

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: Northeast Region Marine Mammal Grant Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-NERO-2011-2002879

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.472, Unallied Science Program

Dates: Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on April 26, 2011. Use of U.S. Mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject an application. Please keep this in mind when developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: The Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) was enacted in 1972 largely in response to concerns that human activities were contributing to the decline of the populations of certain marine mammal species. The underlying focus of the MMPA is the implementation of policies to prevent the decline of marine mammal species beyond the point where they would stop being functioning parts of their ecosystems. The MMPA prohibits the taking of any marine mammal in U.S. waters, with the exception of certain cases such as through permitted activities, where "take" is defined as hunting, harassing, capturing, or killing a marine mammal or attempting to do so. The MMPA is unique in that its underlying intent is the management of marine mammal stocks to help them achieve their optimum sustainable populations within their ecosystems, rather than managing for the benefit of commercial exploitation. The MMPA was amended in 1994 to provide certain exceptions to the take prohibitions, establish provisions for the preparation of marine mammal stock assessment reports, implement a program addressing interactions between commercial fisheries and marine mammals, and institute studies of pinniped interactions with fisheries. NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is charged with carrying out the mandates of the MMPA for the protection of whales, dolphins, porpoises, seals, and sea lions, while the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is charged with protecting walrus, manatees, otters, and polar bears.

The Marine Mammal Program within the NMFS Northeast Region's Protected Resources Division (PRD) carries out the mandates of the MMPA, and is charged with protecting the whales, dolphins, porpoises, and seals that occur within the Northeast region (Maine through Virginia). Many of the program's activities focus on addressing human-caused impacts to

marine mammals, including vessel strikes and fishing gear interactions, and managing behaviors associated with marine mammal viewing activities, such as whale watches and recreational boating. The program also includes a marine mammal health and stranding response component, which includes coordinating response and data collection efforts for stranded animals and learning more about factors affecting the health of marine mammals. Finally, an important component of the Marine Mammal Program is outreach and education efforts to support all of its sub-programs, including regulated parties like fishermen and marine mammal viewing groups like whale watch vessels. For more information about the Marine Mammal Program in the Northeast Region, visit http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/mmp/.

NMFS seeks the submission of proposals addressing the research and management needs that have been identified for the Marine Mammal Program in the Northeast. A wide variety of applicants are eligible to submit proposals, including state agencies, non-profit organizations, fishermen, stranding network partners, and others. This document describes how to submit proposals for funding in Fiscal Year 2011 and how NMFS will evaluate proposals and determine those that will be recommended for funding.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of the Northeast Region Marine Mammal Grant Program is to provide funding to address NMFS-identified high priority research and management needs to support the various sub-programs operating within the NMFS Northeast Region's Marine Mammal Program. A general overview of the sub-programs is provided here, with more specific details on high priority research needs provided in Section I.B. (Program Priorities).

Take Reduction Teams and Plans

Section 118 of the Marine Mammal Protection Act mandates the formation of Take Reduction Teams (TRTs) to address the serious injury and mortality of strategic marine mammal stocks that are incidentally captured in commercial fishing gear. TRTs are groups of stakeholders that develop strategies to reduce these interactions. These strategies are provided through recommendations to NMFS and are implemented through Take Reduction Plans (TRPs). TRPs may include regulations and are often accompanied by non-regulatory conservation measures, such as outreach and ideas for gear research projects. The Northeast Region PRD currently oversees the following TRTs: Atlantic Large Whale (focusing on North Atlantic right whales (*Eubalaena glacialis*), humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), and fin whales (*Balaenoptera physalus*)); Harbor Porpoise (focusing on harbor porpoises (*Phocoena phocoena*)); and Atlantic Trawl Gear (focusing on long and short-finned pilot whales (*Globicephala* spp.), common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis*), and white-sided dolphins (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*)). Each TRP has its own associated research needs and priorities, which include biological as well as gear research needs, to support efforts to reduce incidental interactions with fishing gear. More information on Northeast Region TRPs can be found by visiting the Marine Mammal Program website (http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/mmp/) and clicking on the appropriate TRP link under "NER Features."

