



NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program

Projects to Approve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans



Preserving, Sustaining, and Restoring Coral Reef Ecosystems

Supporting Local Conservation Efforts

Since 2002, NOAA has awarded cooperative agreements to support value-added studies or projects that will enhance the conservation of coral reef fishery resources. This program is only awarded to Federal Fishery Management councils with jurisdiction over tropical and sub tropical shallow water coral reef ecosystems including the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. Projects to Approve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans (CRFMP) has supported 12 awards to the Federal Fishery Management Councils for on-the-ground activities in U.S. Federal waters and to support fishery management needs of the states and territories.

Program Priorities

The objectives of the CRFMP are to support programs and projects by the Regional Fishery Management Councils to conserve and manage coral reef fisheries by (1) reducing the adverse impacts of fishing and other extractive uses on coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and (2) incorporating conservation and sustainable management measures into existing or new Federal fishery management plans (FMP's).

The CRFMC grant program is not intended to not replace support for existing Council staff and should support activities in addition to those currently supported by NOAA. Priority is given to proposals

FY2006 project priorities fall within 7 categories:

1. Identification, mapping and characterization of EFH, HAPC, or reef fish spawning aggregation sites;
2. Monitoring reef fish stocks;
3. Efforts to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources;
4. Identification and reduction of adverse effects of fishing gear, including the elimination of destructive and habitat-damaging fishing practices;
5. Assessment of the adequacy of current coral reef fishing regulations;
6. Education and outreach efforts to recreational and commercial fishers; and
7. Ecosystem-scale studies and inclusion of ecosystem approaches into coral reef FMP's.

for coral reef activities in the Council's jurisdiction. Proposals for complementary activities of high conservation value within state waters that are fully coordinated with appropriate state, territory or commonwealth management authorities will also be accepted.

Improving Coral Reef Fishery Management

The CRFMP solicits proposals for coral reef conservation projects for work in Council's jurisdiction. Proposals go through a competitive review process and projects are selected for funding based on technical merit, geographic balance, and conservation priorities. NOAA awards approximately \$1,050,000 to partners annually through this grant program.



SNAPSHOTS OF SUCCESS

Characterization of Mid-shelf Bank in the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico as Essential Habitat of Corals and Reef Fishes

The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council partnered with Texas A&M University and NOAA's Southeast Fisheries Science Center to study Sonnier Bank in the northwestern region of the Gulf of Mexico and assess its importance as habitat for corals and fish populations. Sonnier Bank has a number of geological features/peaks where fish aggregate. Benthic mapping helped identify a number of unique habitats such as uplifted caprock, sculpted lumps with steeply dipping ridges, and isolated patches of coral heads. The benthic community appeared to be similar to what it was 20 years ago although some bleaching of *Millepora* coral was documented. Researchers also observed a diverse fish community including snappers, groupers, jacks, and grunts. Fish abundance varied with depth that as some species were associated with the peaks and others were found in deeper water. In addition, researchers had encouraging preliminary results when comparing data collected by scuba and remotely operated vehicle that suggest it may be possible to convert counts from remotely operated vehicle (ROV) to what might be equivalent with scuba. This would make ROV an effective tool for quantifying and monitoring fish abundances at highly structured habitats that are too deep for scuba. The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council is using this information to assess the importance of Sonnier Bank for fish habitat.

How to Apply:

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, and Caribbean Fishery Management Council are eligible for funding under this program. Proposals are accepted and competitively awarded annually. Projects awards range from \$125,000 - \$575,000.

Grant deadline information can be found at <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/habitat/ead/fundingopps.htm> or on www.grant.gov by search the Funding Opportunity Number NMFS-HCPO-2006-2000350.

Project Examples:

- * Maintenance of Arc IMS System and Design and Implementation of Maps of Coral anLive/Hard Bottom and Representative Video and Photography Via the Internet.
- * Inventory and Atlas of Corals and Coral Reefs,w ith Emphasis on Deep-water Coral Reefs from the Caribbean EEZ.
- * State of Hawaii MHI Lobster Stock Assessment.
- * CNMI Inshore Tagging Project.
- * Continued Documentation and Multi-beam Mapping of the Outer Continental Shelf and Upper Continental Slope Deepwater habitat and Coral Reef Systems.
- *Support and Maintenance for Serving Maps of Coral and Live/Hard Bottom EFH and EFH-HAPC's via the nternet.



ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- § **Federal Agency Name(s):** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA); U.S. Department of Commerce
- § **Funding Opportunity Title:** NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program / Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grant Program
- § **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- § **Funding Opportunity Number:** NMFS-HCPO-2006-2000350
- § **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):**
11.441 - Habitat Conservation
- § **Dates:** Preapplications must be received by NOAA before midnight, Eastern Time, on November 15, 2005. Final applications must be received by NOAA before midnight, Eastern Time, on March 3, 2006.
- § **Funding Opportunity Description:** The NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/ Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans, as authorized under the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, provides grants of financial assistance ranging from \$175,000-\$525,000 to Regional Fishery Management Councils for projects that reduce the adverse impacts of fishing and other extractive uses within coral reef ecosystems, and incorporate conservation and sustainable management measures into existing or new Federal fishery management plans (FMPs) for coral reef species

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans

A. Funding Opportunity Description

1. Program Objective

Pursuant to the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (Act), the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary), through the NOAA Administrator (Administrator), and subject to the availability of funds, is authorized to provide matching grants of financial assistance for coral reef conservation projects through the Coral Reef Conservation Program (Program). As such, the objective of the Program is to provide financial assistance for coral reef conservation projects consistent with the

Act and “A National Coral Reef Action Strategy” (Strategy). A copy of the Strategy and the Act can be found at: <http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov/>.

Pursuant to the Act, NOAA published the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program Implementation Guidelines (Guidelines) in the Federal Register Vol. 67, No. 76, page 19396, on Friday, April 19, 2002. The Guidelines can be also found at: <http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov/>.

The Guidelines provide broad eligibility criteria, pursuant to Section 6403(g) of the Act, for coral reef conservation activities, and also created the following six program categories under the Program for awarding financial assistance:

1. State and Territory Coral Reef Management;
2. State and Territory Coral Reef Ecosystem Monitoring;
3. Coral Reef Ecosystem Research;
4. General Coral Reef Conservation;
5. Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans; and,
6. International Coral Reef Conservation.

From year to year, specific priorities of the above listed program categories change due to Congressional appropriations and direction, and priorities of NOAA, the Program, and the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. Each of the categories listed above has its own FFO announcement, which describes the following specific requirements and criteria: program priorities, applicant and project eligibility, funding availability, application content and submission, application review and selection, and award administration. The criteria provided herein are specific only to the Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans category.

The principal objectives of the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grant Program (CRCGP/FMC) are to support programs and projects by the Regional Fishery Management Councils to conserve and manage coral reef fisheries by (1) reducing the adverse impacts of fishing and other extractive uses on coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and (2) incorporating conservation and sustainable management measures into existing or new Federal fishery management plans. This program will support projects and activities by the Councils with responsibilities for fishery management plans that include coral reefs or fishery resources that depend on coral reef ecosystems, as established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), that enhance the conservation of coral reef fishery resources. It is not intended to support normal Council activities or responsibilities.

Successful projects will be those that have a high probability of addressing the goals and purposes of the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (Act 16 U.S.C. 6401, 6403, P.L.106-562) and the priorities identified in the National Action Plan to Conserve Coral Reefs and the National Coral Reef Action Strategy, specifically pertaining to activities that seek to reduce adverse impacts of extractive uses. First priority will be given to proposals for coral reef activities in the Council’s jurisdiction. Proposals for complementary activities of high conservation value within state waters that are fully coordinated with appropriate state, territory or commonwealth management authorities will also be accepted. Proposed activities should be in addition to those

currently supported by NMFS and should not replace support for existing Council staff.

2. Program Priorities

For this solicitation, all applications must fall within at least one of the 7 categories: (a) identification, mapping and characterization of EFH, HAPC, or reef fish spawning aggregation sites; (b) monitoring reef fish stocks; (c) efforts to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources; (d) identification and reduction of adverse effects of fishing gear, including the elimination of destructive and habitat-damaging fishing practices; (e) assessment of the adequacy of current coral reef fishing regulations; (f) education and outreach efforts to recreational and commercial fishers; and (g) ecosystem-scale studies and inclusion of ecosystem approaches into coral reef FMPs. The priorities are not listed in any particular order and each is of equal importance.

