 40 pts). For the NERRS Collaborative Science Program this includes the following:

Does the proposal describe a national-level program that has clearly defined, focused, and realistic objectives that can address innovative applied research and the sharing of information within the reserve system? Will the proposed program increase the capacity of reserves to effectively support coastal and estuarine resource management? (20 pts)

Does the proposal describe a viable plan for involving intended users of the science in all aspects of the research supported by the program, from problem definition to project implementation? Does the proposal incorporate principles of diversity and inclusion to ensure equitable participation in activities? (10 pts)

Will the proposed program effectively support sharing and transfer of research outcomes and monitoring information, as well as knowledge related to methodologies, best practices, lessons learned, and tool development, among the reserves and with stakeholders in the coastal management community? (10 pts)

Technical and scientific merit: 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 (total: 30 pts). For the NERRS Collaborative Science Program this includes the following:

Is the proposed approach appropriate and viable for efficiently administering funding for collaborative research and supporting the reserves and their prospective partners to conduct collaborative research? Are the proposed goals and objectives of the program achievable within the proposed time-frame? (15 pts)

Is there a viable plan, including training, to increase the capacity of reserve staff and students to develop and participate in collaborative research projects? (10 pts)

Does the approach include a plan to utilize feedback from NOAA and the reserve system to adaptively manage the program to achieve the program's goals and objectives and address the research and management priorities of NOAA and the NERRS? (5 pts)

Overall qualifications of the funding applicants (15 points): This criterion ascertains whether the funding applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the program's goals and objectives. For the NERRS Collaborative Science Program, this includes the following:

Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the challenges and benefits associated with national-scale programs focused on coastal and estuarine ecosystem science and coastal resource management? Does the applicant possess the experience, facilities, and resources to establish a national program that will solicit and administer competitive, peer-reviewed, projects? Does the applicant possess experience and knowledge to support collaborative

research processes? Does the applicant demonstrate an understanding of the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in their approach to funding science?

Project costs (5 points). This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the proposed program's needs, objectives, and time-frame. Are budget expenditures justified and reasonable for the tasks proposed? Are expenditures adequate and reasonable to accomplish the objectives described for the program?

Outreach and education (5 points): This criterion assesses whether the proposal provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to understand and protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NERRS Collaborative Science Program, this should include a strategy for the dissemination of the findings and results from projects and other activities supported by the program to resource managers, local communities, and other stakeholders as appropriate, and includes engagement of the NERRS research, education, stewardship, and coastal training programs.

Data management plan (5 points): This criteria assesses whether the proposal includes a thorough and effective data management plan. For the NERRS Collaborative Science Program, applications will be evaluated on the following: Does the project include a data management plan that provides appropriate data to CDMO in a timely manner?

Does the project include a data management plan that ensures that environmental data will be visible, accessible, and independently understandable to users? Does the application include a clear explanation if a data management plan is not required for this project (no environmental data produced) or if data are not publicly accessible due to law, regulation, policy (such as those applicable to personally identifiable information or protected critical infrastructure information or proprietary trade information) or by security requirements.

## B. Review and Selection Process

### Letters of Intent (LOI) Review Process:

All LOIs may be evaluated by federal and non-federal staff members in the context of the above evaluation criteria. The goal of this review is to determine whether the proposed program is responsive to the goals as advertised in this notice and select the projects that are strongly aligned with the goals and objectives of the NERRS Collaborative Science Program. Highly ranked program proposals will be encouraged to continue on to the proposal process. LOIs that do not strongly align with the goals and objectives of this announcement will not be encouraged to submit full proposals.

Appropriate mechanisms will be established to avoid conflict of interest for reviewers. The NOAA Office for Coastal Management will respond to each LOI by email informing the applicant (i.e., the lead PI) whether or not they are encouraged to submit a full proposal. We anticipate sending responses by 12/15/2023. If the lead PI does not receive an email by 12/15/2023 the lead PI must contact < Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov > and request the status of

their LOI. The proposal submission deadline in this announcement will apply to everyone. The results of the LOI review will be released to the lead PI only. Applicants may choose to submit a proposal even if they are not encouraged by NOAA to do so after submitting an LOI.