Ship Strike Reduction Program

Collisions with vessels are the leading human-caused source of mortality for the endangered North Atlantic right whale. With only 300-400 in existence, North Atlantic right whales are among the most endangered whales in the world. Their slow movements, time spent at the surface, and time spent near the coast make them highly vulnerable to human activities, especially being struck by ships. To address this, NMFS implemented regulations establishing seasonal ship speed restrictions (73 FR 60173, October 10, 2008) for vessels greater than or equal to 65 feet in length to reduce the likelihood of mortalities and

serious injuries resulting from collisions with vessels. More information on the Ship Strike Reduction Program can be found at: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/shipstrike/>.

Marine Mammal Viewing Program

This program focuses on promoting responsible use of the oceans, in particular activities that could involve marine mammal viewing. Such activities include commercial operations dedicated to viewing whales, dolphins, and seals, as well as activities not specifically targeting marine mammals that could impact their behaviors, such as boating and fishing. PRD has developed outreach materials and has implemented voluntary incentive programs like the Whale SENSE program to promote responsible viewing of marine mammals. More information on the Marine Mammal Viewing Program in the Northeast can be found at: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whalewatch> .

Northeast Region Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program

The NMFS Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program (MMHSRP) was formalized by the 1992 Amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act and NMFS was designated as the lead agency to coordinate stranding networks, responses/investigations of mortality events, biomonitoring, tissue/serum banking, and analytical quality assurance. NMFS works cooperatively with several agencies within the northeast region, making up the Northeast Region Stranding Network. Currently, the NMFS Northeast Region has fourteen Stranding Agreement holders/government responders that respond to stranded marine mammals. Throughout the region, there are seven rehabilitation facilities. All seven facilities rehabilitate pinnipeds and five are authorized to rehabilitate small cetaceans. The MMHSRP holds a scientific research permit (Permit No. 932-1905-MA-009526) to conduct necropsy examinations on endangered marine mammals, including large whale species. Through this permit, authorization is delegated by NMFS to authorized stranding network participants to conduct necropsy examinations and tissue/sample collection of endangered species. More information on the MMHSRP can be found at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/health> .

Large Whale Disentanglement Program

The Large Whale Disentanglement Program was created as a mechanism to respond to large whales that have incidentally become entangled in fishing gear. The Atlantic Large Whale Disentanglement Network (ALWDN), which provides entanglement response coverage from Maine through Florida, was formed in the 1990s as a partnership between government, state, and local volunteers to address entanglement reports with trained, permitted, and properly equipped personnel. This program supplements the on-going management efforts under the Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan for reducing the serious injury and mortality of large whales due to incidental interactions with

commercial fishing gear. More information on the Large Whale Disentanglement Program can be found at: http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/stranding/lwd.html .

Northeast Region Marine Mammal Outreach and Education Program

Outreach and education efforts are a vital component to all of the sub-programs within PRD's Marine Mammal Program and are especially important for educating those constituents who are subject to regulation under the MMPA and Endangered Species Act (ESA). Current efforts include, but are not limited to, the distribution of outreach guides, placards, and brochures at various events such as fishing industry meetings, enforcement and observer program trainings, and other venues; maintenance of the Marine Mammal Program's website; publishing articles in appropriate media outlets; and fielding calls from NMFS stakeholders.

B. Program Priorities

The following program priorities have been identified for each sub-program operating within PRD's Marine Mammal Program. Many of these priorities have been selected from a larger list of research needs and priorities that have been identified for protected species in the Northeast Region (http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/research/). The sub-programs within the Marine Mammal Program include: Take Reduction Planning, Ship Strike Reduction Program, Marine Mammal Viewing Program, Northeast Region Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Program, Large Whale Disentanglement Program, and Northeast Region Marine Mammal Outreach and Education Program. Successful proposals will be those that demonstrate a clear link to any of the priorities identified below and will assist NMFS in its conservation and management efforts for marine mammals. Section VII. lists the appropriate NMFS contacts for each sub-program.

