Ocean Exploration Education Funding Opportunity Announcement

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Funding Opportunity Description 4
A. Program Objective 4
B. Program Priorities 5
C. Program Authority 5
II. Award Information 5
A. Funding Availability 5
B. Project/Award Period 6
C. Type of Funding Instrument 6
III. Eligibility Information 6
A. Eligible Applicants 6
B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement 7
C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility 7
IV. Application and Submission Information 7
A. Address to Request Application Package 7
B. Content and Form of Application 7
C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM) 11
D. Submission Dates and Times 12
E. Intergovernmental Review 12
F. Funding Restrictions 12
G. Other Submission Requirements 13
V. Application Review Information 14
A. Evaluation Criteria 14
B. Review and Selection Process 15
C. Selection Factors 15
D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates 16
VI. Award Administration Information 16
A. Award Notices 16
B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements 17
C. Reporting 24
VII. Agency Contacts 25
VIII. Other Information 25

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Ocean Exploration Education Funding Opportunity Announcement

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-OAR-OER-2024-2008070

Federal Assistance Listings Number: 11.011, Ocean Exploration

Dates: Applicants are required to submit a full proposal and must be received by 11:59 p.m. EDT on September 15, 2023. Proposals received after the deadline will be disqualified.

Funding Opportunity Description: NOAA Ocean Exploration is soliciting proposals that support NOAA Ocean Exploration's education priorities, which include increasing the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the education program; and developing education resources to complement virtual and hybrid education delivery.

NOAA Ocean Exploration is dedicated to exploring the unknown ocean, unlocking its potential through scientific discovery, technological advancements, and data delivery. By working closely with partners across public, private, and academic sectors, we are filling gaps in our basic understanding of the marine environment. This allows us, collectively, to protect ocean health, sustainably manage our marine resources, accelerate our national economy, better understand our changing environment, and enhance appreciation of the importance of the ocean in our everyday lives.

NOAA Ocean Exploration operates an education program to raise awareness of the importance of the ocean, ocean exploration, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education and is committed to improving America's environmental literacy by bringing the excitement of ocean exploration and discovery to a wide variety of diverse audiences. Educators and public and private partnerships are essential to this mission. NOAA Ocean Exploration offers many opportunities for educators to learn about NOAA science and technology associated with exploring the ocean in their classrooms.

NOAA Ocean Exploration is soliciting proposals that:

- Connect NOAA Ocean Exploration's exploration resources to the expanded delivery of virtual and hybrid professional development experiences for educators; thus increasing

the opportunities to provide high quality education content and experiences to the public about ocean exploration. Expand the available audience for NOAA Ocean Exploration education content, in terms of quantity, diversity, and geographic location.
- Invest in projects and partners that are leading STEM education programming for diverse youth in middle school, high school, undergraduate, and/or community college to learn about the ocean, develop or advance STEM skills, and increase awareness of ocean science and exploration careers.
- Invest in a future ocean workforce that is more representative of U.S. demographics by funding projects that minimize barriers to entry and retention of diverse learners from communities historically marginalized from ocean science and exploration industries.

The following checklist is provided to aid in preparing full proposals.

Full Proposals (due September 15, 2023 at 11:59 pm ET)

- Executive summary, maximum 1 page
- Project narrative, maximum 12 pages
- Data and information sharing plan, maximum 2 pages
- Statement of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), maximum 1 page
- Previous significant results
- Summary of current funding support for each principal and co-principal investigator
- Curriculum vitae, maximum 2 pages for each principal investigator and co-principal investigator
- Budget justification and budget tables
- Negotiated indirect cost rate agreement (if applicable)
- National Environmental Policy (NEPA) questionnaire
- Letters of support (optional, e.g. partnership support letters)
- Forms (for nonfederal applicants only):
  - Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
  - Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A)
  - Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
  - Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL)
  - Certification Regarding Lobbying (CD511)
- Suggested reviewers (optional)

Nonfederal applicants must submit all documents required for a full proposal individually through Grants.gov.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

NOAA Ocean Exploration is dedicated to exploring the unknown ocean, unlocking its potential through scientific discovery, technological advancements, and data delivery. By working closely with partners across public, private, and academic sectors, we are filling gaps in our basic understanding of the marine environment. This allows us, collectively, to protect ocean health, sustainably manage our marine resources, accelerate our national economy, better understand our changing environment, and enhance appreciation of the importance of the ocean in our everyday lives.

NOAA Ocean Exploration operates an education program to raise awareness of the importance of the ocean, ocean exploration, and STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education and is committed to improving America's environmental literacy by bringing the excitement of ocean exploration and discovery to a wide variety of diverse audiences. Educators and public and private partnerships are essential to this mission. NOAA Ocean Exploration offers many opportunities for educators to learn about NOAA science and technology associated with exploring the ocean in their classrooms.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, school systems have largely reopened but the landscape of the classroom has changed. While many educators and classrooms have evolved to hybrid learning environments, so too have NOAA Ocean Exploration's education product and delivery methods. Virtual and online offerings have expanded the education program's audience, reaching previously untapped educators increasing accessibility and inclusion for increasingly-diverse classrooms.

