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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: Year 2016/2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set Aside

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2016-2004548

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.454, Unallied Management Projects

Dates: Complete proposals/applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. EDT on 10/31/2015. Proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration. For proposals submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication will be the basis of determining timeliness. The proposal must be validated by Grants.gov in order to be considered timely. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.
For those without access to the Internet, one signed original and two hard copy applications must be postmarked or received by the established due date for the program at the following address: Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, ATTN: 2016/2017 Atlantic Scallop Research Set-Aside Program. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. (Note that late-arriving hard copy proposals provided to a delivery service on or before 5:00 p.m. on the closing date for applications will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the proposal was provided to the guaranteed delivery service by the specified closing date and time and if the proposal is received by Northeast Fisheries Science Center (NEFSC) no later than 5 p.m., two business days following the closing date.)
No facsimile or electronic mail proposals will be accepted. March 1, 2016, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

Funding Opportunity Description: NMFS, in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), is soliciting Atlantic Sea Scallop (scallop) research proposals to utilize scallop Total Allowable Catch (TAC) that has been set-aside by the Council to fund scallop research endeavors through the 2016/2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program. No federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Rather, proceeds generated from the sale of RSA quota will be used to fund research activities and

compensate vessels that participate in research activities and/or harvest set-aside quota. Projects funded under the Scallop RSA Program must enhance the knowledge of the scallop fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which scallop management decisions are made. Priority will be given to scallop research proposals that investigate research priorities identified by the Council, which are detailed under the Program Priorities section of this announcement.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Scallop RSA Program was established through the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to address scallop research priorities identified by the Council. NMFS, in coordination with the Council, is soliciting proposals for scallop research to be conducted under the 2016/2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program. Set-aside quota will be awarded to successful applicants.

B. Program Priorities

Projects funded under the Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program must enhance the understanding of the scallop resource or contribute to scallop fishery management decisions. Priority is given to funding research proposals addressing the below list of 2016 and 2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Priorities.

Applicants responding to scallop survey priorities should be aware that 2-year survey proposals will be accepted under this competition. Additionally, such applicants are encouraged to review and consider the findings of the Scallop Survey Methodologies Peer Review, which was convened by the Northeast Fisheries Science Center in March 2015. This includes efforts to increase the level of coordination between scallop survey efforts. Reports and additional information for this peer review are posted at: www.nefsc.noaa.gov/saw/scallop-2015. 2016 and 2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Priorities

HIGHEST (listed in order of importance)

1. Survey Related Research (a, b, and c have equal priority)

1a. an intensive industry-based survey of each of the relevant scallop access areas (Closed Area I, Closed Area II, Nantucket Lightship, Delmarva, Elephant Trunk and Hudson Canyon) that will provide estimates of total and exploitable biomass to be used for setting fishery catch limits under the rotational area management program. To support these area management decisions, survey data and biomass estimates must be available by early August of the year in which the survey is conducted (e.g. survey results that would inform 2017 fishing area decisions must be available by August 2016). Areas scheduled to be open in the following fishing year generally have a higher priority than other areas. For 2016 the priority areas are likely to be: Elephant Trunk, Hudson Canyon, the access area in southern part of Closed Area II, the access area in Nantucket Lightship including the extension to the east as well as to the west within the current EFH closed area where small scallops have been observed, and to the north of the Closed Area I access area within the current EFH closed

area that has known concentrations of scallops. For 2017 the priority areas are: Elephant Trunk, the access area in the southern part of Closed Area II, and the access area in Nantucket Lightship with extension to the east. If boundaries of scallop access areas change as a result of a future Council action, then applicants may be requested to adjust their survey to be consistent with new or modified access area boundaries. Additionally, applicants should note that the priority areas listed here may change based on results of 2015 surveys and/or feedback from the scallop fishing industry. Therefore, applicants may be requested to adjust their proposed survey to meet these emergent survey needs.

