ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

Funding Opportunity Title: Fiscal Year 2015 NOAA Gulf of Mexico Bay-Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2015-2004209

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.463, Habitat Conservation

Dates: Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on October 24, 2014 to be considered for funding. Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply online through www.grants.gov. Hard copy applications arriving after the closing date given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time. In any event, hard copy applications received by NMFS later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Region (Fisheries Southeast Regional Office) is seeking proposals under the Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program. The Gulf of Mexico B-WET program is an environmental education program that promotes locally relevant, experiential learning in the K-12 environment. Funded projects provide Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs) for students, related professional development for teachers, and help to support regional education and environmental priorities in the Gulf of Mexico. This program addresses NOAA's Long-Term Goal of "Healthy Oceans: Marine fisheries, habitats, and biodiversity are sustained within healthy and productive ecosystems" and "NOAA's Engagement Enterprise Objective for An engaged and educated public with an improved capacity to make scientifically informed environmental decisions".

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Gulf of Mexico NOAA Bay-Watershed Education and Training (Gulf B-WET) Program is an environmental education program that supports experiential learning through local competitive grant awards. Gulf B-WET is part of the national B-WET Program found in each of the following geographic regions: Chesapeake Bay, California, Hawaiian Islands, New England, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific Northwest, and Great Lakes.

For the purposes of this solicitation, the Gulf of Mexico region is defined as the coastal counties in the states of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas. Gulf of Mexico coastal counties are listed on page 48-49 of the following document:

National Ocean Service, NOAA. 2011. The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. http://stateofthecoast.noaa.gov/NOAAs_Gulf_of_Mexico_at_a_Glance_report.pdf

Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must target teachers and/or students in the above defined Gulf of Mexico coastal counties.

NOAA recognizes that knowledge and commitment built from firsthand experience, especially in the context of one's community and culture, is essential for achieving environmental stewardship. Carefully selected experiences driven by rigorous academic learning standards, engendering discovery and wonder, and nurturing a sense of community will further connect students with their watershed, help reinforce an ethic of responsible citizenship, and promote academic achievement. Experiential learning techniques, such as those supported by the NOAA B-WET Program, have been shown to increase interest in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), thus contributing to NOAA's obligations under the America Competes Act (33 USC 893a(a)).

The primary delivery of the Gulf B-WET Program is through Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences (MWEEs). For purposes of this solicitation, MWEEs are defined as follows:

-Experiences that are investigative or project oriented. Experiences should be centered around questions, problems, and issues and be investigated through data collection, observation, and hands-on activities. Experiences should stimulate observation, motivate critical thinking, develop problem-solving skills, and instill confidence in students. Where appropriate, technology such as computers, probeware, and GPS equipment should be integrated throughout the instructional process. Experiences such as tours, gallery visits,

simulations, demonstrations, or nature walks may be instructionally useful, but alone do not constitute a meaningful experience.

-Experiences that are an integral part of the instructional program. Experiences should be clearly part of what is occurring concurrently in the classroom. The experience should be part of the curriculum and aligned with the academic standards. Experiences should occur where and when they fit into the instructional sequence. Experiences do not have to be based solely on science disciplines. Experiences could involve the use of materials, resources, and instruments to address multiple topics, such as maritime heritage, history, economics, math, English, art, and the cultural significance of our natural resources. Experiences make appropriate connections between subject areas and reflect an integrated approach to learning.

-Experiences that are part of a sustained activity. Meaningful experiences are part of a sustained activity that stimulates and motivates the student from beginning to end. Though a watershed experience itself may occur as one specific event occurring in one day, the total duration leading up to and following the experience should involve a significant investment of instructional time. An experience should consist of three general parts - a preparation phase; an action phase; and a reflection phase. Projects should provide teachers with the support, materials, resources, and information needed to conduct these three parts.

a. The preparation phase should focus on a question, problem, or issue and involve students in discussions about it.

b. The action phase should include one or more outdoor experiences sufficient to conduct the project, make the observations, or collect the data required.

c. The reflection phase should refocus on the question, problem, or issue; analyze the conclusions reached; evaluate the results; assess the activity and the learning; and include sharing and communication of the results. This phase may also include a stewardship activity in the community.