Successful proposals directly support NOAA Ocean Exploration priorities including increasing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the education program; and developing education resources to complement virtual and hybrid education delivery. In addition, successful proposals typically involve multiple partners; are characterized by an interdisciplinary and innovative exploration approach; frequently leverage other programs and organizations with compatible objectives; produce information that will be valuable to state and federal marine resource managers; give consideration to environmental impacts in the project planning and represent the applicant's ability to acquire all necessary permits; explain the plan for making data and results publicly available to advance scientific knowledge and inform environmental management decisions; and provide a plan for diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) activities.

Applicants must be willing to adhere to an open data policy that ensures that all environmental data and information collected or created with program support, once quality controlled, will be promptly made publicly available. At a minimum, grant recipients are required to submit all applicable raw data to NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI), which will provide public access, discoverability, and permanent archiving; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, particularly for large or unusual datasets. In addition, proposals must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and all other federal laws regarding environmental protection (e.g., Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and National Marine Sanctuaries Act).

B. Program Priorities

NOAA Ocean Exploration is soliciting proposals that:

- Connect NOAA's exploration resources to the expanded delivery of virtual and hybrid professional development experiences for educators; thus increasing the opportunities to provide high quality education content and experiences to the public about ocean exploration. Expand the available audience for NOAA Ocean Exploration education content, in terms of quantity, diversity, and geographic location.
- Invest in projects and partners that are leading STEM education programming for diverse youth in middle school, high school, undergraduate, and/or community college to learn about the ocean, develop or advance STEM skills, and increase awareness of ocean science and exploration careers.
- Invest in a future ocean workforce that is more representative of U.S. demographics by funding projects that minimize barriers to entry and retention of diverse learners from communities historically marginalized from ocean science and exploration industries.

C. Program Authority

33 USC 3403(a)

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

NOAA Ocean Exploration anticipates approximately $500,000 per year (with a ceiling of $1,000,000 per year depending upon the availability of funding) will be available to fund a proposed project under this notice. This will be a multiyear award (performance

dependent) with a maximum of 5 years.

The amount available for this funding opportunity will be subject to the final FY24 appropriation/allocation for NOAA Ocean Exploration. Publication of this notice does not obligate NOAA to fund any specific project or use all or any part of available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to initiate or continue exploration activities where NOAA Ocean Exploration has recommended funding. NOAA Ocean Exploration will determine the amount of recommended funding for a proposed project during pre-award negotiations with the applicant.

B. Project/Award Period

NOAA Ocean Exploration will accept proposals that are one to five years. The anticipated award start date is on or near January 1, 2024.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

In general, projects selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement under the terms of this notice. Projects funded through cooperative agreements may involve substantial involvement by the federal government, including, but not limited to, direction or redirection of the scope of work due to interrelationships with other projects or stipulation that the awardee must meet or adhere to specific procedural requirements before subsequent stages of a project may commence.

By receiving funding from NOAA Ocean Exploration, all awardees agree to certain requirements for education and outreach, data management, and website content development. To help meet these requirements, NOAA Ocean Exploration staff and/or NOAA designee(s) will be assigned as a primary point of contact to help plan and execute these activities. In some cases, these individuals may join an at-sea science team and serve as a NOAA Ocean Exploration representative, expedition coordinator, data manager, or web coordinator.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants represent U.S.-based institutions of higher education; nonprofit organizations; and for-profit organizations.

The U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) and NOAA support cultural and gender diversity and encourage women and minority individuals and groups to apply to this notice of funding

opportunity. In addition, DOC and NOAA are strongly committed to broadening the participation of individuals from historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and other organizations that work in underserved areas. DOC and NOAA encourage applications involving contributions from any of the above.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost sharing is not required.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

1. Potential Partners

NOAA Ocean Exploration encourages partnerships with academia, government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and private-sector companies. Foreign entities can participate, but only through collaboration with an eligible U.S.-based organization as a sub-awardee. NOAA Ocean Exploration also encourages applicants to enhance or expand the scope of their proposals through complementary requests for funding from other sponsors, both internal and external to NOAA (e.g., for ship time or other assets).

2. Permits and Approvals

Applicants are responsible for obtaining all international, federal, state, and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed project. Applicants are expected to design their projects to minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. If applicable, documentation of requests for or approvals of cultural resource or environmental permits must be included in the proposal package.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Information about how to apply for federal grants is available at https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/apply-for-grants.html. For applicants without internet access, contact the NOAA Ocean Exploration grant program manager, Kristen Crossett, by phone (301-325-2113) or mail (NOAA Ocean Exploration, ATTN: Kristen Crossett, SSMC3-Room 2327, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910) to obtain an application package and guidance on submission of full proposals.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format requirements
   a. Proposals must be formatted to print on 8.5” x 11”paper with 1-inch margins in 12-point font.
   b. The principal investigator's last name must be included in the bottom right-hand corner of each page. All digital files should be named with the principal investigator’s last name and a descriptor indicating the file content, e.g., “Jones Cover Sheet 2024.”
   c. The title must be no longer than 15 words/100 characters.

