

## 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: Cooperative Research Program (CRP)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2015-2004136

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

Dates: Applications must be received on grants.gov by 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on September 2, 2014 to be considered for funding. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: The Cooperative Research Program (CRP) provides opportunity to compete for financial assistance for projects which seek to increase and improve the working relationship between fisheries researchers from the NMFS, state fishery agencies, universities, and the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial) in the Gulf of Mexico (FL, AL, MS, LA, TX), South Atlantic (FL, NC, SC, GA) and Caribbean (USVI and Puerto Rico). The program is a means of involving commercial and recreational fishermen in the collection of fundamental fisheries information in support of management and regulatory options. This program addresses NOAA's mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources through an Ecosystem Approach to Management."

## FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

### I. Funding Opportunity Description

#### A. Program Objective

CRP is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to increase and improve the working relationship between fisheries researchers from the NMFS, state fishery agencies, universities, and the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial) in the Gulf of Mexico (FL, AL, MS, LA, TX), South Atlantic (FL, NC, SC, GA) and Caribbean (USVI and Puerto Rico). Congress has initiated the cooperative research funding to assist the NMFS in becoming more transparent by improving the confidence that both commercial industry and recreational fishermen have in the data and analyses performed in support of fisheries management.

#### B. Program Priorities

Proposals must address one of the priority areas listed below as they pertain to Federally managed species or species relevant to Federal fisheries management plans. The priorities are not listed in any particular order of importance. If you select more than one priority, you should list first on your application the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of your proposal. Projects should focus on the greatest probability of collecting data that aids in recovering, maintaining, or improving the status of stocks upon which fisheries depend; improving the understanding of factors affecting recruitment success and long-term sustainability of fisheries; and/or generating increased values and opportunities for fisheries.

The main premise for a CRP project is to provide usable and relevant information to aid fishery researchers, scientists, and managers to make informed management decisions. As such, priority needs are for information that can be utilized for assessments in the future. Stocks managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act are the top priority and research that targets a stock such that the results can be completed in time to support an impending stock assessment is encouraged. High priority Federally managed FMP species listed in appendix 1 of the SEFSC strategic plan;

[http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/Strategic-Plans/SEFSC%20Strategic%20Plan\\_Sept2013%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/Strategic-Plans/SEFSC%20Strategic%20Plan_Sept2013%20(1).pdf)

are suggested as a guide to assist in research species/stock selection for the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, Caribbean and Highly Migratory Species groups within the EEZ for the Region.

Projects will also be evaluated as to the likelihood of achieving the following priorities, with consideration of the magnitude of the eventual economic or social benefits that may be realized:

1. Commercial and Recreational Finfish:

There are several priorities within this general category that pertain to the collection of catch, effort, size frequency, bycatch, and detailed data on fishing area by vessels in the commercial and recreational fisheries for finfish species.

a. Projects to characterize the total catch (from all fleets affecting the stocks), including catch composition and disposition of the catch.

b. Projects focusing on the composition and disposition of bycatch and discards such as determining the effects on discard rates of increasing size limits or reducing possession limits. Additionally, discard mortality rates currently used in assessments are generally based on small numbers of observations or are unknown. Research is needed to improve estimates of discard mortality rates and must account for the effects of fish size, gear, area, season and depth of fishing.

c. Investigations to determine more efficient methods to record catches accurately on a real time basis during fishing operations (e.g. electronic logbooks).

d. Projects to develop methods to increase the amount of at-sea observations including imaging systems and to obtain life history information; i.e. otoliths for aging, gonads for maturity/fecundity, and could include genetic material or stomach contents for trophic level work.

e. Data collection projects to improve life history information on commercial and recreational finfish and elasmobranch species. Improved information about the age-structure of the catch (both retained and discarded), based on otoliths, vertebrae, spine or other hard-part aging techniques, will provide insight on a stock's resilience to fishing. Improved information on the reproductive characteristics of the stock, including the relationship

between size or age and reproductive capacity, will provide information to refine estimates of long-term biological productivity of the stock.

f. Projects focusing on the effect of rapid recompression (e.g., via descender devices) on the post-release condition, behavior and mortality of released fish, with considerations for factors such as depth and water temperature.

g. Projects to develop a consistent sampling methodology that will permit monitoring of the relative abundance of a fishery resource over time. An initial step for such a project is to develop sampling designs and protocols for sampling fleet catches to estimate relative abundance, including standardization of fishing power of individual vessels.

h. Projects involving Marine ecosystem modeling of food webs, trophic structure, and recruitment in the Gulf of Mexico. Mechanistic models that characterize impacts of fisheries and bycatch on energy flow and allocation of biomass within food webs are of interest, as are models that can be scaled geographically so as to describe place-based or subregional food webs as well as their interactions on a Gulf-wide LME scale. Are environmental factors (light, prey type and abundance, temperature, turbulence, predators) influencing feeding, growth and recruitment success of marine fish? What are the most important environmental factors? Does fish physiology or behavior interact with environmental factors to generate favorable conditions for fish recruitment?