Details of the 7 categories are as follows:

a. Identification, mapping and characterization of EFH, HAPC, or reef fish spawning aggregation sites: Studies that identify, map and characterize important essential fish habitat, habitat areas of particular concern, and spawning populations in U.S. coral reef ecosystems, assess the condition of the habitat, and determine the spatial extent of fishing induced disturbance. Special priority will be given to studies associated with coral reef areas that are currently, permanently, or seasonally closed to fishing or that may merit inclusion in an expanded network of no-take ecological reserves. Eligible activities include multi-beam or sidescan sonar mapping and characterization of such areas on deeper coral reefs, banks and beds.

b. Monitoring reef fish stocks: Monitoring reef fish stocks in existing no-take marine reserves and reference sites on coral reefs in the Council's jurisdiction to evaluate the effectiveness of reserves. Emphasis should be placed on improving stock analysis of species proposed as candidates for endangered species listing, high value fisheries species, species targeted for the aquarium trade, or other indicator species.

c. Efforts to reduce overfishing of coral reef resources: Studies needed to develop proposals to reduce over-fishing of coral reef resources, including compilation of existing background information on currently unassessed coral reef fishery stocks, targeted assessments of such coral reef fishery stocks for which overfishing is strongly suspected, and improved means of data collection from harvesting activity for both target and non-target species. Efforts could include socioeconomic monitoring of fisheries and reporting and implementation of observer programs.

d. identification and reduction of adverse effects of fishing gear, including the elimination of destructive and habitat-damaging fishing practices: Studies workshops, or consultations with fishers needed to identify adverse effects of fishing and fishing gear on essential fish habitat and implementing actions to reduce these effects.

f. Assessment of the adequacy of current coral reef fishing regulations: Studies, workshops, or consultations with fishers needed to assess the adequacy of current fishing regulations and the need for additional gear and anchoring restrictions to reduce habitat damage

on coral reefs and other adverse impacts of fishing within the Council's jurisdiction.

g. Education and outreach efforts to recreational and commercial fishers: Enhanced education and outreach to recreational and commercial fishers specifically targeted to reduce the adverse impacts of fishing on coral reef ecosystems.

h. Studies to understand and incorporate ecosystem-scale considerations into coral reef fishery management plans: Studies needed to understand ecosystem effects of fishing on coral reefs, including: the development of models and studies to improve our understanding of larval pathways, trophic interactions and their ecosystem impacts associated with fishing, and habitat impacts associated with certain types of fishing gear and practices.

3. Program Authority

Authority for the Fishery Management Council Grant Program is 16 U.S.C. 6403.

B. Award Information

1. Funding Availability for FY2005

NOAA announces that approximately \$1,050,000 may be made available for distribution under the FY 2006 CRCGP/FMC, for cooperative agreements to support coral reef conservation activities under this program. Awards will range from a minimum of \$175,000 to a maximum of \$525,000 with a total of \$525,000 will be available for activities in the Western Pacific, and a maximum of \$525,000 will be available for activities in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, and Caribbean in order to ensure the regional balance called for by the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000. Activities approved by NOAA will be awarded as new cooperative agreements either by the Pacific Islands Regional Office or NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation. The number of awards made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested for each project, the merit and ranking of the proposals, and the amount of funds made available to the GCRC by Congress. The funds have not yet been appropriated for this program, and there is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

2. Project/Award Period

Projects for a period of 12- to 18-months will be considered under the CRCGP/FMC. Funding for subsequent years will require submission of a new application, which will compete with other project proposals submitted during the subsequent budget period. If an applicant wishes to continue work on a project funded through this program beyond the project period and obligated award funds have not been expended by the end of the period, the applicant can notify the assigned Federal Program Officer 30 days prior to the end of the period to determine eligibility for a no-cost extension.

3. Type of Funding Instrument

NOAA will provide funding to the Regional Fishery Management Councils as 12-18 month cooperative agreements.

4. Permits and Approvals

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, state, and local government permits and approvals for the proposed work. For work within National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks, National Seashores, and other Federally designated protected areas, it is the applicant's responsibility to request and obtain any necessary permits or letters of agreement prior to award from the appropriate government agencies.

Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential adverse impact on the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of environmental permits must be included in the proposal package. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they have sufficient environmental documentation to allow program staff to determine whether the proposal is categorically excluded from further National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis or whether an environmental assessment is necessary to conform with requirements of NEPA. For those applications needing an environmental assessment, applicants will be informed after the peer review stage and will be requested to assist in the preparation of the assessment prior to final approval of the award.

Failure to apply for and/or obtain Federal, state, and local permits, approvals, letters of agreement, or failure to provide environmental analyses where necessary (i.e., NEPA environmental assessment) will delay or prevent the award of funds for projects that have been preliminarily selected for funding.