1b. an intensive industry-based survey of areas that may be candidate access areas in the future (i.e., open areas with high scallop recruitment or closed areas that may open to fishing). Examples areas include the Northern Edge of Georges Bank in and around Closed Area II, the northern part of Closed Area I that is currently part of an essential fish habitat (EFH) closed area, east and west of the Nantucket Lightship scallop Access Area, south of Closed Area II, and south of Nantucket Lightship along the 40 fathom curve to Hudson Canyon. Seasonal monitoring of candidate access areas will be considered to monitor the survival of small scallops.

1c. a broad, resource wide industry-based survey of scallops within Georges Bank and/or Mid-Atlantic resource areas. The survey or surveys do not need to be carried out by a single grant recipient. The primary objective of these surveys would be to provide an additional broadscale biomass index to improve the overall precision of the scallop biomass estimate produced by the Scallop Plan Development Team. Survey results must be available by early August of the year in which the survey is conducted (e.g. survey results that would inform 2017 fishing effort decisions must be available by early August 2016).

2. Bycatch research

Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce the impacts of the scallop fishery with respect to bycatch. This would include projects that determine seasonal bycatch rates, characterize spatial and temporal distribution patterns, gear modifications to reduce bycatch and avoid fishery conflicts, as well as the associated discard mortality rates of yellowtail flounder, windowpane flounder, lobster, and other key bycatch species. Research efforts should be targeted to provide results that would help the scallop industry avoid pending or potential implementation of accountability measures.

3. Scallop area management research

Such research would include, but would not be limited to, research to actively manage spat collection and seeding of sea scallops; and research aimed at describing the occurrence, as well as understanding the mechanisms, of processes that affect scallop product quality (i.e., scallops with grey meats or evidence of disease/parasites).

MEDIUM (not listed in order of importance):

4. Research on scallop predation and ways to mitigate predation impacts (e.g. starfish, crab and dogfish)

5. Research to support the investigation of loggerhead turtle behavior in the Mid-Atlantic (via satellite tagging or other means) to understand their seasonal movements, vertical habitat utilization, and how and where interactions with scallop dredge gear are occurring. This includes monitoring of scallop dredge and scallop trawl operations, and the development of further gear modifications if monitoring should indicate current designs are not eliminating the threat or harm to sea turtles or are resulting in unacceptable reductions in scallop catch.
OTHER (not listed in order of importance):
6. Habitat characterization research including (but not limited to): before after control impact (BACI) dredge studies; identification of nursery and over-wintering habitats of species that are vulnerable to habitat alteration by scallop fishing; evaluation of long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on the ecosystem; and habitat recovery potential from fine scale fishing effort. In particular, projects that would evaluate present and candidate EFH closures to assess whether these areas are accomplishing their stated purposes and to assist better definition of the complex ecosystem processes that occur in these areas. Finally, investigation of variability in dredging efficiency across habitats, times, areas, and gear designs to allow for more accurate quantitative estimates of scallop dredge impacts on the seabed and development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts.
7. Research projects designed to either 1) examine whether chemicals, water quality, and other environmental stressors affect reproduction and growth of scallops (e.g. jet fuel, pesticides, ocean acidification, etc.); or 2) research other scallop biology projects, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (reproduction, timing of spawning, larval and early post-settlement stages), and seasonal growth patterns of scallop shell height and meat and gonad weight (which could include analysis of Northeast Fisheries Science Center archived scallop shells from the 1980s and 1990s).
8. Discard mortality of scallops. The assumed discard mortality rate used in the scallop stock assessment is very uncertain. Research that would improve the understandings of discard mortality and refine the assumed discard mortality rate would be useful, especially if projects are able to assess variability due to habitat, season, and gears, as well as the magnitude scallops discarded at sea and not landed due to scallop meat quality issues.
9. Incidental mortality of scallops. The assumed incidental mortality rate used in the scallop stock assessment is very uncertain. Research that would evaluate the effect of the four inch rings and mesh twine tops on incidental mortality would be useful.
10. Other resource surveys to expand and/or enhance survey coverage in areas that have the potential to be important resource areas, but which currently lack comprehensive survey coverage (e.g. inshore areas east of the current NOAA Fisheries survey strata or deeper than the surveyed area, Northern Gulf of Maine resource, etc.).
11. Develop methodologies or alternative ways for the scallop fleet to collect and analyze catch and bycatch data on a near real-time basis (i.e., collection of scallop meat weight and

quality data, specific bycatch information, etc. Potential ideas include, but are not limited to: concepts like a scallop “Study Fleet”, electronic monitoring, dockside monitors, scallop bag tags, etc.)