-Experiences that consider the watershed as a system. Meaningful watershed educational experiences should make a direct connection to the marine or estuarine environment. Experiences do not have to be water-based activities -- as long as there is an intentional connection made to the watershed, water quality, and the coastal and marine environment -- watershed experiences may include terrestrial activities (e.g., erosion control, buffer creation, groundwater protection, and pollution prevention).

-Experiences that are enhanced by NOAA products, services, or personnel. NOAA has a wealth of applicable products and services as well as a cadre of scientific and professional experts that can heighten the impact of outdoor experiences. For example, NOAA data can be used to supplement or contextualize the information collected by students. In addition, the inclusion of NOAA products and services in classroom activities will increase awareness of

the agency's vast resources and may lead to better understanding of its mission. NOAA personnel have technical knowledge and experience that can serve to complement the classroom teacher's strengths and augment the array of resources for the learning. Additionally, these professionals can serve as important role models for career choices and as natural resources stewards, thus promoting science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) careers.

B. Program Priorities

Proposals must address one of the three areas of interest: (1) Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for Students; (2) Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences; (3) Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development with long-term classroom-integrated Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their students. In addition to the three program priorities above, one additional factor will be taken into consideration in making funding recommendations: (4) Regional Priorities of the Gulf B-WET Program. Each of these four priorities is described below.

1. Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for Students

The NOAA B-WET Program seeks proposals for projects that provide opportunities for students to participate in a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience. The marine and estuarine environment and the surrounding watershed provide an excellent opportunity for environmental education. In many cases, tidal and non-tidal waters and the landscape around them can provide "hands-on" laboratories where students can see, touch, and learn about the environment. In other cases, the environment can be brought alive to the classroom through a strong complement of outdoor and classroom experiences. The watershed environment can provide a genuine, locally relevant source of knowledge that can be used to help advance student learning skills across the entire school curriculum.

Proposals submitted under this area should address the specific elements and types of activities that define a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (definition above).

2. Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences

The NOAA B-WET Program seeks proposals for projects that provide teachers opportunities for professional development in the area of environmental education. As the purveyors of education, teachers can ultimately make meaningful environmental education experiences for students by weaving together classroom and field activities within the context of their curriculum and of current critical issues that impact the watershed. Systematic, long-term professional development opportunities will reinforce a teacher's

ability to teach, inspire, and lead young people toward thoughtful stewardship of our natural resources.

Proposals submitted under this area should be designed so that teachers not only understand what a Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience is, but why this type of pedagogy is important. The goal is to ensure that professional development experiences for the teacher ultimately benefit the student. Projects should be designed so that teachers are capable of conducting a meaningful watershed educational experience and provide the resources and necessary technical support needed to implement an experience in their classroom.

3. Exemplary Programs combining Teacher Professional Development and Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students

The NOAA B-WET Program seeks proposals for exemplary projects that combine Teacher Professional Development with long-term classroom-integrated Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students. Systematic, long-term professional development for teachers coupled with multiple meaningful watershed experiences for students that are fully supported in the classroom by their teachers will ensure that the concepts of watershed education are fully reinforced throughout the school year.

4. Regional Priorities of the Gulf of Mexico Alliance

The Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program responds to regional education and environmental priorities through local implementation. Therefore, in addition to addressing one of the three programmatic priorities, programs are asked to employ meaningful watershed educational experiences that address the coastal resource priorities outlined by the major regional policy body: The Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA).

The Gulf of Mexico Alliance is a partnership of the states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, with the goal of significantly increasing regional collaboration to enhance the ecological and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. The five U.S. Gulf States have identified six priority issue areas that are regionally significant and can be effectively addressed through increased collaboration at local, state, and federal levels.

Priority Areas:

- Water quality for healthy beaches and shellfish beds

- Wetland and coastal conservation and restoration

- Environmental education

- Identification and characterization of Gulf habitats

- Reducing nutrient inputs to coastal ecosystems

- Coastal community resiliency

For more information about these priorities please visit the NOAA Office of Education National B-WET website at: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/grants/bwet.html and the Gulf of Mexico Alliance website at: http://www.gulfofmexicoalliance.org/.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the NOAA Bay-Watershed Education and Training Program is provided by the following: 33 U.S.C. 893a(a) America Competes Act.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

It is anticipated that approximately $700,000 will be available in FY 2015 for new awards. NOAA anticipates making approximately 4 to 7 new awards during FY 2015. The total Federal amount that may be requested from NOAA shall not exceed $100,000. The minimum Federal amount that must be requested from NOAA is $25,000. Applications requesting Federal support from NOAA for more than $100,000 will not be considered for funding.