Take Reduction Planning

1) Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan

The Atlantic Large Whale Take Reduction Plan (ALWTRP) was implemented in 1997 to reduce the serious injury and mortality of right, humpback, and fin whales resulting from interactions with commercial fixed gear fisheries, including trap/pot and gillnet gear, from Maine through Florida. The ALWTRP includes a number of regulatory and non-regulatory measures to address these interactions. Regulatory measures include time/area closures, gear modification requirements, and universal requirements. Non-regulatory measures include gear research, large whale disentanglement, and outreach and education efforts. The ALWTRP was most recently modified in October 2007 (72 FR 57104, October 5, 2007) to further reduce serious injuries and mortalities of large whales from gear interactions. The amendment included broad-based gear modification requirements, including the use of sinking groundline in fixed gear fisheries to reduce the

amount of fishing line in the water column. Efforts are currently focused on further reducing the risks associated with vertical lines (lines that connect the gear at the ocean bottom to buoys and buoy systems on the surface). More information can be found by visiting the ALWTRP website: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/whaletrp/>.

The following high priority needs have been identified to support management under the ALWTRP:

a) Development of a device or technique to reduce the risk to large whales posed by fixed gear buoy systems;

b) Development and possible field testing of a thwartable bottom release device for reducing entanglement risk to large whales from vertical lines of fixed gear; and

c) Development and possible field testing of a technological device for gear marking purposes (e.g., bar code, electronic tagging) that would provide additional information about gear that has been recovered from entangled animals. It is important that proposed projects consider the following: device must easily affix to the gear, must be low-cost, and must withstand the rigors of the marine environment and commercial fishing.

2) Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan

The Harbor Porpoise Take Reduction Plan (HPTRP) was implemented in 1998 to reduce the serious injury and mortality of harbor porpoises resulting from interactions with commercial gillnet fishing gear from Maine through North Carolina. The HPTRP includes time/area closures, seasonal gear modification requirements (including the use of pingers off the New England coast), and pinger authorization training to address these interactions. The HPTRP was modified in February 2010 (75 FR 7383, February 19, 2010) by implementing new conservation measures to address non-compliance with its management measures, as well as harbor porpoise gear interactions occurring outside of existing management areas. The recent modifications include the implementation of a consequence closure strategy to provide incentives for complying with the pinger requirements off the New England coast. More information can be found by visiting the HPTRP website: <http://www.nero.noaa.gov/hptrp>.

The following high priority need has been identified to support management under the HPTRP:

a) Outreach and education efforts targeting the gillnet fishing industry to help increase compliance with the regulations, especially in areas that are associated with consequence closure areas, as well as to document and address concerns and questions from the industry related to HPTRP management measures, including pinger design and functionality.

3) Atlantic Trawl Gear Take Reduction Strategy

The Atlantic Trawl Gear Take Reduction Team (ATGTRT) was convened in 2006 to address the serious injury and mortality of long and short-finned pilot whales, Atlantic white-sided dolphins, and common dolphins resulting from interactions with several trawl gear fisheries. Management measures to reduce these interactions were not implemented, however, as the levels of bycatch of these species currently are below the thresholds set in the MMPA that would trigger the requirement to develop a take reduction plan. Therefore, the Atlantic Trawl Gear Take Reduction Strategy (ATGTRS) was produced, which contains two non-regulatory components that can be used to help reduce interactions: an Education and Outreach Plan and a Research Plan. The Education and Outreach Plan focuses on the exchange of information to help reduce the bycatch of marine mammals in trawl gear fisheries. The Research Plan identifies research needs to help further our understanding of interactions between trawl gear fisheries and marine mammals. Collection of this information is needed to inform options for reducing these interactions. More information can be found by visiting the ATGTRT website: http://www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/atgtrp.

The following high priority research needs have been identified by the ATGTRT and are included in the ATGTRS Research Plan:

a) Conduct research on gear modifications and/or operating procedures to minimize the incidental capture of marine mammals and reduce serious injury and mortality of such interactions when they do occur (e.g., escape panels, exclusion grids, operational effects on gear performance and net profile); and

b) Photo-document the activity of cetaceans around nets to show the prevalence of marine mammals in close proximity to fishing vessels and the conditions under which interactions occur. These images should be associated with other data collected about environmental conditions and vessel activities (e.g., hauling back, setting out, vessel turns).