C. Program Authority

Statutory authority for this program is provided under sections 303(b)(11), 402(e), and 404(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1853(b)(11), 16 U.S.C. 1881a(e), and 16 U.S.C. 1881c(c), respectively. The Scallop RSA Program is established through the Scallop FMP (69 FR 35193, June 23, 2004) and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 648.56.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

No federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Rather, funds generated from the sale of landed scallop RSA quota shall be used to cover the cost of research activities, including vessel costs. The Federal Government is not liable for any costs incurred by the researcher or vessel owner should the sale of set-aside quota not fully reimburse the researcher or vessel owner for their expenses. Any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

The Scallop RSA TAC is 1.25 million pounds per scallop fishing year (March through February). Under the previous 2015/2016 Federal Funding Opportunity, NMFS awarded 3,394 pounds of scallops from the 2016 set-aside. Consequently, under this solicitation there are 1,249,606 million pounds available from the 2016 RSA TAC, and 1.25 million pounds available from the 2017 RSA TAC.

All scallop RSA quota awards will be made in pounds of scallops, and will not be associated with a specific fishing area or days-at-sea allocation. RSA quota may be harvested from any area that is open to the scallop fishery (i.e., open access areas and open areas), unless otherwise restricted by the Council. Applicants should be aware that yellowtail flounder bycatch in the scallop fishery may restrict the harvest of RSA quota in certain times and areas.

In the event that the entire scallop RSA TAC is not fully expended, NMFS may award unused RSA quota to compensate projects due to low scallop prices or to expand a project within its original topic area. In such an instance, the awarded allocation will be posted on the NMFS Northeast Cooperative Research website (www.nefsc.noaa.gov/coopresearch).

To apply for set-aside quota, applicants must submit a budget that is based on funds necessary to execute the research plan and funds necessary to compensate vessel owners

harvesting set-aside quota. Upon project selection, NMFS will negotiate with successful applicants on the specific RSA quota award. Projects will be selected based on technical merit, management relevance, and responsiveness to Council research priorities. NMFS will establish a common scallop price estimate, based on the best and most recent data available at the time of negotiations, to determine the amount of set-aside necessary to cover research and compensation fishing expenses.

B. Project/Award Period

Proposals may be submitted for research activities that encompass all or part of the 2016 and 2017 scallop fishing years.

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 by NOAA in the management of the project. Examples of substantial involvement may include, but are not limited to, proposals for collaboration between NOAA scientists and a recipient scientist. Funding for contractual arrangements for services or products for delivery to NOAA is not available under this notice.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

1. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state, local, and Native American tribal governments. Federal agencies and institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice. Additionally, employees of any Federal agency or Regional Fishery Management (RFM) Council are ineligible to submit an application under this program. However, RFM Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.
2. DOC/NOAA supports cultural and gender diversity and encourages women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications to the RSA program. In addition, DOC/NOAA is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges, and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.
3. DOC/NOAA encourages applications from members of the fishing community and applications that involve fishing community cooperation and participation.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

None Required

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

1. Research proposals submitted under the 2016/2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop RSA Program must be received within the application submission period to be eligible for consideration.
2. Proposals for different and distinct projects must be submitted separately in accordance with the format requirements in Section IV.B. Multiple stand-alone projects in the same proposal will not be accepted.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application information is available at http://www.grants.gov. Electronic copies of the Standard Forms for submission of research proposals may be found on the Internet in a PDF (Portable Document Format) version at http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/standard.html. Delays may be experienced when registering with grants.gov near the end of a solicitation period. Therefore, NOAA strongly recommends that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through grants.gov. Applicants without Internet access may contact Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, by phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov. To apply for this NOAA Federal Funding Opportunity, go to http://www.grants.gov, and use the following funding opportunity #: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2016-2004548.