C. Eligibility Information

1. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are limited to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, and Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

2. Cost Sharing or Matching

No cost sharing or matching is required under this program. The Administrator has waived the matching requirement for the Fishery Management Councils as discussed in Section VII of the Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program Implementation Guidelines (Federal register Vol. 67, No. 76, page 19396, Friday, April 19, 2002.). This waiver is based on the fact that the Councils are funded solely by awards from the U.S. Federal Government, and therefore, do not have the ability to generate matching funds.

D. Application and Submission Information

The application process requires both a preapplication and final application, subject to the submission dates and times listed below. The preapplication and final applications must include a cover sheet, project summary, the narrative description of the budget and proposed project, and applicable supporting documentation must be complete and must follow the format described here. Failure to follow these requirements will result in the application being returned without review.

Applicants must identify the specific priority or priorities to which they are responding. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list first on the application the priority that most closely reflects the objective of the proposals.

Applicants whose preapplications are preliminarily selected and choose to submit a final application, must submit a final Federal financial assistance award application package, including the revised final application and supporting documentation described below, and all required Federal financial assistance forms. The required Federal financial assistance forms include a SF-424, SF-424A, SF-424B, CD-511, CD-512, and if applicable, CD-346 and/or SF-LLL. These can be filled out and submitted on line at www.grants.gov, can be requested from the technical point of contact, or obtained from the NOAA grants Website at <http://www.rdc.noaa.gov/~grants/pdf>. Applicants are required to include one original and two copies of the signed, hard/paper of the Federal financial assistance forms for each final application package that is not submitted through www.grants.gov

Selected applicants may be asked to revise award objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to submittal of the final application. The amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and the specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD), and relevant NOAA staff.

For each project proposed, the preapplication and final application should not exceed 25 pages, including descriptions of qualification, letters of support and no more than five pages of other attachments, and should use 12-point font on letter size paper. Preapplications and final applications must include the following information:

a. Cover Sheet:

A cover sheet must be included for each application. The cover sheet must list (1) the project title, (2) applicant organization, (3) principal investigator or contact, (4) contact information, (5) program category, (6) geographic location of the project, (7) amount of grant funds requested, (8) amount of matching funds provided, and (9) a one paragraph project summary.

b. Project Summary (1-page limit):

Each application must contain a summary describing:

- (1) Status and magnitude of the issues in the jurisdiction where the project will occur.
- (2) Recent actions undertaken to address the issues.
- (3) How the project fits into the jurisdiction's strategy to addressing critical coral reef conservation needs the next 2- to 3-years.
- (4) Summary of work to be performed and expected outcomes.

c. Narrative Project Description (15 page limit).

The Narrative should be no more than 15 double-spaced pages long (in 12-point font) and must include a clear presentation of the proposed work and a narrative budget justification. Each task within the project must be completely and accurately described. The narrative should include: (1) specific objectives, performance measures for the period of the proposed work, and the expected outcomes; (2) relation to longer-term goals of the PI's project; and (3) relation to other work planned, anticipated, or underway.

Each project must be described as follows:

i. Identification of problem(s): Identify the problem/opportunity the project intends to address and describe its significance to the conservation of coral reefs.

ii. Project objectives: Identify the CRCGP/FMC objective, listed under A. Funding Opportunity Description, 2. Program Priorities, to which the project's objective(s) correspond. Objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; and; attainable within the time, money and human resources available. Projects should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures.

iii. Project narrative: The project narrative is the scientific or technical action plan of activities that are to be accomplished during each budget period of the project. This description should include detailed descriptions of activities, collaborators, milestones, and expected products resulting from a successfully completed project. The narrative should respond to the following questions:

(1) What specific activities does the project include and how do these activities relate to the project's goals and objectives?

(2) Who will be responsible for carrying out each activity? Highlight activities that will be conducted by co-investigators or cooperators, or by sub-contractors, volunteers, and others designated as co-investigators or cooperators.

(3) What are the project milestones? List milestones, describing specific activities and associated time lines necessary to meet them. Describe the time lines in increments (e.g., month 1, month 2, etc.), rather than by specific dates.