2. Full Proposal Required Content

Full proposals must demonstrate relevance to NOAA’s and NOAA Ocean Exploration’s priorities as described in Sections I.A and I.B. Applicants should use January 1, 2024, when referring to the project award date in the proposal and on the Office of Management and Budget standard forms.

No appendices are permitted.

Full proposals must include all of the documents described below in the order listed, unless otherwise indicated. Proposals that do not comply with these requirements will be disqualified. For those using Grants.gov to submit their proposal package, each document must be uploaded as a separate file. A full proposal must include all of the following documents:

a. A maximum one-page executive summary describing the essential elements of the proposed project: The summary must include the project title (no more than 15 words/100 characters); a list of all investigators who will significantly contribute to the project, including their names, contact information, and affiliations; a concise statement about the compelling objectives, benefits, and rationale of the proposed project; and a funding request for each year of the project and the total funding requested. This summary must be written in language that can convey to non-experts the key elements of the proposed project and how it will advance ocean exploration goals.
b. A project narrative not to exceed 12 pages, including all text (minimum 12-point font) and any tables and visual materials (e.g., charts, graphs, maps, photographs): Pages beyond the 12-page limit will be removed from the proposal before it is reviewed. The 12-page limit does not include the executive summary; budget justification and tables; data and information sharing plan (see VIII.A); diversity and inclusion statement; literature cited; current and pending support; curriculum vitae; letters of commitment; and required forms (e.g., NEPA). A

project narrative must include:

i. A project's scientific, technical, historical, cultural, or socioeconomic importance and merit.
ii. A project's goals and objectives and the proposed methodology.
iii. Anticipated contributions of participating personnel.
iv. A description of any complementary funding.
v. Anticipated outputs from the proposed project (e.g., potential discoveries, knowledge and impact, published papers, reports, meetings, and/or education and outreach material).
vi. The value to NOAA and the nation and how the proposed project outcomes will benefit our understanding of the ocean, the science community, and society.
vii. Assessment of the feasibility of the project and mitigation measures.

c. A data and information sharing plan: Proposals submitted in response to this notice must include a data and information sharing plan (up to two pages). See Section VI.B.10, Administrative and National Policy Requirements, for additional information.
d. An outreach and education plan: This plan must describe in one page or less how the proposed project incorporates education and outreach. It must also acknowledge willingness of the applicant (or project partners) to participate in NOAA Ocean Exploration's education and outreach programming.
e. A statement of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA): This statement must describe in one page or less how the proposed project seeks to broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.) and remove barriers in ocean-exploration related activities. The statement should also summarize where and how the project will integrate DEIA, as defined in the White House Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategic-Plan-to-Advance-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-and-Accessibility-in-the-Federal-Workforce-11.23.21.pdf); considerations into team composition, team management, leadership and decision making, focus areas, partnerships; and how the outcomes of these considerations are reflected in the proposed work. Where possible, it should also include goals and metrics for assessing and adjusting DEIA efforts. This program provides NOAA Ocean Exploration an opportunity to support NOAA's commitment to DEIA by requiring applicants to consider DEIA in project development. This has the potential to make an impact on DEIA in science at NOAA and beyond.
f. Previous significant results: This document must provide a concise summary of previous significant results and achievements from any prior or ongoing NOAA

Ocean Exploration funding to the principal investigator and/or co-principal investigators. This summary should include publications and outputs and describe related data and information sharing experience.

g. A summary of current funding support: This summary must provide information about a principal investigator's and co-principal investigators' current and pending federal support for ongoing projects and outstanding proposals, including potential subsequent funding in the case of continuing awards. The proposed project and all other projects or activities that use federal assistance to fund the principal investigator or other senior project personnel's time should be included. The relationship between the proposed project and these other projects should be described, and the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the projects must be clearly stated.

h. Resumes: Resumes must be included for each principal and co-principal investigator(s). Resumes should be a maximum of two pages and include a list of relevant recent publications.

i. A budget justification and budget table: This budget information must adhere to the guidance and templates provided in the NOAA Grants Management Division's Budget Narrative Guidance (https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/gmd_budget_narrative_guidance_-_05-24-2017_final.pdf). The justification and tables are to be provided in 12 point font as stated in section IV.B.1.a. All expenses must be rounded to the nearest dollar and identified and listed in separate tables for the years in which they will be incurred. The budget must include, and justify, sufficient resources to analyze, interpret, publish, and archive data (including archiving costs associated with NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information in accordance with the applicant's data and information sharing plan) and results of the project. Applicants must describe the scope of work and budget for each year of support being sought (not to exceed five years) and provide a summary budget table for the entire award period. The summary budget table must reflect the object classes contained in the SF-424A form, which is the Grants.gov official budget form included as part of the proposal package. The table must reflect the computations and basis used in the development of costs and justifications for salary and travel (travel must be itemized to include destination, airfare, per diem, lodging, and ground travel), contracts for analyses and/or cataloging, publications, rentals, supplies, equipment, subawards to other parties for services, and nonstandard items, including ship time and submersibles that require NOAA Ocean Exploration funding. Cost sharing and/or in-kind contributions must be clearly identified and given a value.