B. Content and Form of Application

Should a recipient wish to include a coversheet with his/her proposal, the coversheet should summarize key information already contained in detail within the proposal. Such information might include, for example, the program name, date, applicant name, project title, project duration, principal investigator(s), program priorities addressed, and funds requested broken down by research, compensation, and total value.
Applications must adhere to the provision under "Applications" and the seven requirements under "Required Elements" and must be submitted by the stated deadline. Failure to follow these provisions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.
1. Applications
a. Applications submitted to the 2016/2017 Scallop RSA Program must include a Standard

Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance), including a detailed budget using Standard Form 424A, (Budget Information--Non-Construction Programs), Standard Form 424B (Assurances--Non-Construction Programs), Commerce Department Form CD-511, (Certification Regarding Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). These forms are available at http://www.ago.noaa.gov/acquisition/standard.html. These forms should be submitted through the www.grants.gov website. Applicants submitting hard copy must include one signed original and two signed unbound copies of the application (including supporting information).

b. The Standard Form SF424 must include the estimated monetary value of the entire project, including costs of compensation fishing and research project costs. This value must be recorded under item 18. Estimated Funding (e) "Other" on the SF424.

c. The Standard Form SF424A must report the total value under "Non-Federal."

d. Applicants must identify the specific research priority or priorities to which they are responding. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of the proposal first. Each application must address only one research investigation. If an application does not fulfill a priority category, it must be clearly stated in the application. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to 12 pages, excluding item "e" below. The format may vary, but must include:

a. A narrative project description to include project goals, and objectives. Funding objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; clear as to the "what and when," but avoiding the "how and why;" and attainable within the time, funding, and resources available. Proposals should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures, describing how investigators foresee research results being used in the management and/or science arena to enhance the understanding of the scallop resource or contributing to the body of information on which management decisions are made (see Section I.B.). The main body of the narrative should be a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and include: (1) Project design and management, including who is responsible, expected products, and participants other than applicant; (2) project year, or years, including the duration (starting on the first day of the month and ending on the last day of the month); (3) names and affiliations of the principal investigator(s) (PI); (4) contribution and relevance of the proposed work; and (5) a summary of the existing state of knowledge related to the project;

b. A detailed budget, including a description of the funds needed to execute the research plan and compensate vessels that harvest set-aside quota. The budget must include a breakdown of research costs including labor, vessel contracts, equipment, supplies, and

overhead, as applicable. The proposal must state how the proceeds from the sale of compensation fishing activities, including those derived from incidental catch, will be divided between the vessel and applicant. Proposals must provide a description of the safeguards that will be used to ensure that the TAC set-aside will not be exceeded;
c. A list of any federal regulations that the applicant needs to have waived and a brief justification for such a waiver;
d. Each proposal must identify the activities for the vessel(s) participating in the project, including research and compensation fishing activities. All vessel(s) selected by the applicant to participate in the study should be listed in the proposal, if possible;
e. Supporting documents, including resumes, letters of intent for vessels to participate in research activities, and any relevant contracts; and
f. As part of this application process, questions from The Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for NOAA Federal Financial Assistance Applicants, OMB Approval Number 0648-0538, must be answered and submitted with the application. These questions include: A1-A3, A11, A12, B1, C1, D1-D3, E1, E4, F1-F3, F10-F13, H1-H24, H26, H27-H31. This form is located at http://www.nepa.noaa.gov. Failure to complete all of the indicated questions with current and relevant information will result in the application being considered incomplete.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Complete proposals/applications must be received on or before 5 p.m. EDT on 10/31/2015. Proposals received after the established deadline will be rejected and returned to the sender without consideration. For proposals submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication will be the basis of determining timeliness. The proposal must be validated by Grants.gov in order to be considered timely. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. For those without access to the Internet, one signed original and two hard copy applications must be postmarked or received by the established due date for the program at the following address: Cheryl A. Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, ATTN: 2016/2017 Atlantic Scallop Research Set-Aside Program. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. (Note that late-arriving hard copy proposals provided to a delivery service on or before 5:00 p.m. on the closing date for applications will be accepted for review if the applicant can document that the proposal was provided to the guaranteed delivery service by the specified closing date and time and if the proposal is received by NEFSC no later than 5 p.m., two business days following the closing date.)