i. Projects to document the knowledge of commercial (and recreational) fishers to identify reef fish spawning aggregation (FSA) sites and develop annual monitoring of FSAs for abundance indices and efficient biological sampling to assessing size and age structure in the population.

j. Research is needed to determine the impacts of bag and size limits on species that are important to recreational and charter boat industries. Projects should emphasize the effects of alternatives size limits.

k. Projects are needed to improve catch and effort data for private recreational fishermen. The projects should identify sample sizes, including number of intercept

interviews and dock samples, required to achieve standard statistical levels of accuracy and precision.

l. Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of artificial reefs in increasing productivity and recreational fishing opportunities. Projects should examine the value of artificial reefs to fishing communities, and estimate associated economic impacts.

m. Research is needed to develop pilot cooperative surveys in the US South Atlantic that target deepwater snapper-grouper species (e.g., snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, golden tilefish) to provide accurate and precise indices of abundance and life history information.

n. Research is needed to assess selectivity of hook and line gear for red snapper.

## 2. Economic Studies:

a. Proposals to determine how fishing costs change when fishermen change their fishing activities regarding how, when and where to fish, and what species to target. These changes could occur as part of a normal seasonal rotation among fisheries, or in response to changes in common management tools such as seasonal closures, area closures, industry quotas, commercial trip limits or recreational bag limits, and minimum size limits. This would reflect individual fishing trips by commercial, charter or party boats in federally managed fisheries. Additionally to look at fishing behavioral models with the intent of this research to determine how fishermen change their fishing patterns and strategies regarding how, when and where to fish, and what species to target in response to changes in common management tools such as seasonal closures, area closures, industry quotas, trip limits, and minimum size limits.

b. Projects to estimate the effect of proposed management alternatives on the benefits of recreational fishing by fishery and mode of fishing (private boats, charter boats, head boats). Evaluate the economic effects of regulations for recreational fisheries and changes in economic surpluses.

c. Develop a system of economic incentives to reduce bycatch in commercial and/or recreational for-hire fisheries. The project should compare the costs, potential gains, and levels of bycatch reduction associated with traditional bycatch reduction methods (such as gear, season or area restrictions) and any innovative alternative methods addressed by the project.

d. Research and data are needed to estimate the social and economic impacts associated with management of commercial fisheries with individual transferable quotas (ITQs). Currently, two IFQ programs are operational in the Gulf of Mexico: red snapper and grouper-tilefish. Periodic evaluations of the perceptions and attitudes of fishery stakeholders are necessary for a comprehensive analysis of the socioeconomic effects associated with IFQ management.

e. Research and data are needed to estimate the social and economic impacts that are associated with MPA closures. Currently the Caribbean has five seasonal closures in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) for spawning aggregations of fish and one no-take zone consisting of an annual closure. The size of these areas is small compared to MPAs established on the mainland, but constitute a significant portion of the fishing grounds in the Caribbean. Although research has been conducted on the biological impacts of several no-take zones, little, if any research, has been done to estimate the impacts of closures on fishing communities.

### 3. Commercial Shrimp Harvest:

a. Identifying Non-Trawlable Areas: Research is needed to investigate how habitat enhancements of non-trawlable areas could benefit shrimp fisheries. For example, artificial reefs could be established in non-trawlable areas and the impacts on shrimp and finfish populations could be evaluated. Such research should determine if enhancements would increase habitat for juvenile and adult fish, i.e. red snapper.

b. Quantification of Effort: Research is needed to improve shrimp effort data.

c. Quantification of Bycatch Rates: Statistical research is needed to ensure that extrapolation of the results of individual trawl bycatch surveys to the fleet are statistically valid. The procedures should account for the total range of conditions found in all major fishing areas. The research should estimate the number of scientific fishery observers that should be employed to collect bycatch information for prevailing conditions and areas. The project should describe the statistical accuracy and precision of estimates for each major fishing area in addition to the total fishing area. This is critical to improving stock assessments, especially in the Gulf of Mexico.

#### 4. Caribbean Fisheries:

a. Cooperative projects between scientists and industry members are needed to enhance studies of the effectiveness of MPAs in meeting their stated objectives.

b. Projects to document the knowledge of commercial (and recreational) fishers to identify reef fish spawning aggregation and nursery grounds of juvenile fishes.

c. Projects to determine the impact on coral reefs from commercial and recreational fishing operations. Industry participation is needed to determine the impacts of gear on coral reefs. Research should focus on diving, recreational boating and anchoring on coral reefs.

d. Projects to improve commercial data collection capabilities.

e. Projects to improve recreational data collection capabilities.

f. Projects on the collection of biological samples from commercial and recreational fisheries.