j. Indirect cost rate agreement (if applicable): A copy of the indirect cost rate agreement from the applicant's organization that was used to calculate indirect costs must be included as a separate document. If the agreement is being renegotiated, the status of the indirect cost rate application should be indicated in an attached letter. See Section VI.B.13 for more indirect cost rate information.

k. A National Environmental Policy Act statement: Applicants are required to submit answers to questions 1 through 19 and 51 through 57 of the NOAA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) questionnaire (https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/funding-opps/media/NOAA-Grants-Questionnaire-final.pdf). See Section VI.B.7 for more NEPA information.

l. Letters of support: Letters of support are optional. A letter of support from a partner is an example of the kind of letter that would benefit an applicant.

m. Forms: Nonfederal applicants must complete and submit the following Office of Management and Budget forms, which are available as part of the opportunity package on Grants.gov.
    i. Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)
    ii. Budget Information for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A) — When applying for a multiyear award, nonfederal applicants must submit a line item budget, with each year being a separate column, in Section B and a corresponding budget narrative for each of the anticipated funding periods (years).
    iii. Assurances for Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B)
    iv. Disclosure of Lobbying Activities (SF-LLL) — This is to be filled out by the lead principal investigator's organization.
    v. Certification Regarding Lobbying (CD511) — This is to be filled out by the lead principal investigator's organization.

n. A list of suggested reviewers: A list of suggested reviewers is optional. Applicants interested in including such a list should provide the names, email addresses, and phone numbers for up to five non conflicted potential peer reviewers. Applicants may also provide the names of individuals they would like excluded from the review process along with justification for the request.

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

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) Provide a valid unique entity identifier (UEI) in its application; and (iii) 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. NOAA may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable UEI and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time NOAA is ready to make a Federal award, NOAA 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.

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. 6101 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://sam.gov/content/home.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Full proposals received after the deadline will be disqualified.

Full proposals must be received by 11:59 p.m. EDT on September 15, 2023.

Applicants without internet access who must submit a hard copy of their full proposal by mail or delivery service should allow sufficient time for delivery to NOAA Ocean Exploration by the deadline. Proposals received after their respective cutoff dates and times will not be considered.

Note: Applicants may have to register or renew their SAM registration 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. Additional information can be found on the SAM website https://www.sam.gov) and through the Federal Service Desk website (https://www.fsd.gov).

E. Intergovernmental Review

Proposals received in response to this notice are subject to Executive Order 12372 Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Applicants must contact their state’s single point of contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the state’s process under this executive order. The names and addresses of SPOCs can be found on the Office of Management and Budget’s website (https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SPOC-4-13-20.pdf).

F. Funding Restrictions

For the purpose of this funding opportunity, costs for ship time and/or other ocean data collection platforms (e.g., remotely operated vehicles, autonomous underwater vehicles) are considered rental costs and therefore are not included in modified total direct cost (MTDC). The exception is for applicants from organizations with a federal negotiated indirect cost rate agreement that covers these charges.

NOAA Ocean Exploration will not provide funding to hire and/or fund the salaries and associated overhead costs of any permanent federal or state government employee. In addition, NOAA Ocean Exploration will not pay facilities and administrative (F&A or "overhead") fees to federal and state agencies for subawards (e.g., for personnel time, ship time, or other ocean data collection platform support). Awardees from federal and state agencies may use award funding to cover travel, equipment, supplies, and contractual personnel costs associated with the proposed work.

Funding for ship time on NOAA Ship Okeanos Explorer is not available through this announcement.

G. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants without internet access should see Section IV.A for mailing information.

1. Full Proposals

Nonfederal applicants must submit their full proposals through Grants.gov, which will record the official date and time of receipt.

To submit an application through Grants.gov, applicants must register for a Grants.gov user ID and password. This process can take between three and five business days, or up to four weeks if not completed correctly. To avoid delays, applicants are strongly encouraged to register early, log in, review the application instructions, and apply as soon as possible before the deadline. Information about the Grants.gov registration process for organizations is on Grants Online (https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/applicants/organization-registration.html). Organizations already registered with Grants.gov do not need to re-register.

The following steps are recommended if an issue with Grants.gov (technical problems or glitches with the website) that may hinder submission before the deadline:

1. Print any error message received.
2. Call the Grants.gov Contact Center at (800) 518-4726 for immediate assistance and get the case number for future communications.

3. Contact NOAA Ocean Exploration at (301) 325-2113 or kristen.crossett@noaa.gov prior to the deadline.

In the event of a confirmed Grants.gov systems issue, NOAA reserves the right to accept proposals in an alternate format prior to the deadline. Problems with an applicant organization's computer system or equipment are not considered system issues. Similarly, an applicant's failure to complete the required registration, submit their proposal via a registered authorized organization representative (AOR), or read email messages from Grants.gov are also not considered system issues.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Full Proposal Evaluation Criteria

NOAA Ocean Exploration will conduct mail reviews to evaluate full proposals. Full proposals will be evaluated and rated individually by no fewer than three independent peer mail reviewers with collective expertise in the relevant disciplines. All peer reviewers will be required to sign confidentiality and nondisclosure agreements. The reviewers will be asked to determine and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, deficiencies, and risks associated with each proposal.