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applicants will need to determine if their State participates in the intergovernmental review process. This information can be found at the following website: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc. This information will assist applicants in providing either a Yes or No response to Item 16 of the Application Form, SF-424, entitled "Application for Federal Assistance."

E. Funding Restrictions

1. The research project period may encompass all or part of the 2016 and/or 2017 scallop fishing years (March 1, 2016 – February 28, 2017, and March 1, 2017 – February 28, 2018, respectively). Proposals to fund research started before final approval of the project for TAC set-aside awards are eligible for consideration, but any project expense incurred prior to the final determination is done solely at the researcher's risk.
2. Set-aside quota may only be harvested from open areas and open access areas, excluding areas identified by the Council as closed to RSA compensation fishing.
3. Set-aside quota awarded under this competition must be harvested by the end of May 2017 or 2018, as determined by the fishing year from which the award was derived, at which point all compensation fishing must cease, regardless if a portion of the set-aside has not been harvested. For example, 2016 set aside quota must be harvested by May 31, 2017.
4. The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred by any applicant to this announcement or any proposed or selected application or project. Any additional funds, generated through the sale of the fish harvested under the research quota, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for use of his/her vessel.

F. Other Submission Requirements

1. Applications should be submitted through www.grants.gov. If an applicant does not have Internet access, hard copies should be sent to NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA, 02543. Mark proposals "Attention—2016/2017 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside Program."
2. NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Because this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for an application. However, the Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside species or directly in research projects. NMFS, in consultation with the Council, may decide to hold a meeting with the public to discuss general topics concerning past RSA program accomplishments and ways to enhance communications on funding priorities and associated

potential study methods. Such meetings will be publicized by NMFS and the Council in accordance with their respective requirements.

3. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. The provisions of the Scallop RSA Program, and the associated 2016 and 2017 TAC set-asides were considered under the Environmental Impact Statement for Amendment 15, and the Environmental Assessment for Framework 27. Applications that propose research and/or compensation fishing that is not within the scope of the NEPA analysis for these management actions may require the applicant to provide additional information that will serve as the basis for any further analyses.

4. Permits and Approvals

a. If field research will occur in state or federal waters, investigators must secure the appropriate vessel documentation, as determined by the Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, Sustainable Fisheries Division. Such documentation may include a Letter of Acknowledgment, Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP), Exempted Educational Activity Authorization, or Temporary Possession Letter of Authorization. Investigators will be notified if there is no required or recommended research specific vessel documentation. In order to assist NMFS in determining whether or not the proposed research would require a permit, researchers should briefly address the following:

i. Location and Time of Year - Specify time of year and areas where research will occur (e.g., coordinates, 10-minute squares, closed areas; include map if possible);

ii. Gear Type - Specify type(s) of gear, including mesh size or gear modification (trawl; pot; gillnet; dredge; acoustic gear, including frequency and amplitude);

iii. Effort - Specify the number of vessels, number of tows, length of tows, number of pots, set duration of tended gear, sampling frequency, etc.;

iv. Catch - Specify the anticipated species composition and amount (directed catch and bycatch);

b. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, include a list of the specific regulations, along with a brief justification, for each regulation that needs to be waived. Should the applicant submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, the completed application should be received by NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research. NMFS may not exempt a vessel from any requirement imposed by any state. Therefore, applicants are urged to discuss with state fisheries agencies any proposed landings in their state(s), and must obtain any additional permits that may be required by such state(s).