There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. If applicants incur any costs prior to an award being made, they do so at their own risk of not being reimbursed by the government. Notwithstanding verbal or written assurance that may have been received, there is no obligation on the part of NOAA to cover pre-award costs unless approved by the Grants Officer as part of the terms when the award is made.

B. Project/Award Period

The project start date should not begin before July 1, 2015. The period of awards may be for a maximum period of up to 24 months. Applications must include a project description and a budget for the entire award period. Applicants selected to receive funding may be asked to modify the project start date. It is recommended to include in your project description the flexibility of the requested start date.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement of NOAA in the management of the project. A cooperative agreement will be used if the NOAA B-WET Program shares responsibility for management, control, direction, or performance of the project with the recipient. Specific terms regarding substantial involvement will be contained in special award conditions.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are K-12 public and independent schools and school systems, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, for profit organizations, state or local government agencies, interstate agencies, and Indian tribal governments.

Applicants may be physically located in any U.S. state; however, education projects must target teachers and/or students in Gulf of Mexico coastal counties, which are listed on page 48-49 of the following document:

National Ocean Service, NOAA. 2011. The Gulf of Mexico at a Glance: A Second Glance. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce. http://stateofthecoast.noaa.gov/NOAAs_Gulf_of_Mexico_at_a_Glance_report.pdf

Additionally, priority will be given to applicants who 1) show prior experience in working in the Gulf of Mexico region, 2) show prior experience with Gulf of Mexico regional issues, or 3) demonstrate partnerships with local organizations in the Gulf of Mexico region on proposed projects.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

No other criteria.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply online through www.grants.gov. Application packages are available through www.grants.gov. If applicants do not have internet access, application pakcages may be requested from: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-

WET Program Manager, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, Building 1100, Room 202D, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529, (228) 688-1520, Amy.Clark@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application

Proposals should follow the content and format described below. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of the Fisheries Southeast Regional Office or the reviewers as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

1. Format Requirements:

All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 10-point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper. The project description should not exceed 15 pages, exclusive of project summary, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, letters of support, data sharing plan, and federal forms. Any attachment included in an electronic application should meet the above format requirement when printed out. All documents submitted as electronic application elements should be PDF (rather than MS Word, Excel, or other files types).

2. Content Requirements:

The following Federal Forms are required and must be submitted with applications.

(1) Application for Federal Assistance: SF-424. Funding on this form should reflect the total funding requested in the application.

(2) Budget Information, Non-construction Programs: SF-424A.

(3) Assurances, Non-Construction Programs: SF-424B

Additionally, the following Department of Commerce forms may be required:

(4) Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension, and other Responsibility Matters: Drug Free Workplace Environment: CD-511

(5) Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: SF-LLL (if applicable)

The following information should be included.

a. Project Summary (1-page limit): It is critical that the project summary accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements and objectives of the activities. It is imperative that applicants tie their proposals to the program priorities described in Section I.B. The project summary should include: Organization title; Principal Investigator(s); Address, telephone number, and email address of Principal Investigator(s); MWEE Priority addressed (i.e., Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for Students, Professional Development for Teachers related to Meaningful Watershed

Educational Experiences, or Exemplary Programs), the GOMA Priority(ies) addressed; Project title; Project duration; Project objectives; Succinct description of work to be performed during the entire project period (including number of teachers/students to be reached); Total Federal funding requested; Cost-sharing to be provided from non-Federal sources if any; Cost per student and/or teacher.

b. Project Description (15-page limit): The project description should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V. Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes. Project descriptions should include the number of teachers and/or students to be reached each year of the proposed project. Project descriptions should outline how the project proposes to implement each component of a meaningful watershed educational experience, including alignment with state standards and classroom curricula.

In addition, project descriptions should include significant external sharing and communication. Projects should include a mechanism that encourages students and/or teachers to share their experiences with peers and with the environmental education community, e.g., through mentoring opportunities, presentations at conferences, in-school service days, or other public forums, and media. This may also include a stewardship activity in the community.