Reviewers will use the following criteria and corresponding weight values to evaluate full proposals:

a. Importance/Relevance and Applicability of Proposed Project to NOAA's and NOAA Ocean Exploration's Missions and Goals (30%): This criterion assesses whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed project and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, tribal, or local activities. For NOAA Ocean Exploration, the reviewers will evaluate the extent to which 1) the proposed project is germane to NOAA's education-focused mission goals, and 2) the anticipated results could have significant downstream impact
b. Technical Merit (30%): 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 NOAA Ocean Exploration the reviewers will evaluate the extent to which 1) the proposed approach is technically feasible, 2) the proposed approach is innovative, 3) the proposal includes clear goals and objectives, 4) the methods are commensurate with the NOAA's goals and objectives, and 5) the plans for documentation, archiving, and sharing of data, and multimedia are adequately described.

c. Overall Qualifications of Applicants (20%): This criterion assesses whether the applicant(s) possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For NOAA Ocean Exploration, the reviewers will evaluate 1) the qualifications of the applicant(s) including if they have the proper expertise to accomplish the proposed project and 2) the strength, breadth, and depth of any proposed project partnerships. If the applicant has previously received NOAA Ocean Exploration funding, reviewers will also evaluate their award performance (e.g., timely publication of results and sharing of data). An applicant's qualifications, independent of the applicant's career stage, will be reviewed as part of this evaluation criterion.
d. Project Costs (15%): This criterion assesses the proposed budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the proposed project needs and timeframe.
e. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (5%): This criterion assesses whether the proposed project will provide an opportunity to broaden the participation of underrepresented groups (e.g., gender, ethnicity, disability, geographic, etc.).

B. Review and Selection Process

Once NOAA Ocean Exploration receives a full proposal, staff conduct an initial administrative review to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the proposal. If a proposal is in compliance and complete, it will be subjected to the peer review process.

For the full proposal, peer reviewers will rate each proposal using the evaluation criteria and percentage weights provided above and will provide summary comments. Both federal and nonfederal experts may be invited to participate in the external mail reviews. External mail reviewers will not be asked to reach consensus on individual proposals or to rank proposals.

The NOAA Ocean Exploration selecting official, in consultation with NOAA Ocean Exploration outreach and education staff, will make the final decisions based on scores and comments from the external mail reviewers.

C. Selection Factors

The NOAA Ocean Exploration selecting official will recommend proposals for funding in rank order unless there is justification for moving a proposal up or down in the ranking. Such justification could be based on one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding

2. Balance/distribution of funds

a. Geographically
b. By type of organizations
c. By type of partners
d. By exploration priorities
e. By project theme and/or focus

3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or another federal agency

4. Program priorities and policy factors described in Section I.A and B, including, but not limited to, logistical feasibility and scientific discipline

5. Applicant's prior award performance, including data and information sharing

6. Strength of partnerships and/or inclusion of, and participation by, diverse groups.

7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) determination and draft necessary documentation to advance funding recommendations to the grants officer

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NOAA Ocean Exploration intends to notify all applicants of the results of the peer review of their proposal as well as NOAA Ocean Exploration's final recommendation to award or decline funding their proposal by email approximately 45 days after receipt of their full proposal. Applicants should factor in this time when proposing starting dates for exploration activities. Project/award start dates are expected to be on or around January 1, 2024. Progress of the peer-review process and timing of budget allocation to NOAA Ocean Exploration could affect this timeline.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

1. Notification of Acceptance

Successful nonfederal applicants will receive notification that their proposals have been funded from the NOAA Grants Management Division. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by the NOAA Ocean Exploration selecting official that their proposal was not recommended for funding. For applicants, project activities should not be initiated in

the expectation of grant funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Management Division. Any spending prior to an official notice of award will be at the awardee's risk.

a. Pre-Award Costs. Per 2 CFR 200.458, NOAA authorizes award recipients to expend pre-award costs up to 90 days before the period of performance start date at the applicant's own risk without approval from NOAA and in accordance with the applicant's internal policies and procedures. Such costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the federal award. This does not include direct proposal costs (as defined at 2 CFR 200.460). In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for direct proposal preparation costs. Pre-award costs will be a portion of, not in addition to, the approved total budget of the award. Pre-award costs expended more than 90 days prior to the period of performance start date require approval from the grants officer. This does not change the period of performance start date.

b. Grants Officer Signature. Proposals submitted in response to this notice are not considered awards until the grants officer has signed the grant or cooperative agreement. Only grants officers can bind the government to the expenditure of funds. The grants officer's digital signature constitutes an obligation of funds by the federal government and formal approval of the award.

c. Limitation of Liability. Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not have been appropriated yet for the program in this notice. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

2. Modification to Applications

NOAA Ocean Exploration may ask applicants whose proposals are recommended for funding to modify objectives, work plans, data information and sharing plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA substantial involvement in each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA Ocean Exploration.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements. Through 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal

Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200 (http://go.usa.gov/SBYh and http://go.usa.gov/SBg4), which applies to awards in this program.