Ship Strike Reduction Program

The Ship Strike Reduction Strategy consists of both regulatory and non-regulatory components, including operational measures for vessels, education and outreach programs, technological research, and international conservation agreements. Research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the ship speed reduction rule (73 FR 60173, October 10, 2008) and to further investigate the nature of vessel collisions with North Atlantic right whales. This primarily includes evaluating the level of industry awareness of the regulations implementing ship speed restrictions to protect North Atlantic right whales. Additional research is also needed to explore technologies that may be utilized to prevent or mitigate vessel collisions with right whales. Lastly, research is needed to investigate the

potential impact of interactions between right whales and vessels under 65 feet in length.

The following high priority research needs have been identified to support management efforts to prevent ship strikes of right whales:

- a) North Atlantic right whale ship speed reduction rule education and outreach effectiveness analysis;
- b) Technologies that may be utilized to prevent vessel collisions with North Atlantic right whales; and
- c) Impact of interactions between North Atlantic right whales and vessels under 65 feet in length.

Marine Mammal Viewing Program

With increased uses of the marine environment for business (e.g., fishing) and pleasure (e.g., boating, whale watching), the Marine Mammal Viewing Program recognizes the importance of providing education and outreach to the public to promote on-the-water stewardship when it comes to living marine resources. This program focuses on providing guidance for responsibly conducting activities like commercial whale, dolphin, and seal watching, and recreational boating and fishing, to help minimize the disturbance of and injuries to marine mammals.

The following priorities have been identified as research needs to promote the responsible viewing of marine mammals and learn more about the species being targeted for viewing:

- a) Quantifying harassment for various viewed species, particularly humpback whales in the northeast and bottlenose dolphins in the Mid-Atlantic;
- b) Effectiveness of using whale watching vessels as platform for collecting sightings data in the Mid-Atlantic; and
- c) Analysis of current whale watch passenger demography, knowledge of, and values towards marine mammals and marine mammal conservation (also an outreach priority).

Northeast Regional Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program

The MMHSRP includes a variety of stranding network partners that are available to respond to and assist stranded marine mammals. Responders collect important information that assists managers in monitoring the health of marine mammal populations. It is important for stranding network partners to have the necessary plans and protocols in place for responses to stranded animals, but to also be prepared in the case of emergencies or

unplanned events, such as disease outbreaks at rehabilitation facilities.

The following priorities have been identified to support the continued implementation of the MMHSRP:

a) Enhance disaster preparedness protocols through further Incident Command System (ICS) and emergency response trainings, improve equipment caches, development of oil spill preparedness protocols, mass die off disposal plans;

b) Collect and analyze samples for base line data and detection of emerging infectious diseases with stranding response and rehabilitation facilities and enhance contingency response plans for disease outbreaks; and

c) Enhance collaborative regional approach for retrospective sample analysis and contingency plans for long-term regional sample storage (i.e. Unusual Mortality Event sample storage).

Large Whale Disentanglement Program

The Large Whale Disentanglement Program and members of the ALWDN are constantly attempting to improve their capacity to disentangle large whales, including developing newer and more advanced tools, and determining the best way to increase its capabilities for responding to entangled animals along the East Coast. Further, the collection of the gear that is removed from large whales is important, as identifying the gear that entangles whales is essential in assisting management efforts to reduce interactions between fisheries and large whales.

The following priorities have been identified to support the continued implementation of the Large Whale Disentanglement Program:

a) Development and field testing of new innovative tools and/or technologies to improve large whale disentanglement success rates;

b) Increase overall ALWDN capabilities by supporting ALWDN trained and authorized advanced responder participation in complex entanglement cases. This project would support collaboration of advanced ALWDN responders to travel to and participate in complex entanglement cases and would also allow training opportunities, meeting with other advanced ALWDN responders, and necessary specialty equipment procurement; and

c) Investigate various marking and recovery options to increase gear recovery during disentanglement operations, including the development of the protocols and field testing of proposed modifications.

Northeast Region Marine Mammal Outreach and Education Program

NMFS PRD is responsible for ensuring proper dissemination of information about its programs, regulations, and efforts to protect the species it manages and protects. It is imperative that these materials remain updated and informative, and PRD must ensure that they are effective in relaying the information they contain.