(4) What are the major outcomes, results, or products expected? Describe expected outcomes, results, or products that will directly relate to the CRCGPO/FMC objectives. Identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities and the potential impacts of this proposed project on the conservation of coral reefs.

iv. List the programs (Federal, state, territorial or local governmental activities) this project would affect and describe how the project coordinates with relevant state, territorial, or local governmental and non-governmental agencies, and if applicable, NOAA regional activities.

v. Describe how the project will be organized and managed. The lead organization and person listed as the technical contact, should be identified as the principal investigator. The principal investigator may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the principal investigator, there must be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and principal investigator (e.g., applicant will be responsible for managing the grant funds and the principal investigator will be responsible for completing the project milestones on time and within budget, etc.).

d. Narrative Budget Summary:

Provide a detailed breakdown of costs by category and the corresponding direct and indirect cost totals. Provide information regarding the amount of matching funds available to the applicant. If the applicant currently has a negotiated indirect cost rate with the Federal Government, up to 25% of the total indirect costs can be included in the budget supported by federal funds. Indirect costs are overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and, therefore, cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. If indirect costs are included, the package should include a copy of the current, approved, negotiated indirect cost agreement with the Federal Government.

Funds for salaries and fringe benefits may be requested only for those personnel who are directly involved in implementing the proposed project and whose salaries and fringe benefits are directly related to specific products or outcomes of the proposed project. NOAA strongly encourages applicants to request reasonable amounts of funding for salaries and fringe benefits to ensure that your proposal is competitive. Proposals can include the support for a maximum of one full-time equivalent working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities.

We will not consider fees, fund-raising activities, travel for Federal employees, salaries for Federal employees, or profits as allowable costs in the proposed budget. The total costs of a project consist of all allowable costs you incur in accomplishing project activities during the project period. A project begins on the effective date of an award agreement between you and the Grants Officer and ends on the date specified in the award. Applicants will not be reimbursed for time expended or costs incurred in developing a project or preparing the application, or in any discussions or negotiations with us prior to the award. We will not accept such expenditures as part of your cost share.

3. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be received by NOAA before Midnight Eastern Time on the dates specified below:

Preapplication due to NOAA - November 15, 2005

NOAA returns proposal comments to applicants – February 3, 2006

Final Applications due to NOAA - March 3, 2006

There will be no extensions beyond these dates. If the preapplications and final applications are not received by NOAA by the deadlines listed above, the late application will not be reviewed or considered for FY 2006 funding.

Preapplications may be submitted by surface mail or e-mail. Submissions by e-mail are preferred. If submitting by surface mail, applicants are encouraged to include an electronic copy of the pre-application or final application on disk or cd. Pre-applications must be sent to coral.grants@noaa.gov or to David Kennedy, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, Office of Response and Restoration, N/ORR, Room 10102, NOAA National Ocean Service, 1305 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Final applications should be submitted electronically to: www.grants.gov, the Federal grants portal. If internet access is unavailable, hard copies can be submitted David Kennedy, NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, Office of Response and Restoration, N/ORR, Room 10102, NOAA National Ocean Service, 1305 East West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Applicants are required to include one original and two copies of the signed, hard/paper of the Federal financial assistance forms for each final application package applications that is not submitted through www.grants.gov.

4. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this Program are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Specific information regarding Intergovernmental Review can be found above in Section IV. Application and Submission Information, D. Intergovernmental Review.

5. Funding Restrictions

a. Ineligible Projects: These funds are not intended to support normal Regional Fishery Management Council's activities or responsibilities. The following categories of activities or expenses are not eligible for funding:

i. Meetings and travel necessary to conduct normal Council business including regular Advisory Panel, Stock Assessment Panel or Scientific and Statistical Committee meetings, Environmental Impact Statement hearings; other public hearings; Fishery Management Council meetings; etc.

ii. Regular Council reports and information dissemination, including annual FMP reports, FMP amendments, public notices, advertisements, etc.

iii. Council staff aside from a maximum of one full-time equivalent working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities.

iv. Activities related to FMPs that do not directly include shallow coral reef resources.

b. Pre-award Notification Requirements: The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification of Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register Notice of December 30, 2004 (69 FR 78389) is applicable to this solicitation.

c. Indirect Cost Rates: The budget may include an amount for indirect costs if the

applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the Federal government. Indirect costs are essentially overhead costs for basic operational functions (e.g., lights, rent, water, insurance) that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified specifically within a particular project. For this solicitation, the Federal share of the indirect costs must not exceed the lesser of either the indirect costs the applicant would be entitled to if the negotiated Federal indirect cost rate were used or 15 percent of the direct costs proposed. If the applicant does not have a current negotiated rate and plans to seek reimbursement for indirect costs, documentation necessary to establish a rate must be submitted within 90 days of receiving an award.

d. Allowable Costs: Costs that are directly related and can be traced to the cost of the project being supported, and that are within approved budget categories may be charged to the award. Generally, costs that are allowable include equipment, supplies, and training for activities specifically pertaining to the agreed upon elements of the proposal, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable." Funds can be used to support a maximum of one full-time position for an individual working exclusively on Council coral reef conservation activities. Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out the project.

