

FAQs - Part 2

Note: To ensure fairness, we are unable to answer any additional questions unless they are technical issues with the application.

Question: Who is eligible to apply?

- U.S.-based for-profit organizations or businesses; U.S.-based public, private, or state educational institutions; and U.S.-based not-for-profit organizations, including think tanks and civil society/non-governmental organizations with or without 501(c)(3) status.

Question: Does OES expect that organizations with prior involvement in this initiative or already-established program capabilities will have a significant advantage?

- All applicants will be considered equally based on the merits of the submitted application.

Question: Is direct U.S. agency involvement in the project scope a requirement for eligibility and/or favorable scoring?

- No. While applicants may discuss with other U.S. government (USG) agencies, it is not a requirement. Selected awardees will enter into a cooperative agreement with the Department of State, which will entail substantial involvement from other USG agencies on the project to ensure activities are complementary and not duplicative of USG activities. We do not require nor do we expect letters of support from USG agencies in an application.

Question: Where should we include the references?

- References can be included as an appendix to the application and will not be included in the 15-page limit.

Question: Are the summary page and the proposal summary the same thing?

- The summary page should serve as a cover sheet with core/basic information. The summary page is not included in the 15-page limit. The

proposal summary is the first component of the 15-page narrative, which provides an overview of the proposal.

Question: Where can I find the logic model, timeline, and monitoring indicator tracker templates?

- For MyGrants, you can find the templates under the “Information for Applicants” section. For Grants.gov, you can find the templates under the Documents section towards the bottom of the opportunity listing.

Question: Would you support a proposal that has focuses on expedition(s) and research with one Pacific Island Country (PIC) partner in the early stages of the award, but transitions toward building a relationship with a different PIC in a later stage of the award?

- All applications will be considered equally based on their proposal and justification. Applications are not limited to a single PIC nor working with a single PIC partner. If resources allow, illustrating potential for partner expansion in the future could be beneficial.

Question: For purposes of preparing the technical approach and budget, should applicants propose preliminary survey areas and coverage assumptions, or are additional geographic areas, approximate survey extents, coordinates, or planning assumptions available from OES at this stage?

- Applicants should propose preliminary survey areas and coverage assumptions based on the information provided in the NOFO (e.g., available budget, geographic areas of focus).

Question: Should each applicant independently propose and justify the duration and number of vessel days for each expedition, or is there an anticipated planning range that OES recommends for budgeting purposes?

- There is no anticipated planning range that OES recommends. Applicants should propose and justify the duration in their proposals.

Question: Should applicants prepare their proposals under the assumption that they will be responsible for securing the survey/research vessel, crew,

mobilization/demobilization, and associated operational support required for the expeditions?

- Yes, there will be no ship or vehicle time provided. Applicants are responsible for securing the necessary equipment. Applicants should include any necessary costs in their budget.

Question: The NOFO describes coordination with NOAA and other USG entities. For proposal purposes, should applicants consider this primarily technical and programmatic coordination and not assume the availability of government vessels, equipment, personnel, or other operational resources unless specifically indicated otherwise by OES?

- Correct.

Question: Should each applicant propose and justify the geophysical and oceanographic systems and methodologies appropriate to accomplish the objectives?

- Yes.

Question: For purposes of properly defining the technical scope, may “resource characterization” be accomplished through remote sensing/geophysical characterization where scientifically appropriate, or does OES expect proposals to also include physical sampling/ground-truthing and laboratory characterization?

- Resource characterization efforts are preferred and are best accomplished by collecting and analyzing geologic samples. However, narrowing areas of resource potential using ship- or uncrewed systems-based mapping tools without geologic sampling may also be considered.

Question: Considering the range of water depths referenced in the NOFO, should applicants demonstrate operational capability across the entire range, including depths greater than 5,000 meters, or may the required depth capability correspond to the specific geographic areas and expeditions proposed by the applicant?

- The required depth capability may correspond to the specific geographic areas and expedition proposed by the applicant.

Question: Can you clarify whether regional experience is a minimum eligibility requirement or a competitive consideration? Additionally, may comparable deep-sea mapping, exploration, or characterization experience from other geographic regions be considered evidence of technical capability?

- Comparable experience from other geographic regions may be considered evidence of technical capability. Prior regional experience is not required, though applicants should demonstrate regional awareness and cultural sensitivity in their application.

Question: Must partnerships with PIC governments, scientific institutions, universities, or other local organizations be formally established at the time of application, or is it acceptable to demonstrate the capacity and a specific strategy to establish such partnerships during the initial planning period? Where a partner has already been identified, is a Letter of Support sufficient to document the proposed relationship at the application stage?

- If you have already identified a PIC government entity, scientific institution, university, or other local organization as a partner, you are welcome to provide a letter of support. Partnerships do not need to be formally established at the time of application; however, you should demonstrate the capacity and plan to establish these partnerships during the initial planning period.