c. Successful applicants must obtain compensation fishing permits from NMFS prior to initiating compensation fishing. NMFS will issue letters of authorization to federally permitted scallop vessels as identified by the Project Coordinator, thereby authorizing such

vessels to take compensation fishing trips.
d. Grant recipients and partnering vessel owners and operators must adhere to compensation fishing permit and exempted fishing permit terms and conditions. Failure to do so may result in the revocation of RSA compensation fishing and exempted fishing privileges for the remainder of the project period.
e. Projects may not have more than 50 vessels authorized to conduct compensation fishing at any given time, unless sufficient rationale can demonstrate that more than 50 vessels are needed. In addition, principal investigators and project coordinators should be aware that it may take NMFS up to 4 weeks to process requests to revise the list of vessels that are authorized to conduct compensation fishing.
f. Amendment 15 established a list of scallop management measures from which vessels that are conducting research funded by the scallop RSA program could be exempted via a letter of authorization. These management measures include crew restrictions, seasonal closures in access areas, and the requirement to return to port if fishing in more than one area. The review and issuance of these permits would not entail additional environmental review or public comment beyond that which was conducted for Amendment 15. These authorizations would apply only to dedicated research activities, and would not be available to vessels harvesting scallops for sale.
To apply, please go to http://www.grants.gov, and use the following Federal Funding Opportunity # NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2016-2004548. Applicants without Internet access may contact Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

NMFS may convene a technical review panel of three or more federal and public/private sector experts to discuss the technical merit of the proposals. The review panel will be required to submit written evaluations and a ranked score in accordance with the technical evaluation criteria listed below:
1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. Applicants should provide a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or hypothesis to be addressed. The proposal should describe its relevance to RSA program priorities. If not directly related to priorities listed in this solicitation, applicants should provide justification why the proposed project should be considered. (20 points)
2. Technical/scientific merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically

sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Special emphasis will be given to proposals that foster and improve cooperative interactions with the fishing industry, other research organizations conducting scallop research, NMFS, and other stakeholders. A clear description of the project design, including a detailed description of field and laboratory work, and analysis methods, should be provided. The time frame for conducting the proposed research should be clearly specified. Activities that take place over a wider versus narrower geographical range, where appropriate, are preferred. (30 points)

3. Overall qualifications of the project: This criterion assesses whether the applicant, and team members, possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This includes demonstration of support, cooperation and/or collaboration with the fishing industry, and qualifications/experience of project participants. (15 points)

4. Project costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. Cost-effectiveness of the project is considered. (25 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This includes identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of disseminating results. Where appropriate, data generated from the research must be formatted in a manner consistent with NMFS and ACCSP databases. A copy of this format is available from NMFS. Principal Investigators should anticipate being requested to provide an oral presentation to the Council’s Scallop Committee, Advisory Panel, or Plan Development Team on the results of their research. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

In addition to the technical evaluation as described above, NMFS, in consultation with the Council, will convene a management review panel, including Council members and scallop fishery experts, to review and individually critique the proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals as they relate to the program priorities enumerated in Section I.B. above. Applicants may be required, in consultation with NMFS, to further refine/modify the study methodology as a condition of project approval. No consensus recommendations will be made by the management review panel.

C. Selection Factors

The Program Officer will make recommendations to the Selecting Official based on technical ranking and management reviews. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank technical order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon

one or more of the following factors:
1. Availability of funding.
2. Balance/distribution of RSA quota:
   a. Geographically
   b. By type of institutions
   c. By type of partners
   d. By research areas
   e. By project types
3. Whether this project duplicates other projects currently supported or being considered for support by other NOAA offices.
4. Program priorities and policy factors.
5. Applicant's prior award performance.
6. Partnerships and/or Participation of targeted groups.
7. Adequacy of information necessary to conduct a NEPA analysis and determination.
Key program policy factors (see 4 above) to be considered by the Selecting Official are: (1) The time of year the research activities are to be conducted; (2) the ability of the proposal to meet the applicable experimental fishing requirements; (3) redundancy of research projects; and (4) logistical concerns. Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award. All approved research must be conducted in accordance with provisions approved by NOAA. Unsuccessful applications will be returned to the submitter. Successful applications will be incorporated into the award document.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Award announcements are expected 6 months following the deadline for this announcement.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that their applications have been recommended for selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not authorization to begin project operations. An official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that grants the set aside award and allows compensation fishing to begin. These notifications will be issued via email to the Authorizing Official and the Principal Investigator of the project. Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified electronically.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. 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) are applicable to this solicitation.

2. Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for application preparation costs. Publication of this announcement in no way obliges NOAA or the Department of Commerce to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

3. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Applicants should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project. NOAA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) staff must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by NEPA, for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following websites: www.nepa.noaa.gov , www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf , and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation https://ceq.doe.gov/ceq_regulations/regulations.html. Consequently, applicants are required to provide, under the description of program activities, detailed information on the activities to be conducted. This shall include locations, sites, species and potentially effected habitat, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns which 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, etc.). Applicants may be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an Environmental Assessment if it is determined such an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts associated with their proposed research activities. Failure to do so shall be grounds for rejecting an application. In some cases, if additional information is required after an application is selected, set-aside quota can be withheld by the NOAA Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment

4. The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 is not applicable to this RSA program.

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

In accordance with Sections 523, 536, and 537 of the Commerce Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2014 (Pub. L. 113-76, Division B), an authorized representative of the selected applicant(s) will be required to provide certain pre-award representations regarding federal felony and federal criminal tax convictions, unpaid federal tax assessments, and delinquent federal tax returns. NOAA will provide a successful corporate applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representatives certifying that the corporation has no Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal law.

C. Reporting

1. Recipients will be required to submit the following financial and performance (technical) reports. These are to be submitted electronically through the Grants online system. Hard copy submissions will be accepted only if the recipient does not have Internet access. A final Financial Status Reports (SF-425) is required to be submitted to the Grants Officer no later than 90 days after the award expiration.

a. The SF425 must report $0.00 on every line item and the comment section should read: "This is an RSA grant award which has no federal dollars associated with it. The final accounting information will be submitted with the final report."

2. Performance or progress reports are required to be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer semi-annually. These reports will be due no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of an award. The final report is due no later than 90 days after the award expiration. The format of the final report may vary, but the report must contain:

a. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);

b. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;

c. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;

d. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making;

e. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished;

f. A detailed accounting of the following items is required: All fish caught during compensation fishing and research (including catch by vessels operating under a Letter of Acknowledgment), fish landed, fish sold, and, if applicable, the disbursement of any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings above the costs of the research activities; and

g. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS, as requested.

3. Vessels operating under an Exempted Fishing Permit or conducting compensation fishing must report each trip to NMFS in accordance with the vessel monitoring system or Interactive Voice Response system instructions provided by NMFS. Non-compliance with this reporting requirement could be cause for revoking compensation fishing privileges, and not awarding future NOAA projects.

VII. Agency Contacts

Information may be obtained from Deirdre Boelke, New England Fishery Management Council, phone (978) 465-0492, fax (978) 465-3116, or email dboelke@nefmc.org, or from Cheryl Corbett, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, phone 508-495-2070, fax 508-495-2004, or email cheryl.corbett@noaa.gov for grant related questions, or from Ryan Silva, NMFS, Greater Atlantic Regional Fisheries Office, phone (978) 281-9326, fax (978) 281-9135, or email ryan.silva@noaa.gov for compensation fishing/regulatory questions.

VIII. Other Information

Limitation of Liability

In no event shall NOAA or DOC be responsible for application/proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges. Recipients and subrecipients (subcontractors) are subject to all Federal laws and agency policies, regulations, and procedures application to Federal financial assistance awards.

The Data/Information Sharing Plan

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

1. Unless otherwise noted in this federal funding announcement, a Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages shall be required as part of the Project Narrative. A typical plan may include the types of environmental data and information to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, data, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the NOAA Standard Evaluation Criteria, Item 1 -- Importance and/or Relevance and

Applicability of Proposed Project to the Mission Goals.

2. The Data/Information Sharing Plan (and any subsequent revisions or updates) will be made publicly available at time of award and, thereafter, will be posted with the published data.

3. Failing to share environmental data and information in accordance with the submitted Data/Information Sharing Plan may lead to disallowed costs and be considered by NOAA when making future award decisions.