Funds cannot be used to support (1) normal Council activities or responsibilities including regular Council reports and information dissemination, (2) meetings and travel necessary to conduct normal Council business, (3) Council staff involved in activities other than coral reef conservation projects outlined in the proposal, and (4) Council activities related to fishery management plans that do not directly include shallow coral reef resources.

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable. The earliest date for receipt of awards will be approximately 90 days after the submission of the final, approved application. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for proposed restoration activities.

E. Application Review Information

1. Evaluation Criteria:

Reviewers will assign scores to proposals ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below.

a. Importance and Applicability of Proposal (Score = 0-40): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. Applications will be evaluated on clear identification of project goals and objectives and the ability to link those goals and objectives to project activities and the applicability of the project to the GCRC goals. Reviewers will consider:

- (1) Whether the proposed work contributes to improved understanding, conservation, management, or protection of coral reefs in the U.S. waters and the Freely Associated States by addressing one of the 7 program priorities (0-20 points); and

- (2) The need for the proposed coral reef activity in the jurisdiction; the contribution of potential outcomes, results, or products to coral reef conservation and management; and, the amount of collaboration with local, state and territorial governments (0-20 points).

b. **Technical/ Scientific Merit** (Score = 0-30): This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Applications will be scored based on their clear identification of performance evaluation methods and the suitability of those methods for evaluating the success or failure of the project in terms of meeting its original goals and objectives. Reviewers will evaluate:

- (1) The completeness and adequacy of detail in the project description, including clearly stated coral reef conservation objectives and goals, and the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results in the time line specified in the statement of work and the inclusion of quality assurance considerations if data collection is proposed (0-10 points).
- (2) The overall technical feasibility of the project, including whether the proposed approach is technically sound and uses appropriate methods that are likely to achieve project goals and objectives on both an ecological and community stewardship level (0-10 points)
- (3) Whether there are effective mechanisms to evaluate project success (0-10 points).

c. **Overall Qualification of Applications** (Score = 0-10): This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. The overall qualifications of the project will be evaluated based on:

- (1) The capacity of the applicant and associated project personnel to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as indicated by the qualifications and past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in designing, implementing and effectively managing and overseeing projects that benefit living marine resources. Consideration will be made to previous awards received by the Principal Investigator and outcomes, results, or products resulting from such awards. Communities and/or organizations developing their first locally-driven coral reef conservation project may not be able to document past experience, and therefore will be evaluated on their potential to effectively manage and oversee all project phases, on the basis of their explanation of characteristics such as education, training and/or experience of primary project participants.
- (2) The facilities and/or administrative resources and capabilities available to the applicant to support and successfully manage the restoration work, including the availability of NOAA or other technical expertise to guide the project to a successful completion. Applicants with demonstrated or potential NOAA involvement in or support for the proposed project may score higher on this criterion.

d. Project Costs (Score = 0-10): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time-frame. The budget should reflect the ability of the work to be completed for the funding and timing proposed and a demonstrated need for funding. The itemized costs and the overall budget must be justified and allocated appropriately. NOAA will expect cost-sharing to leverage funding or other resources that improve cost-effectiveness and to further encourage partnerships among government, industry, and academia. Applicants that provide documentation that acceptable secured match is available within the proposed project period, and those that are able to provide cash contributions, are likely to score higher on this criterion.

e. Outreach and Education (Score = 0-10): 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. The reviewers will evaluate whether information about or the findings of this work is disseminated to the appropriate user groups and if the proposed outreach/education methods appropriate for this type of work.

2. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 3 steps, including an initial evaluation, technical review, and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., the Office of Habitat Conservation, Ecosystem Assessment Division Chief). The peer review step will involve at least 3 individual reviewers per application. The Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the numerical ranking of the applications and the evaluations by the peer reviewers as well as the selection factors set in E.3. below.

a. Initial Evaluation of the Applications: The initial screening will ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements, clearly relate to the 2006 GCRC objectives, and meet all of the eligibility criteria. Application packages will be screened to ensure that they were received by the due date (see Submission Dates and Times); include the entire preapplication package (cover sheet, project summary, the narrative description of the budget and proposed project, minus the Federal forms); identify a Principal Investigator and provide current resumes or curricula vitae for both the Principal and Co-Investigators; identify one of the 7 project categories; include supporting documentation from relevant state or territorial governments; and include any relevant permit application cover letters, if applicable. Preapplications that pass this initial screening will be submitted for technical review.

b. Technical Review: Technical review is conducted by a minimum of three external reviewers. Each reviewer will individually evaluate and score preapplications (0-100 points) using the evaluation criteria provided in Section V, A above. This review will involve experts from both NOAA and non-NOAA organizations. NOAA will also request and consider written comments on proposed projects from each agency with jurisdiction over coral reef ecosystems in the area where the project is to be conducted. The technical reviewers' ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the preapplications. No consensus advice will be given by the technical reviewers.

c. Final Selection: Preapplications for GCRC projects will be evaluated by at least three individual technical reviewers, including those mentioned in the above paragraph, according to the criteria and weights described in this solicitation. The proposals will be rated, and reviewer comments and composite project scores and a rank order will be presented to the Selecting Official. Based on these cumulative reviews and the additional selection factors described below, the Selecting Official, in consultation with Coral Reef Conservation Program staff, will make preliminary funding recommendations. Only those applications having an average score higher than 70 points in the peer review will be considered for funding. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not among those recommended for funding.

3. Selection Factors

The Selecting Official, in consultation with Office of Habitat Conservation staff, will select the preapplications to be recommended to the Grants Management Division (GMD) for funding and determine the amount of funds available for each approved proposal. Preapplications will be awarded in rank order of the technical review ratings, unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon 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. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other federal agencies.

4. Program priorities and policy factors as set forth in section A.2.
5. Applicant's prior award performance.
6. Partnerships and/or 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.

4. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NMFS will provide a summary of comments received during the review process to each selected applicant by February 3, 2006. These summary comments will include input from peer reviewers, the solicited jurisdictions, and the NOAA Coral Program review, and are intended to be used in the applicant's development of the final application. The Program Officer and/or Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal, and request specific modifications to the proposal, based on the review. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for award to the Grants Officer who is authorized to obligate the funds. If insufficient eligible projects are received, NOAA may reallocate residual funds from this program area to a different funding category under the Program.

Upon receipt of the final application, complete with the requisite Federal financial assistance forms, NMFS will review the complete package and make final funding recommendations based on the incorporation of, and/or response to comments that were returned to the applicant. NMFS will submit these funding recommendations to the NOAA selection panel for final review, pursuant to Section X(4) of the Guidelines. The selection panel will ensure that funding decisions are consistent with the geographic distribution requirements of 16 U.S.C. 6403(d). Final funding will be made available to the successful applicant by October 1, 2006.

F. Award Administration Information

1. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification from the Program Office that the application has been submitted to the NOAA Grants Management Division with a recommendation for funding. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance of the project. Official notification of funding, signed by a NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. Notifications will be issued through electronic mail to the authorizing official and the principle investigator of the project.

Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not selected for recommendation. Unsuccessful applications will be kept on file in the Program Office for a period of at least 12 months, then destroyed.

2. 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 published in the Federal Register December 30, 2004 (69 FR 78389). You may obtain a copy of this notice by contacting the agency contact(s) under Section VII, or by going to the website at: http://www.access.gpo.gov/su_docs/aces140.html. Applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

Limitation of Liability

Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of Fiscal Year 2005 appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds have not yet been appropriated for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige 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 website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216--6--TOC.pdf>, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.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, 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 on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

3. Reporting

Cooperative agreement recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) reports on a semi-annual schedule no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. The comprehensive final report is due 90 days after the award expiration. All financial reports shall be submitted in triplicate (one original and two copies) to the NOAA Grants Officer. Performance reports should be submitted to the

NOAA Program Officer (NMFS Office of Habitat Conservation). Electronic submission of performance reports is preferred.

G. Agency Contact(s)

Technical point of contact for NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Grant Program/Projects to Improve or Amend Coral Reef Fishery Management Plans Grants Program is Andy Bruckner, 301-713-3459, extension 190 or e-mail at andy.bruckner@noaa.gov.