Project descriptions should also identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities of the entire prospective project. Include the number of students and/or teachers directly affected by this grant. Also, include a per-teacher and/or per-student cost calculation for this project.

Project descriptions should include a two part evaluation description:

> Project Evaluation: Project evaluation is defined as the systematic collection and documentation of information about your project's outcomes in order to improve the project's effectiveness, guide judgments about its impact, and/or inform decisions about future programming or funding. Proposals should provide a project evaluation plan. For information on how to create a project evaluation plan, please see the California B-WET project evaluation website at http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/education/evaluation/welcome.html.

and

> National Evaluation: In addition to project evaluation, grantees may be asked to participate in data collection for the national B-WET evaluation. B-WET has created a cross-region, internal evaluation system to monitor program implementation and outcomes on an ongoing basis. Results of this evaluation will be used to make adjustments to B-WET Federal Funding Opportunities (FFOs) and activities in order to improve the B-WET

program, document its value, and better tailor it to program audiences. Furthermore, the system will generate a data set that will be valuable to researchers and has the potential to inform the field of environmental education more broadly. Success of this effort depends on grantee participation, so applicants are strongly encouraged to review the information about the national evaluation system (available here: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/grants/bwet_eval.php) and consider how they can support it as part of their projects.

As part of this evaluation system, recipients of B-WET grants and teacher-participants in grantees' professional development programs may be asked to voluntarily complete online questionnaires to provide evaluation data. One individual from each grantee organization will be asked to complete a questionnaire once per year of the award. For projects that work with teachers, the teacher-participants will be asked (using email addresses provided by the grantee organization) to complete one questionnaire at the close of their professional development and one after implementing Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences with their students (at the end of the following school year). Grantees should be able to complete their questionnaire within 30-60 minutes (depending on the nature of their program) and teachers, within 30 minutes. B-WET grantees and teachers who respond to the questionnaires will remain anonymous to B-WET and NOAA. NOAA will only view the resulting data in aggregate at the national or regional level, however grantees will receive a password-protected report link to allow them to view data from teacher participants of their project in aggregate.

Grantees are encouraged to provide information about how they plan to support this national evaluation system, incorporate it into the project timeline, and ensure responses from participating teachers as part of their application. More information, including all of the survey instruments, is available on the NOAA B-WET national website here: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/grants/bwet_eval.php. Grantees should review the information available and take this into consideration in the planning for their project evaluations. For example:

-Grantees may not need to include questions that will be answered through the teacher instrument in their own evaluations.

-Wherever possible grantees should try to incorporate participation in the evaluation system into existing requirements for professional development program completion. For example, on completion of the teacher professional development survey, teachers will receive some program incentive.

Note that this evaluation system is not intended to fully replace project level evaluation. While grantees will have access to their teacher's data from the evaluation system, the national evaluation may not provide the level of detail needed to fully understand, describe,

and improve specific grant projects. Grantees are therefore encouraged to balance these needs within their evaluation budget.

Additional information about this project, including background, FAQs, survey instruments, and suggested text for communicating with your teacher participants about this project, is available here:

http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/grants/bwet_eval.php

This data collection will be conducted in a manner consistent with the Paperwork Reduction Act and OMB guidelines (OMB Control No 0648-0658).

c. Literature Cited: If references are cited, proposals should include a literature cited list.

d. Letters of Support/Partnerships: Letters of support from each partner that is making a significant contribution to the project should be included with the application package. Wherever reasonable, proposals should include partnerships with school divisions and/or the state department of education (if the applicant is not one of these entities). Projects are also encouraged to collaborate with NOAA entities as partners. NOAA entities include programs, offices, and organizations, such as the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, National Marine Sanctuary Program, National Sea Grant College Program, National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office Marine Mammal Branch, National Weather Service Weather Forecast Offices, NOAA Marine Debris Program, NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration, NOAA Cooperative Institutes, and Regional Associations of the Integrated Ocean Observing System.

e. Budget and Budget Justification: In addition to the SF424A Budget Information form, applicants should include a detailed budget justification, or budget narrative. Provide justification for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested. Also, applicants should complete and submit the B-WET budget template found at http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/outreach_education/gulf_b_wet/applying_for_a_gulf_b_wet_grant/index.html. All budget information submitted with the application should mirror the dollar amounts on required SF-424 and SF-424A forms.