#### Full Proposal Review and Selection Process:

An initial administrative review will be conducted on each application to confirm that it is timely, responsive, and complete. NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or solved. Applications that meet the minimum requirements will be evaluated and scored individually by independent peer review and by independent peer panel review during a merit-based review and ranking process. Panel independent peer reviewers will have experience in managing or administering programs related to estuarine and coastal management. Appropriate mechanisms will be implemented to avoid potential conflicts of interest during the proposal review process. Each reviewer will be asked to individually evaluate and rank proposals using the weighted evaluation criteria above. Proposal evaluations will be based exclusively on information included in the application.

Proposers may include a list of suggested reviewers who they believe are especially well qualified to review the LOI or proposal. Proposers also may designate persons they would prefer not review the LOI or proposal, indicating why. These suggestions are optional. The Competition Manager handling the proposal will consider the suggestions and may contact the proposer for further information. However, the decision whether or not to use the suggestions remains with the Competition Manager.

Both Federal and non-Federal experts may be used in the review process. The peer reviewers will be several individuals with expertise in the subjects addressed by particular applications. Each reviewer will score proposals individually on a scale of one to five, where scores represent respectively: Excellent (5), Very Good (4), Good (3), Fair (2), Poor (1). Reviewers will then consider the relative weighting of the evaluation criteria in providing an overall proposal score.

The peer panel will consist of individuals whose expertise covers a range of experience relevant to the goals and objectives of this NOFO. The panel will have access to the LOI reviews of proposals and will use the LOI reviews in their discussion and evaluation of the proposals. The peer panel will rate the proposals using the evaluation criteria and scoring instructions provided above. Panel reviewer ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the proposals. If more than one non-Federal reviewer is on the review panel, the input from individual panel members will be used to rank proposals and the panel member's input to the Selecting Official will not be provided as consensus advice.

### C. Selection Factors

The Selecting Official will be an official within the Office for Coastal Management (or their designee) and will make the final recommendation for an award to the Grants Officer, who is authorized to obligate Federal funding and execute the award. The Selecting Official or designee may also negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official will recommend an application for funding based on rank order, unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following selection factors:

- (1) Availability of funding;
- (2) Balance/distribution of funds: a) by geographic area, b) by type of institutions, c) by type of partners, d) by research areas; or e) 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 set out in Sections I.A. and I.B.;
- (5) An applicant's prior award performance;
- (6) Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups; and
- (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 NOAA GMD.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest-scored application. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their application was not among those recommended for funding. Unsuccessful applications submitted in hard copy will be kept on file in accordance with NOAA records requirements and then destroyed.

In addition, NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, may ask applicants to work together or combine projects, may defer applications to the future, or may reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized.

Please note that not all activities submitted under a single proposal may be deemed appropriate for funding, and the Selecting Official may recommend alternate activities as appropriate or only partial funding, based on the selection factors and the merit and/or panel review written evaluations. For a proposal to be selected for funding, the applicant may be asked to modify objectives and activities, work plans, and budgets, and to provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. This may result in submission of a revised application before final funding decisions are made. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and other relevant application details will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the

applicant, NOAA Grants Management Division, and Office for Coastal Management officials. Applicants should also note that modifications to projects may be necessary as a result of NOAA's efforts to comply with NEPA and other legislation.

**Risk Review:** After applications are proposed for funding by the selecting official, the Grants Office will perform administration reviews. These may include assessments of the financial stability of an applicant and the quality of the applicant's management systems, history of performance, and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities. Special conditions that address any risks determined to exist may be applied. Applicants may submit comments to the Responsibility/Qualification section of SAM.gov about any information included in the system about their organization for consideration by the awarding agency. NOAA reserves the right to not make an award to an applicant where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be made by the NOAA Grants Officer.

#### D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Formal announcement of an award will be made by approximately August 30, 2024. The anticipated start date for cooperative agreement awards made under this competition is October 1, 2024, dependent on funding availability, acceptable completion of all NOAA/applicant negotiations including NEPA and environmental compliance analysis and permit requirements, and the provision of other supporting documentation as requested. See IV.A for information about award notices. All applications submitted to this competition will be retained for at least three years and then destroyed.