2. Research Terms and Conditions. For awards designated on the CD-450 (award document) as research, the Commerce Terms and the Federal-wide Research Terms and Conditions (Research Terms) as implemented by the Department of Commerce (https://www.nsf.gov/awards/managing/rtc.jsp) both apply to the award. The Commerce Terms and the Research Terms are generally intended to harmonize with each other; however, where the Commerce Terms and the Research Terms differ in a research award, the Research Terms prevail, unless otherwise indicated in a specific award condition.

3. Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) (http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf) are applicable to this notice.

4. Department of Commerce Terms and Conditions. Successful applicants who accept a NOAA award under this notice will be bound by the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. This document will be provided in the award package in NOAA's Grants Online system at http://www.ago.noaa.gov and on the Department of Commerce website https://www.commerce.gov/oam/policy/financial-assistance-policy.

5. Bureau Terms and Conditions. Successful applicants who accept an award under this notice will be bound by bureau-specific standard terms and conditions. These terms and conditions will be provided in the award package in NOAA's Grants Online system. For NOAA awards only, the Administrative Standard Award Conditions for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Financial Assistance Awards U.S. Department of Commerce (https://www.noaa.gov/organization/acquisition-grants/financial-assistance) are applicable to this notice.

6. Human Subjects Research. For research projects involving human subjects, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or an exemption determination will be required in accordance with Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions Research Involving Human Subjects policy requirements (https://www.commerce.gov/oam/policy/financial-assistance-policy).

7. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for proposals seeking NOAA federal funding. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found on the NOAA NEPA website at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/, including NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA (https://www.noaa.gov/organization/administration/nao-216-6a), the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-40/chapter-V), and a Companion Manual to the NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) entitled Policy and Procedures for Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Related Authorities (https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/NOAA-NAO-216-6A-Companion-Manual-03012018%20%281%29.pdf). Consequently, as part of an application, under the description of 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 nonindigenous 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 help NOAA draft 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 proposed project. Failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting a proposal. In some cases, if additional information is required after a project is selected for funding, funds can be withheld by the grants officer under a specific 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.

8. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). 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 notice 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.

9. Minority Serving Institutions. The Department of Commerce/NOAA is strongly committed to increasing the participation of minority serving institutions (MSIs) (i.e., Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian institutions, and institutions that work in underserved communities).

10. Data and Information Sharing Plan
    a. 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) and free of charge or at no more than the cost of reproduction unless an exemption is granted by NOAA Ocean Exploration. All 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 (ISO) that include quality control (QC) procedures.
    b. Applicants must include a data and information sharing plan of up to two pages describing how data and information sharing requirements will be satisfied. NOAA Ocean Exploration and reviewers will consider the contents of data and information sharing plans (or absence thereof) and past performance regarding such plans during proposal review. Data and information sharing plans should include the principal and co-investigators' ORCID (https://orcid.org/), descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created or collected during 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. Data and information management plans should comply with Section VIII.A. of this notice and the NOAA Ocean Exploration's Data and Information Sharing Plan Information and Guidance (https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/funding-opps/media/fy24-data-management-plan.pdf). The costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving should be considered in the proposal budget unless otherwise stated in the guidance. At a minimum, grant recipients are expected to submit all applicable raw data to NOAA's National Centers for Environmental

Information (NCEI), which will provide public access, discoverability, and permanent archiving; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, particularly for large or unusual datasets.

c. NOAA may, at its discretion, make awardees' data and information plan publicly visible or use information from the plans to produce formal metadata records to be included in a catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data.
d. 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. Such manuscripts must be compliant with Section 508 (https://Section508.gov), an amendment to the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Manuscripts will be made publicly available by NOAA following agreed embargo periods. Awardees are encouraged to publish in open-access journals, where appropriate. Publications produced via funding under this notice should cite NOAA Ocean Exploration and the grant number as the funding source.

More information can be found on NOAA's Data Management Procedures at: https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/documents/Data_Sharing_Directive_v3.0_remediated.pdf and at NAO 212-15 Management of Environmental Data and Information: https://www.noaa.gov/organization/administration/nao-212-15-management-of-environmental-data-and-information

11. Science Integrity.
    a. Awardees from nonfederal organizations must maintain the scientific integrity of research performed pursuant to this grant or financial assistance award including the prevention, detection, and remediation of any allegations regarding the violation of scientific integrity or scientific and research misconduct, and the conduct of inquiries, investigations, and adjudications of allegations of violations of scientific integrity or scientific and research misconduct. All the requirements of this provision flow down to subrecipients.
    b. The peer review of the results of scientific activities under a NOAA grant, financial assistance award, or cooperative agreement must be accomplished to ensure consistency with NOAA standards on quality, relevance, scientific integrity, reproducibility, transparency, and performance. NOAA will ensure that peer review of "influential scientific information" or "highly influential scientific assessments" is conducted in accordance with the Office of Management and Budget Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review and NOAA policies

on peer review, such as the Information Quality Guidelines (https://www.noaa.gov/organization/information-technology/policy-oversight/information-quality).