It is anticipated that grant recipients will be asked to attend a two-day Regional B-WET conference to be held in one of the Gulf States, or a National B-WET conference, at some point during the award period. The conferences will be an opportunity for former and current B-WET grant recipients to present their B-WET projects and learn from each other. Your budget should include, in the travel category, estimated funds for these trips (such as meals, lodging, airfare and/or other transportation including rental car, shuttle, or taxi). Although this is considered an outreach and education opportunity, it should not be the sole

justification to meet the outreach and education criteria; local, regional or national communication is required as well.

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

g. Data Sharing: Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users in a timely manner (typically no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created), free of charge or at minimal cost to the user that is no more than the cost of distribution, except where limited by law, regulation, policy, or security requirements.

A Data Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the proposal. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the expected temporal and spatial coverage of the data; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; and procedures for providing access, sharing, and security. Because NOAA believes it important that data sets developed with its support should be shared with the scientific community, PIs should also indicate how and when they have made their data accessible and usable by the community in the past. The Data Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criterion "Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposed project to the mission goals."

The Data Sharing Plan (updated as needed) must be made available publicly at time of award and must remain available until the Environmental Data are made available publicly.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by 11:59 p.m., Eastern Time on October 24, 2014 to be considered for funding. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without further consideration.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to apply online through www.grants.gov. For applications submitted through grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis of determining timeliness.

If applicants do not have internet access, hard copy applications may be submitted to Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office, Building 1100, Room 202D, Stennis Space Center, MS 39529. Hard copy submissions will be dated and time stamped when they are received in the NMFS office. Hard copy applications arriving after the closing date given above will be accepted for review only if the applicant can document that the application was provided to a delivery

service that guaranteed delivery prior to the specified closing date and time; in any event, hard copy applications received by NMFS later than two business days following the closing date will not be accepted. Faxed or emailed copies of applications will not be accepted.

Additional information about Grants.gov submissions: Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through http://www.grants.gov. Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number (www.dnb.com) and be registered in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) (www.ccr.gov). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in CCR. Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Because first-time registration with Grants.gov can take up to three weeks, it is strongly recommended that this registration process be completed as soon as possible. Also, even if an applicant has registered with Grants.gov previously, the applicant's password may have expired or their central contractor registration may need to be renewed prior to submitting to Grants.gov. Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days to establish. Please consider these notes in developing your submission timeline.

D. Intergovernmental Review

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

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a Federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. Proposals to this competition that limit indirect costs to no more than 25% of direct costs will likely score higher on evaluation criterion.

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

F. Other Submission Requirements

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking

NOAA federal funding opportunities. Consequently, applicants should identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the environment.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

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

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of proposal to the program goals (30 points)

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program, this includes:

- Does the project make a direct connection to the greater marine or estuarine environment? (5 points)

- Does the proposal make an intentional connection to the watershed system and how actions within that system can affect the marine and estuarine environment? (5 points)

- What is the likelihood of the proposed educational and environmental activities to improve the general understanding of the environment? (5 points)

- Does the experience focus around questions, problems, or issues pertaining to specific region? (3 points)

Is the project design project-oriented, hands-on, investigative, and part of a sustained activity? (5 points)

- Does the project include pre and post activities? (4 points)

- Does the project address multiple disciplines? (2 points)

- Does the project contain a Data Sharing Plan makes data and information collected under a NOAA grants or cooperative agreements visible, accessible, and independently understandable to general users in a timely manner? (1 point)

2. Technical merit (35 points)

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program, this includes:

- Does the proposal clearly outline how the project is an integral part of the classroom or instructional program? (5 points)

Priority-specific questions (only one will apply): (10 points)

> For exemplary programs only: Does the project combine Teacher Professional Development with long-term classroom-integrated Meaningful Watershed Educational Experiences for their Students?

> For MWEE student programs only: Is the project aligned with academic learning standards in science and other disciplines?

> For teacher professional development programs only: Does the teacher receive the needed support to fully participate in the program (i.e., continuing education credit, substitute teachers, stipends, etc.)? Is this support reasonable and necessary?