#### C. Program Authority

Authority for the CRP is provided by the following: 16 U.S.C. 661.

## II. Award Information

### A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2015 for projects. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon FY 2015 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center estimates awarding approximately eight projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$300,000. The average award is \$150,000. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds.

### B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards can be for a maximum period of up to 12 months. Applicants will need to compete for additional years of funding and must include a statement identifying concrete results and accomplishments from the previous year's effort. Satisfactory performance in the use of NOAA funding previously received is also required.

### C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a cooperative agreement. NMFS is substantially involved as a partner in the cooperative research activities with the recipient. Substantial involvement includes planning, scheduling, conducting, and analyzing proposed project activities and frequent contact with the grantee to help solve technical problems/situations as they arise during performance of the award.

## III. Eligibility Information

### A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, and state, local, and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the CRP is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

Applicants who are not commercial or recreational fisherman must have commercial or recreational fishermen participating in their project. There must be a written agreement with a fisherman describing the involvement in the project activity and the estimated dollar amount to be provided to that fisherman in compensation for his involvement.

## B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

## C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project. This written agreement must be signed by the SEFSC Director or Lab Director.

## IV. Application and Submission Information

### A. Address to Request Application Package

The standard application package is available at <http://www.grants.gov>. If you do not have internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, an application package may be received by contacting Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail: [Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov](mailto:Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov).

### B. Content and Form of Application

#### 1. Format Requirements:

All pages must be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 12-point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. The project description may not exceed 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirement when printed out.

#### 2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

a. Signed Title Page: The Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through grants.gov satisfy this requirement.

b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B. (Funding Opportunity Description). The Project Synopsis must identify the principal investigator(s) and a brief statement of qualifications.

c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V. (Application Review Information). Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes.

d. Data Sharing (2-page limit): 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 security requirements.

1. Unless otherwise noted in the 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 should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information 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, sharing, 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) must 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.

e. Literature Cited: If applicable.

f. Budget and Budget Justification: There should be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF-424 budget forms, including the dollar amount provided to the fisherman in compensation for his involvement. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.

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

h. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov). If you do not have internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, an application package may be received by contacting Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail: [Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov](mailto:Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov).

i. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:

1. Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-

NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

2. Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

3. Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

4. Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

5. Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

6. Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance? If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

7. Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the impact.

8. Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

9. Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

j. Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares.

k. Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

All applicants must include a written agreement with a person employed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), who will act as a partner in the proposed research project. The NMFS partner will assist the applicant to develop a design for the project to assure that the outcome will provide suitable, scientific data and results to support needed fisheries management information.

l. Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number ([www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)) and be registered in the Systems for Award Management (SAM) ([www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.

### C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov), postmarked, or provided to a delivery service by 5:00 PM Eastern Standard Time (EST) on September 2, 2014. Note: It may take [www.grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) up to two (2) business days to validate or reject an application. Please keep this in mind when developing your submission timeline. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. Applications received later than 5 calendar days following the postmark closing date will not be accepted. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. See Section IV F. Other Submission Requirements for complete mailing information.

### D. Intergovernmental Review

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

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

### E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a Federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. The Federal share of indirect costs awarded must not exceed the lesser of the negotiated rate or 25% of direct costs identified on NOAA Form 424A Budget Information. The indirect rate is fixed at 25 percent in order to maximize the funds available for actual research and to allow applicants to recover a reasonable indirect cost.

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

### F. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants should submit applications electronically through <http://www.Grants.gov>. Applicants should note that it can take between 3-5 business days or as long as 3 weeks to

register with Grants.Gov if all steps are not completed in a timely manner, and registration is required only once. Users of Grants.gov will be able to download a copy of the application package, complete it off line, and then upload and submit the application via the Grants.gov site. If an applicant has problems downloading the application forms from Grants.gov, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov.

If an applicant does not have Internet access or if Grants.gov is inaccessible, paper applications will be accepted. Paper applications must be submitted with completed, signed, original forms in hard copy and an electronic copy of the entire application on CD, including scanned signed forms. If the applicant has completed the entire application in Grants.gov but is unable to submit it via Grants.gov, then this application package should be provided via CD along with printed and signed versions of forms SF-424, SF-424B, and CD-511. The authorized representative **MUST** sign and date these forms over the printed signature that will appear in the signature box. Paper applications should be printed on one side only, on 8.5" x 11" paper, and should not be bound in any manner.

Applicants who are not commercial or recreational fisherman must have commercial or recreational fishermen participating in their project. There must be a written agreement with a fisherman describing the involvement in the project activity and the estimated dollar amount to be provided to that fisherman in compensation for his involvement. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

Paper applications must be postmarked or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt and sent to: Dax Ruiz, Federal Grants Program Manager, NOAA/NMFS/SERO; 263 13th Avenue, South, St. Petersburg, FL, 33701, Phone: (727) 824-5324, e-mail: Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov.