Question: Must an application address all priority PICs identified in the NOFO, including the Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Tonga, or may an applicant propose a technically justified subset of countries consistent with the overall objectives of the program?

- You are not required to address all priority PICs in the application.

Question: If the application focuses on one priority PIC, would the State Department encourage or discourage inclusion of additional regional country partners or collaborators?

- We will consider all applications based on the merit of the proposal and justification. Applicants should demonstrate regional awareness and cultural sensitivity in their application.

Question: Are there specific technical standards that applicants should incorporate for data acquisition, QA/QC, processing, resolution, metadata, and final data delivery, or should applicants propose and justify the standards considered appropriate for the proposed technical methodology?

- Applicants should propose and justify the standards considered appropriate for the proposed technical methodology and may indicate flexibility or potential alternative standards, as appropriate.

Question: For expedition planning purposes, should applicants base their proposals on currently available/public datasets, or does OES anticipate that additional USG or PIC bathymetric, geophysical, geological, environmental, or oceanographic datasets may be made available to the recipient following award?

- Expedition planning should take into account all available data for the region. Additional data may be provided by USG and PICs once projects are funded.

Question: Should applicants plan and budget under the assumption that the recipient will be responsible for securing applicable research permits, marine scientific research authorizations, clearances, and other approvals required for operations within each PIC, with OES providing governmental coordination as appropriate?

- Recipients are responsible for securing approval required for operations within each PIC. OES will provide government coordination, as appropriate.

Question: May an applicant structure the program through a consortium combining marine geophysical capability, vessel operations, environmental/oceanographic science, mineral characterization, data processing, and PIC/local expertise through subawards and/or contractual arrangements, subject to applicable federal assistance requirements? If so, does this NOFO establish any specific limitation on the proportion of program scope or budget that may be performed by subrecipients or contractors?

- There are no expectations or specific limitation for what proportion of activities would be handled directly by a prime or the subs on an award so long as all costs meet the requirements stated within Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) at [48 CFR Part 30 \(2020\)—Cost Accounting Standards](#) and [48 CFR Part 31 \(2019\)—Contract Cost Principles and Procedures](#) as reasonable and allocable.

Question: The FAQ states that an organization may participate as a sub-awardee in multiple applications. To confirm, may an organization submit its own application as the prime applicant while simultaneously participating as a technical sub-awardee or partner in applications submitted by other eligible applicants?

- Yes.

Question: Given that U.S.-based for-profit organizations are eligible applicants, is it correct that a for-profit recipient must budget only allowable direct and indirect costs and may not include commercial fee/profit in the federal assistance award? Additionally, is this restriction treated differently when a commercial entity participates as a contractor/vendor to the recipient under applicable federal assistance procurement requirements?

- For-profit entities should refer to FAR Cost Principles [eCFR :: 48 CFR Part 31 -- Contract Cost Principles and Procedures \(FAR Part 31\)](#) to ensure the proposed budget meets reasonable and allocable requirements.

A for-profit organization that is itself the recipient of a Department of State federal assistance award may only budget and be reimbursed for allowable direct and indirect costs – it may not build in commercial fee or profit as part of the award. When a for-profit entity is engaged not as the recipient itself, but as a contractor or vendor procuring goods/services for the recipient under the recipient's own procurement system (governed by 2 CFR 200.317–200.327), that contractor may include a reasonable profit or fee as part of its price. This is standard commercial contracting practice, and the recipient – as the procuring entity – is responsible for:

- Conducting a cost or price analysis for procurements (including analyzing profit) under 2 CFR 200.324, and

- Negotiating profit as a separate element of price, particularly for sole-source or non-competitive procurements, considering factors like contractor risk, complexity, and performance.

Question: Can OES confirm the current anticipated number of awards and whether the anticipated award range remains \$2 million to \$7 million per award?

- The anticipated award number and dollar value are dependent on the applications we receive. Applicants may be asked to scale up or scale down their budget upon successful selection of award.

Question: Given the substantial involvement under a cooperative agreement and the possibility of adjustments to geographic or programmatic priorities, may work plans, expedition schedules, and budgets be modified through applicable award mechanisms when an OES-directed change materially affects vessel operations, mobilization, scientific scope, or program costs?

- An amendment to the award may take place if there are any changes agreed upon by both the Department of State and awardee that are materially different from what is defined in the award's official statement of work.

Question: Should applicants anticipate and budget for direct participation by PIC scientists, technical personnel, and/or government representatives in expeditions, training activities, scientific exchanges, workshops, and related capacity-building activities where consistent with the proposed program design?

- Applicants should propose and justify a budget that demonstrates relevant stakeholder engagement and an understanding of cultural considerations that may affect expedition planning, logistics, and execution.