- Does the applicant utilize NOAA programs, lesson plans, or a curriculum focused on marine and estuarine issues? Does the applicant use NOAA personnel to enhance their project? (5 points)

- Does the applicant show a knowledge and understanding of the NOAA Education Strategic Plan (http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/NOAA_Ed_Plan.pdf)? (2 points)

- Does the applicant demonstrate how their project is aligned and supports the goals and strategies of the NOAA Education Strategic Plan? (2 points)

- Is the project aligned with environmental literacy principles (e.g. Ocean Literacy, http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf or Climate Literacy, http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/education/literacy/climate_literacy.pdf) where appropriate? (1 point)

- Are the objectives in the proposal clearly defined and focused? Does the applicant demonstrate that the objectives are realistic and can be reached within the proposed project period? (4 points)

- Will the project outcomes have significant and lasting benefits for teachers and students? (1 points)

- Does the project evaluation component of the project focus on measuring changes in participants (changes can be in knowledge, attitudes, skills or conservation actions)? (2 points)

- Does the applicant discuss how the B-WET National Evaluation system will be incorporated into their plans for project evaluation? (1 point)

- Do the changes measured in participants (outcomes) match the project goals and objectives, which include engaging participants in meaningful watershed educational experiences? (2 points)

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (10 points)

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program, this includes:

- Does the applicant show the capability and experience in successfully completing similar projects? Are the partners involved in the project qualified? (5 points)

- Does the applicant 1) show prior experience in working in the Gulf of Mexico region, 2) show prior experience with Gulf of Mexico regional issues, or 3) demonstrate partnerships with local organizations in the Gulf of Mexico region on proposed projects? (2 points)

- Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the target audience? (1 point)

- Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the Content Standards for their state? (1 point)

- Does the applicant document past collaborations with schools or school systems? (1 point)

4. Project costs (20 points)

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program, this includes:

- Does the applicant demonstrate the ability to leverage other resources? (2 points)

- Is the budget request reasonable and does the applicant justify the proposed budget request? (7 points)

-If applicant charges indirect costs, do they limit indirect costs to no more than 25% of direct costs? (3 points)

- Is a significant percentage of the budget directly related to bringing students and teachers in contact with the environment? (5 points)

- Are requested funds for salaries and fringe benefits only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the proposed project and/or are directly related to specific products or outcomes of the proposed project? (2 points)

- Does the applicant demonstrate sustainability beyond the project period? Does the applicant demonstrate that the project will continue after NOAA funding has expired? (1 point)

5. Outreach and education (5 points)

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. For the NOAA Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program, this includes:

- Does the project involve external sharing and communication, which could include a stewardship activity in the community? (3 points)

- Does the target audience share their findings, experiences, or results to their peers or their community? (2 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

When we receive applications we will screen them to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see IV.C. Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant (see III.A. Eligibility Information); address one of the priorities (see I.B. Program Priorities); and include required content (see IV.B. Content and Form of Application).

We do not have to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause your application to be rejected so that you would have an opportunity to correct them. However, should we do so and provide you information about deficiencies, or should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it. If your application does not conform to these requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Following the technical review, we will determine the score for each individual review and average the individual technical review scores to determine the final technical score for each application. Then, we will rank applications in descending order by their average technical scores. The top fifteen applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review.

Those applications that are not in the top fifteen will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those applications that meet the top fifteen ranking will be presented to a panel of experts known as the Gulf B-WET panel. Each member of the Gulf B-WET Panel individually considers if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel members recommending the proposal for funding (or the percent recommended). In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent recommended that are competing for the final available funds, the technical review scores will determine the order. If a tie persists beyond this, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that are most pertinent to the needs as listed under the program priorities at the time of selection. Program priorities are not listed in order of importance because the importance can change over time.

C. Selection Factors

The Gulf B-WET Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;

2. Balance/distribution of funds:

a. geographically

b. by type of institutions

c. by type of partners

d. by research areas

e. by project types

3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies;

4. Program priorities and policy factors as set out in Section I.A. and I.B.;

5. Applicant's prior award performance;

6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;

7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

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

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended within 255 days from the date of publication of this notice. The project start date should not begin before July 1, 2015.