## VI. Award Administration Information

### A. Award Notices

Applications recommended for funding by the selecting official will be forwarded to the NOAA GMD by the Program Office. The applicant will be notified by the program office by email that their application was recommended for funding and remains under consideration. The applicant should be aware that the notification by the program office is not the official award notice and funding is not assured. Official notification happens only when the applicant receives an award notice from the Grants Officer electronically. The official notice of award is the Commerce Form 450 (CD-450), Financial Assistance Award, issued by the NOAA Grants Officer Electronically through NOAA's online electronic grants management system.

In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions limiting the use of funds for activities that have outstanding environmental compliance requirements and may lead to modification of the project's scope of work. These special award conditions may also include other compliance requirements for the award and will be applied on a case-by-case basis. Applicants are strongly encouraged to review award documents carefully before accepting a Federal award to ensure they are fully aware of the relevant terms that have been placed on the award.

## B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

### 1. Pre-Award Notice

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), are applicable to this solicitation. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXC7A>.

### 2. Uniform Administrative Requirements

Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements at 2 C.F.R. 200, implemented by the Department of Commerce at 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, apply to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXCJQ>.

### 3. Terms and Conditions

The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. These terms will be provided in the award package in the NOAA online grants management system. In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis, and requirements for submitting progress reports.

### 4. NEPA Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts for individual projects as required by NEPA. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) implementing regulations.

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, [http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216\\_6.pdf](http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf), and the Council on Environmental Quality

implementation regulations, [http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/NEPA-40CFR1500\\_1508.pdf](http://energy.gov/sites/prod/files/NEPA-40CFR1500_1508.pdf).

Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non- indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). 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 an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. 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.

#### 5. Data Sharing Requirements

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

Proposals submitted in response to this Announcement must include a Data Management Plan of up to two pages describing how these requirements will be satisfied. The Data Management Plan should be aligned with the Data Management Guidance provided by NOAA in the Announcement. The contents of the Data Management Plan (or absence thereof), and past performance regarding such plans, will be considered as part of proposal review. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; methods for providing data access; approximate total volume of data to be collected; and prior experience in making such data accessible. The costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving may be included in the proposal budget unless otherwise stated in the Guidance. Accepted submission of data to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information

(NCEI) is one way to satisfy data sharing requirements; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, particularly for large or unusual datasets. NOAA may, at its own discretion, make publicly visible the Data Management Plan from funded proposals, or use information from the Data Management Plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data.

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

NOAA's Administrative Order on the Management of Environmental Data Management and Information is available under:

[http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative\\_orders/chapter\\_212/212-15.html](http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_212/212-15.html)

Principal Investigators should indicate how and when they have made their data accessible and usable by the community in the past.

More information about the Data Sharing Policy is available on NOAA's Environmental Data Management Committee website at: [www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.DSP.php](http://www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.DSP.php)

#### 6. Certifications Regarding Federal Felony and Federal Criminal Tax Convictions, Unpaid Federal Tax Assessments and Delinquent Federal Tax Returns.

In accordance with Federal appropriations law, an authorized representative of the selected applicant(s) may be required to provide certain pre-award certifications regarding federal felony and federal criminal tax convictions, unpaid federal tax assessments, and delinquent federal tax returns.

#### 7. Limitation of Liability

Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of continuing Congressional appropriations. 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. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

NOAA reserves the right to halt activity under the award through enforcement procedures under 2 C.F.R. 200.339-.343, Remedies for Non-compliance, 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 as described in 2 C.F.R. 200.340.

## 8. Certification Regarding Lobbying Activities

a) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid by or on behalf of the applicant, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

b) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the applicant shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions.

c) The applicant shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly.

This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by Section 1352, title 31, U.S.C. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

## C. Reporting

Award recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) progress reports consistent with 2 CFR 200.328 - .330 and DOC Standard Terms and Conditions electronically through NOAA's online electronic grants management system. Performance reports must be submitted 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. Financial reports must be submitted every 6 months by the end of April and October during the period of the award in accordance with the DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. NOAA will provide instructions for submitting financial and progress reports upon request.

A comprehensive final report is due 120 days after the award expiration date along with

copies of all products developed under the award. Copies of all materials (including but not limited to brochures, posters, videos, DVDs, publications, reports, management plans, public service announcements, 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 within 120 days of the end of the award. Except where limited by law, regulation, policy or security, recipients are requested to include a statement on the front page of all products to indicate the material is "Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited." If the applicant has requested publication costs, resulting journal publications must be made available to the public free of charge.