c. In performing or presenting the results of scientific activities under a NOAA grant, financial assistance award, or cooperative agreement and in responding to allegations regarding the violation of scientific integrity or scientific and research misconduct, awardees from nonfederal entities and all subrecipients must comply with the provisions herein and NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 202-735D, Scientific Integrity, and its Procedural Handbook (http://nrc.noaa.gov/ScientificIntegrityCommons.aspx.), including any amendments thereto.

d. Awardees from nonfederal organizations will have the primary responsibility for preventing, detecting, and investigating allegations of a violation of scientific integrity or scientific and research misconduct. Unless otherwise instructed by the grants officer, awardees from nonfederal organizations must promptly conduct an initial inquiry into any allegation of such misconduct and may rely on their internal policies and procedures, as appropriate, to do so.

e. By executing this grant, financial assistance award, or cooperative agreement awardees from nonfederal organizations provide their assurance that it they have an administrative process for performing an inquiry and investigation and reporting allegations of a violation of scientific integrity or scientific and research misconduct and that they will comply with their own administrative process for performing an inquiry and investigation and reporting of such misconduct.

f. Awardees from nonfederal organizations shall insert this provision in all subawards at all tiers under this grant, financial assistance award, or cooperative agreement.

12. NOAA Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention and Response Policy. NOAA requires organizations receiving federal assistance to report findings of sexual harassment, or any other kind of harassment, regarding a Principal Investigator (PI), co-PI, or any other key personnel in the award. NOAA expects all financial assistance recipients to establish and maintain clear and unambiguous standards of behavior to ensure harassment free workplaces wherever NOAA grant or cooperative agreement work is conducted, including notification pathways for all personnel, including students, on the awards. This expectation includes activities at all on- and offsite facilities and during conferences and workshops. All such settings should have accessible and evident means for reporting violations and recipients should exercise due diligence with timely investigations of allegations and corrective

actions. For more information, please visit: https://www.noaa.gov/organization/acquisition-grants/noaa-workplace-harassment-training-for-contractors-and-financial.

13. Review of Risk. After proposals are recommended for funding by the NOAA Ocean Exploration selecting official, the Grants Office will perform administrative reviews, including an assessment of risk posed by the applicant under 2 C.F.R. 200.206. These may include assessments of the financial stability of an applicant's organization and the quality of the management systems used by the applicant's organization, the applicant's and their organization's history of performance, and the ability of the applicant and their organization to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on nonfederal organizations. Special conditions that address any risks determined to exist may be applied. Applicants may submit comments to the System for Award Management (SAM) about any information in the system about their organization for consideration by NOAA.

14. Indirect Cost Rate. If an applicant has not previously established an indirect cost rate with a federal agency, they may choose to negotiate a rate with the Department of Commerce or use the de minimis indirect cost rate of 10% of modified total direct cost (as allowable under 2 C.F.R. §200.414). The negotiation and approval of a rate is subject to the procedures required by NOAA and the Department of Commerce Standard Terms and Conditions. The NOAA contact for indirect or facilities and administrative costs is Raishan Adams, Grants Officer, NOAA Grants Management Division, 1325 East West Highway, 9th Floor, Silver Spring, MD 20910, or Raishan.Adams@noaa.gov.

15. Reviews and Evaluation. 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, and also by federal agents and contractors and/or by nonfederal personnel, all of whom enter into appropriate conflict of interest and confidentiality agreements covering the use of such information. As may be provided in the terms and conditions of a specific financial assistance award, awardees 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 the Department of Commerce and external program evaluators. In accordance with §200.303(e),

awardees 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.

C. Reporting

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.328-9 and the terms and conditions of an award, financial reports and performance (technical) reports are to be submitted semiannually. Reports are to be submitted electronically through NOAA's Grants Online system.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act (FFATA), 31 U.S.C. 6101 note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the FFATA Subaward Reporting System (https://www.fsrs.gov/) on all subawards over $30,000. More information is available in 2 CFR Part 170 (https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-2/subtitle-A/chapter-I/part-170).

All final reports may be made available to the public, so they must be compliant with Section 508, an amendment to the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This federal law requires federal agencies to make their electronic and information technology (such as publications, presentations, software, and websites) accessible to people with disabilities. This also applies to electronic and information technology developed using federal funds. Section VIII.A Data and Information Sharing Requirements provides more information about Section 508.

Grants, cooperative agreements, and intra-agency or interagency agreements have the same reporting requirements. A member of NOAA Ocean Exploration's staff will serve as a point of contact for each award and will work with awardees to facilitate reporting requirements described here.