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

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Management Division with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA grants officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The award will be issued to the authorizing official and the principal investigator of the project either electronically or in hard copy (though this typically comes via an email from Grants Online). Unsuccessful applicants will receive notification from the program office indicating that their proposals were not recommended for funding.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in the Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 17, 2012 (77 FR 74634). A copy of the notice may be obtained at http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/search.html.

2. Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be

responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at www.nepa.noaa.gov, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations website at http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm.

Consequently, applicants may be asked to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the grants officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make as assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

For this funding opportunity, applicants should identify any impact the proposed work will have on the quality of the human environment, complete the Environmental Compliance Questionnaire found at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf, and attach the completed questionnaire to their application.

4. Restrictions Governing Making Grants to Corporations Convicted of Felony Criminal Violations and/or Unpaid Federal Tax Liabilities

Sections 536 and 537 of Public Law 113-76, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Title V (General Provisions) (the Act) prohibit funds made available by the Act from being used to enter into a cooperative agreement with or make a grant to any corporation that:

a) was convicted of a felony criminal violation under any Federal law within the preceding 24 months, unless any agency has considered suspension or debarment of the

corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interest of the Government; and/or,

b) has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreement with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, unless an agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interest of the Government.

Applicants should complete the following certification and attach it to their application.

The Applicant represents that-

It is [ ] or it is not [ ] a corporation that was convicted of a felony criminal violation under a Federal law within the preceding 24 months.

It is [ ] or it is not [ ] a corporation that has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an agreements with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability.

Include:

[Signature of person who has authority to certify on behalf of the corporation]

[Typed name of the signing individual]

[Typed title of the signing individual]

[Typed name of corporation]

[Typed phone number of the signing individual]

[Typed email address of the signing individual]

5. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements Effective Date

Please note that on December 26, 2013, OMB published final guidance titled Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements (OMB Uniform Guidance) found at https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/12/26/2013-30465/uniform-administrative-requirements-cost-principles-and-audit-requirements-for-federal-awards, which streamlines the language from eight existing OMB circulars, including Cost Principles (OMB Circulars A-21, A-87, A 122) and administrative requirements (OMB Circulars A-102 and A 110), into one consolidated set of guidance

applicable to federal assistance awards. Once adopted, the OMB Uniform Guidance will supersede DOC's uniform administrative requirements set out at 15 C.F.R. parts 14 and 24. The DOC expects to adopt the OMB Uniform Guidance by December 26, 2014, meaning that the OMB Uniform Guidance will apply to all new awards and to additional funding to existing awards made after December 26, 2014. In addition, the audit requirements of the OMB Uniform Guidance will apply to audits of non-Federal entities beginning on or after December 26, 2014. Therefore, applicants should familiarize themselves with the OMB Uniform Guidance. Additional information on the substance of and transition to the OMB Uniform Guidance may be found at https://cfo.gov/cofar/.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Electronic submission of reports is preferred via the NOAA Grants Online system. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award.

Recipients are encouraged to include the following elements in semi-annual performance reports: header material and body. The header material should include: Project title, Federal award number, Dollar amount of the award, Principle Investigator(s) and contact information, Award period, and Reporting Period. It is recommended that body of the report include the following for each identified task/milestone: Status of the project in terms of progress toward meeting milestones and deliverables in reference to the time line described in the proposal/project plan and description of progress made or accomplishments completed, List of deliverables (products or outputs) resulting from progress on tasks if any, Description of any changes to the project plan and the planned budget versus actual costs, Note of any concerns, delays, challenges, complications or other unexpected changes that you've encountered.

In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive final performance report 90 days after the project end date.

Recipients are encouraged to include the following elements in the final performance report: header material and body. The header material should include: Project title, Federal award number, Dollar amount of the award, Principle Investigator(s) and contact information, Award period, and Reporting Period. It is recommended that the body of the report include: Restatement of the objectives that were approved in the grant application, Statement on whether or not the objectives were met, description of the methods used to meet those objectives, a discussion of successes and difficulties, and data to back up the

successes, statement, if applicable, how you expect that any property (>$5,000) purchased by the grant will be utilized, Statement on how the program will continue through the future, a project evaluation summary/analysis, and a copy of deliverables created as a result of the award.

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

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program or the application process, you may contact: Amy Clark, Gulf of Mexico B-WET Program Manager, Amy.Clark@noaa.gov, (228) 688-1520.

VIII. Other Information

none