## V. Application Review Information

## A. Evaluation Criteria

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

### 1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (40 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities.

Does the proposal describe its relevance to a Cooperative Research Program Priority, and how information gathered will contribute to NOAA's mission to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource and contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made (20 pts)? Does this study address an important problem, providing a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or research need (5 pts)? Is the participation of U.S. fishermen or industry meaningfully incorporated into the project design (15 pts)?

### 2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Proposals should provide a clear definition of the approach to be used, including descriptions of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research.

Are the conceptual framework, design, methods, and analyses adequately developed, well-integrated, and appropriate to the aims of the project (15 pts)? Is sufficient detail provided about the methods proposed for monitoring and evaluating the success of the project, and are they appropriate (10 pts)? Are the objectives in the proposal clearly defined and focused, realistic and attainable within the proposed project period (10 pts)? Does the project demonstrate support, cooperation, and/or collaboration with the fishing industry (5 pts)?

### 3. Overall qualifications of applicants (no points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

4. Project costs (20 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame.

Is the proposed budget sufficiently detailed, with appropriate breakdown and justification of costs by object class (10 pts)? Is the proposed budget cost-effective and realistic based on the applicant's stated objectives and time frame (10 pts)?

5. Outreach and education (no points):

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This criterion is not used by the CRP program.

## B. Review and Selection Process

Once received, applications will be screened to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. Applications are not screened for deficiencies prior to the submission deadline. Should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted. If an application does not conform to the requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Each application will be independently reviewed and scored by at least three reviewers. These scores are then averaged to determine a final score. Applications are then ranked in descending order by the average scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the CRP Panel. Each member of the CRP Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel members recommending the proposal for funding. In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that are most pertinent to the research needs as listed under the program priorities in Section I.B., at the time of selection. Program priorities are not listed in order of importance because the importance can change over time.

### C. Selection Factors

The CRP Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order, or in the case of a rank order tie, based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
  - a. geographically
  - b. by type of institutions
  - c. by type of partners
  - d. by research areas
  - e. by project types

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

4. Program priorities and policy factors;

5. Applicant's prior award performance

6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;

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

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

#### D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended for funding within 275 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is approximately 425 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications. It is suggested that a September 1, 2015, start date be requested on the application.

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

## VI. Award Administration Information

### A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been approved for funding by the NOAA Grants Office with the issuance of an award signed by a NOAA

grants officer. This is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. The award will be issued electronically to the authorizing official of the project. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified by the NMFS program office that their proposals were not selected for recommendation.

#### B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

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

Limitation of Liability - Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) - NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site at [www.nepa.noaa.gov/](http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/), including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA website at [http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative\\_orders/chapter\\_216/216-6.html](http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/ames/administrative_orders/chapter_216/216-6.html) and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations website at [http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc\\_ceq.htm](http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm)

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

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

**UNPAID OR DELINQUENT TAX LIABILITY** - In accordance with current Federal appropriations law, 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.

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

### C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Performance reports should include progress on identified milestones. Electronic submission of reports is required and conducted through the use of NOAA's Grants Online system. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive final performance report 90 days after the project end date.

All data collected as part of the project must be submitted to the NMFS partner. Project data must be edited and verified as accurate by the applicant prior to being submitted to NMFS

## VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Dax Ruiz, State/Federal Liaison Branch, (727) 824-5324, or [Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov](mailto:Dax.Ruiz@noaa.gov).

## VIII. Other Information

Please note that on December 26, 2013, OMB published final guidance titled Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements (OMB Uniform Guidance) (<https://www.federalregister.gov/articles/2013/12/26/2013-30465/uniform-administrative-requirements-cost-principles-and-audit-requirements-for-federal-awards>), which streamlines the language from eight existing OMB circulars, including Cost Principles (OMB Circulars A-21, A-87, A-122) and administrative requirements (OMB Circulars A-102 and A-110), into one consolidated set of guidance applicable to federal assistance awards. Once adopted, the OMB Uniform Guidance will supersede DOC's uniform administrative requirements set out at 15 C.F.R. parts 14 and 24. The DOC expects to adopt the OMB Uniform Guidance by December 26, 2014, meaning that the OMB Uniform Guidance will apply to all new awards and to additional funding to existing awards made after December 26, 2014. In addition, the audit requirements of the OMB Uniform Guidance will apply to audits of non Federal entities beginning on or after December 26, 2014. Therefore, applicants should familiarize themselves with the OMB Uniform Guidance. Additional information on the substance of and transition to the OMB Uniform Guidance may be found at <https://cfo.gov/cofar/>.

Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number ([www.dnb.com](http://www.dnb.com)) and be registered in the Systems for Award Management (SAM) ([www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov)). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in SAM. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.