Successful applicants will be requested to ensure that all interim progress reports indicate whether financial reports have been submitted to NOAA's GMD and are up-to-date. In their final progress report, applicants will be asked to (a) clearly state the resulting overall impact of their project with respect to or within the coastal management community; and (b) certify that "Final financial reports have been submitted to NOAA's GMD and a final funding drawdown has been made through the Automated Standard Application for Payments (ASAP)."

If equipment or tangible personal property is purchased with grant funds, applicants shall submit an inventory in accordance with OMB guidance that Commerce adopted by regulation at 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, which shall be incorporated under the award. The equipment requirements of the OMB Uniform Guidance are set out at 2 C.F.R. Part 200.313.

Recipients must inventory tangible property at least once every two years and at award closeout. As necessary, SF-428 forms may be attached as an appendix to progress reports or submitted directly to the NOAA program officer.

Recipients must submit reports at least annually and at award closeout on the status of real property in which the federal government retains an interest, unless the federal interest in the real property extends 15 years or more. As necessary, SF-429 forms may be attached as an appendix to progress reports or submitted directly to the NOAA program officer.

The program office recommends that if the equipment is no longer needed, recipients are encouraged to request disposition instructions for equipment approximately 150 days before the project period ends to allow sufficient time to have equipment disposition requests addressed before a project ends. Equipment disposition instructions typically require that recipients aft"Submit Additional Closeout Documents" as an award action request in NOAA's online electronic grants management system. NOAA will provide instructions for disposition in accordance with OMB requirements.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6106 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at [www.FSRS.gov](http://www.FSRS.gov) on all subawards over \$30,000. See 2 CFR 170 at [http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170\\_main\\_02.tpl](http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl).

## VII. Agency Contacts

For administrative or technical questions regarding this announcement, contact the competition manager: Christopher Kinkade, NOAA Office for Coastal Management, 1305 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910 by phone at 401-366-4880 or via email at [Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov](mailto:Chris.Kinkade@noaa.gov).

## VIII. Other Information

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out an award. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment and supplies, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable" specifically for the purpose of the award. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Guidance at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, codified by the Department of Commerce at 1327.101. All cost reimbursement sub-awards (e.g. subgrants, subcontracts) are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular type of organization concerned.

The applicant acknowledges and understands that information and data contained in applications for financial assistance, as well as information and data contained in financial, performance and other reports submitted by applicants, may be used by the Department of Commerce in conducting reviews and evaluations of its financial assistance programs. For this purpose, applicant information and data may be accessed, reviewed and evaluated by Department of Commerce employees, other Federal employees, Federal agents and contractors, and/or by non-Federal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflicts of interest and nondisclosure agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, applicants are expected to support program reviews and evaluations by submitting required financial and performance information and data in an accurate and timely manner, and by cooperating with Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with 2

C.F.R. § 200.303(e), applicants are reminded that they must take reasonable measures to safeguard protected personally identifiable information and other confidential or sensitive personal or business information created or obtained in connection with a Department of Commerce financial assistance award.

In addition, Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In accordance with 15 CFR § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

If an applicant submits multiple electronic versions of the proposal, the applicant should advise the federal agency of the tracking number of the proposal that should be withdrawn.

Applicants shall not electronically submit packages with files embedded within other files as any such files may not be reviewed or factored into the merit review process.

The paper copy submission process is an option for applicants in remote island or office locations and for those who do not have access to the Internet.

The federal program office has a process to review for completeness. Administrative reviews generally take place after deadlines because the majority of applicants apply just before deadlines. If there are no time constraints and available resources, the federal agency may reach back to applicants who have submitted incomplete packages.

Recipients of any award (competitive or non-competitive) are required to designate principal investigators (PIs) in NOAA's online electronic grants management system within 30 days of receiving award offers.

Designation of Principal Investigators or Project Directors. After award acceptance in NOAA's online electronic grants management system, the Principal Investigator(s) or Project Director(s) must be associated with the award by the Recipient System Administrator within 30 days from when the award offer was received. This will provide the investigator with access to the award for requesting award actions and submitting project progress reports. The Recipient System Administrator that recipients identify during acceptance will

receive a task in NOAA's online electronic grants management system to "Manage Award Users".