The following priorities have been identified to support the Marine Mammal Outreach and Education Program, and span a variety of stakeholders:

a) Baseline demography, knowledge of and attitudes towards marine mammals for program's various targeted audiences; and

b) Understanding appropriate and effective messaging for the program's various targeted audiences (e.g., commercial vs. recreational groups).

C. Program Authority

16 U.S.C. 753a; 16 U.S.C. 661

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

NOAA anticipates that approximately \$100,000 may be available for distribution to successful projects under the Marine Mammal Grant Program in FY 2011. There are no limitations for the amount of funding that an applicant wishes to request when submitting a proposal; however, it is important that applicants consider the anticipated amount of funding available when developing proposals. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined during pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Funds have not yet been appropriated for this program, and there is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for qualified projects. To assist with proposal reviews in light of uncertain funding, the applicant may wish to incorporate a level of scalability into their project proposals. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific grant proposal or to obligate any available funds.

There is no limit on the number of applications that can be submitted by the same Principal Investigator (PI), agency, State, or other eligible applicant as described in Section III.A. (Eligible Applicants). Multiple applications submitted by the same applicant must, however, clearly identify distinct projects and sub-program priorities provided in Section I.B. If an application for a financial assistance award is selected for funding, NOAA has no obligation to provide any additional funding in connection with that award in subsequent years.

B. Project/Award Period

The project period may extend up to a maximum of 1 year.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Under this solicitation, NOAA will fund awards as grants in an increment of 12 months, with a maximum project period of 1 year.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants for this grant competition include U.S. citizens, members of the fishing industry, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, commercial organizations, and state, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice.

Due to their unique nature and program focus, the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program and the Large Whale Disentanglement Program require more specific eligibility requirements. These include: 1) for all priorities listed for the Northeast Region Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program, eligible applicants include current stranding agreement holders and state agencies, and 2) for Priority 2 under the Large Whale Disentanglement Program, eligible applicants include current ALWDN advanced responders (Level 4 or 5) and their agencies, and the PI must be an authorized advanced responder within the ALWDN.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing or matching is required for this grant program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Not applicable.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

The federal funding announcement and application instructions for this grant program are available through the Grants.gov website at <http://www.grants.gov>. For applicants without internet access, an application package may be received by contacting Amanda Johnson, NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service, Northeast Regional Office, 55 Great Republic Drive, Suite 04-400, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930; Phone: 978-282-8463,

E-mail: Amanda.Johnson@noaa.gov .

B. Content and Form of Application

Proposals must adhere to the following provisions and requirements and be submitted by the proposal submission deadline. Proposals that do not adhere to these provisions will not be considered for funding. Applicants are encouraged to submit proposals early which would allow us to pre-screen applications for any deficiencies, contact applicants as needed, and obtain revised applications by the solicitation deadline.

The following forms are required as part of each application: Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424); Budget Information, Non-Construction Programs (SF-424A); Assurances, Non-Construction Programs (SF-424B); and Certifications Regarding Lobbying (CD-511). These forms are available on Grants.gov as part of the application package. For applicants submitting proposals by mail, the SF-424 form must be signed in ink.

Proposals and all attachments should be formatted for letter-sized paper (8.5" x 11"). The Project Description should not exceed 15 pages. Within the Project Description, tables and visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and other pictorial presentations are not included in the 15-page limitation. Abbreviated CVs or resumes should be appended to each application where appropriate. Appended material includes letters of endorsement, an indirect cost rate agreement, or any other supporting information.

To be considered, proposals must include the following information:

1. Title Page

Provide the project title, project duration (with a start date no earlier than September 1, 2011), applicant name(s), name(s) of the Principal Investigator (or Project Manager) and any Co-Investigators (or Co-Managers), and complete contact information (address, telephone, fax, email, and phone number) for the applicant(s) and all Co-investigators (or Co-Managers).

2. Project Summary (1-page)

Provide a brief summary discussing the project goals and objectives, the proposed activities, the geographic area where the activities would occur, and expected outcomes and benefits of the proposed activities. The summary should clearly state which sub-program and priority or priorities it seeks to address.