Awardees must submit progress reports semiannually (twice a year) and cover six-month periods that begin with the start date of the project. Progress reports are to be submitted electronically to NOAA Ocean Exploration through Grants Online no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. Progress reports should detail award-related activities that occurred during the reporting period that correspond with the goals and objectives from the original proposal's project narrative and should provide specific, project-related information, including a summary budget table of expenses for that period. A final report is due no later than 120 days after the expiration date of an award.

VII. Agency Contacts

For further information and for applicants without internet, contact NOAA Ocean Exploration at (301) 325-2113 or kristen.crossett@noaa.gov. Email inquiries should include the principal investigator's name in the subject heading. Inquiries can also be mailed to Kristen Crossett at NOAA Ocean Exploration, SSMC3-Room 2327, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

VIII. Other Information

By receiving funding from NOAA Ocean Exploration, all applicants agree to expectations for sample collection, education and outreach, and data management as described below. To help meet these requirements, NOAA Ocean Exploration staff and/or NOAA designee(s) may be assigned to help plan and execute these activities. In some cases, these individuals may join an at-sea science team and serve as an NOAA Ocean Exploration representative, expedition coordinator, data manager, and/or web coordinator.

A. Data and Information Sharing Requirements

NOAA Ocean Exploration and grantees are subject to NOAA Public Access to Research Results (PARR) (https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/10169) policy and the implementing guidance in the NOAA Environmental Data Management Committee (EDMC) Procedural Directives (https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.all.php). The PARR policy is NOAA’s response to the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy memorandum dated February 22, 2013, Increasing Access to the Results of Federally Funded Scientific Research (https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/13809).

The Data and Publication Sharing Directive for NOAA Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Contracts (https://nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/documents/Data_Sharing_Directive_v3.0.pdf) is the procedural directive specific to competitive awards. This procedural directive requires NOAA Ocean Exploration to consider, in advance, how to ensure public accessibility and long-term preservation of NOAA-funded data, to provide guidance for applicants to use in developing a plan for data access, and to track and enforce conditions imposed on grant recipients.

Requirements for data and information collected or created with NOAA funds are in Section VI.B.10.a of this document. Awardees must submit required data and information by the deadline, which is defined herein as the soonest of the following:

- The publication date of a manuscript based on data and information collected or created under this award,

- Two years from the time the data are collected and verified, or
- Two years from the end of the award period.

Data should be discoverable and accessible except where limited by law, regulation, policy (e.g., those applicable to personally identifiable information or protected critical infrastructure information or proprietary trade information), or security requirements (http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_212/212-15.html).

Proposals submitted in response to this notice must include a Data and Information Sharing Plan of up to two pages describing how NOAA Ocean Exploration's requirements for environmental data and information will be satisfied (see below). Direct links to the data should be provided to NOAA Ocean Exploration. NOAA may, at its discretion, use information from data and information sharing plans to produce and make available formal metadata records to be included in a catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data.

Awardees must submit scholarly publications on work partially or fully funded by NOAA to the NOAA Institutional Repository. The final pre-publication manuscript of articles should be submitted to the repository after acceptance by the publication but no later than upon publication. Such manuscripts must be compliant with Section 508 (https://Section508.gov), an amendment to the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Manuscripts will be made publicly available by NOAA one year after publication. Awardees are encouraged to publish in open-access journals, where appropriate.

Additional information from NOAA Ocean Exploration on how to develop a data and information sharing plan:

- Data and Information Sharing Plan Information and Guidance (https://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/funding-opps/media/fy24-data-management-plan.pdf)
- FAQ for Data Sharing for NOAA Grants PD (https://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/wiki/index.php/FAQ_for_Data_Sharing_for_NOAA_Grants_PD).

B. Proprietary or Privileged Information

Patentable ideas, trade secrets, and privileged or confidential commercial or financial information, disclosure of which may harm the applicant, should be included in proposals only when such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project.

Such information should be clearly marked in the proposal or included as a separate statement accompanying the proposal (not as part of the project narrative) and should be appropriately labeled with a legend such as, “The following is [proprietary or confidential] information that [name of proposing organization] requests not be released to persons outside the federal government, except for purposes of review and evaluation.” While NOAA will make every effort to prevent unauthorized access to such material, the agency is not responsible or in any way liable for the release of such material.

C. Release of Grantee Proposal Information

A proposal that results in a NOAA award will be available to the public on request, except for privileged information or material that is personal, proprietary, or otherwise exempt from disclosure under law. Appropriate labeling in the proposal aids identification of what may be specifically exempt. Such information will be withheld from public disclosure to the extent permitted by law, including the Freedom of Information Act. Without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure, NOAA will seek to limit disclosure of such information to its employees and to outside reviewers only when necessary for merit review of the proposal or as otherwise authorized by law.

Portions of proposals resulting in awards that contain descriptions of inventions in which either the government or the awardee owns a right, title, or interest (including a nonexclusive license) will not normally be made available to the public until a reasonable time has been allowed for filing patent applications. NOAA will notify the awardee of receipt of requests for copies of funded proposals so the awardee may advise NOAA of such inventions as well as other confidential, commercial, or proprietary information in the proposal.