3. Project Description (15-page limit)

Describe the project activities completely and accurately. The Project Description should include a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and must include

the information listed below in (a)-(g).

(a) Project goals and objectives: Identify the specific problem(s) or opportunities the project intends to address and describe its significance to the priorities described for each sub-program listed above. Identify the project objectives, which should be simple and understandable, as specific and quantitative as possible, and attainable within the time, money and human resources available.

(b) Project narrative: Describe the methodologies or technical plan for activities that are to be conducted during the project. Include detailed descriptions of the specific plan and/or methods that will be employed. Project milestones and the timelines (e.g. the number of months) necessary to meet them should also be discussed. Incorporate the components of the specific sub-program priority or priorities described in the Program Priorities section of this document. Include information about relevant permits that are necessary to conduct the work. Please refer to Section IV.F. (Other Submission Requirements) for more information about permits and approvals.

(c) Benefits or results expected: Identify the outcomes or results and the benefits that should result from the successfully completed project, including benefits that will assist NMFS PRD in its management of marine mammals. Discuss how the project's success in meeting the stated goals and objectives will be measured or assessed. Describe how these expected outcomes, results, or products will be applied and/or made available to any appropriate user groups.

(d) Need for Government financial assistance: Demonstrate the need for government financial assistance. List all other sources of funding that are or have been sought for the project.

(e) Federal, State and local government activities: List any plans or activities (Federal, State or local) this project would affect and, if applicable, identify the relationship between the proposed work and other ongoing work, or work planned, anticipated, or underway through Federal Assistance or other means.

(f) Environmental Impacts: Discuss any potential impacts on marine species and the environment as a result of the proposed activities. The applicant must 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, etc.).

(g) Project management: Describe how the project will be organized and managed and who will be responsible for carrying out project activities. The lead

organization/individual and person listed as the technical contact should be identified as the Project Manager (PM) or Principal Investigator (PI). Use of sub-contractors or volunteer staff time to complete project activities and oversight of those individuals should be discussed. The PM/PI is responsible for all technical oversight and implementation of the approved work plan as delineated in the proposal. One PM or PI must be designated on each project, but the PM/PI may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the PM/PI, there must be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and PM/PI (e.g., applicant will be responsible for managing the grant funds and the PM will be responsible for completing the project milestones on time and within budget, etc.). Project participants or organizations that will have a significant role in conducting the project should be listed as Co-investigators or Co-Managers. Organizations or individuals that support the project, for example, those that contribute data or materials, should be referred to as Cooperators. Copies of the PM's or PI's and all Co-investigator's/Co-Manager's current resumes or curricula vitae must be included as appendices.

4. Total project costs and budget justification

The application must include clear and concise budget information, both on the required Federal forms and in the narrative detail of this section. Applications must include OMB standard form 424A, "Budget Information - Non-construction Programs." All instructions should be read before completing the form, and the amounts per category and total amounts indicated on the form should correspond with amounts indicated on other proposal documents.

Itemized costs per category (salary, supplies, equipment, travel, etc.) and the corresponding direct and indirect cost totals should be listed on a separate sheet or spreadsheet. A budget justification must also be provided to describe and justify the costs indicated in the requested budget.

5. Appendices

Abbreviated curricula vitae or resumes of the PM/PI and any Co-Managers/Co-Investigators should be included with the application. Additional material that is necessary or useful to the description of the project may also be provided (e.g. letters of endorsement, tables or visual materials).

6. NOAA Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for Federal Financial Assistance Applicants

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) Regulations for Implementing NEPA require NOAA to complete environmental analyses for Federal actions, including funding non-federal projects under grants. In certain cases, NOAA will provide grant applicants with an Environmental

Compliance Questionnaire, which is a tool that can be used by NOAA and applicants to ensure that information on potential environmental impacts is obtained. The questionnaire should be completed by applicants applying to this grant program; it can be downloaded from Grants.gov with the application package for this grant program or requested by contacting Amanda Johnson (see Section VII., Agency Contacts).

C. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.grants.gov by 11:59 p.m. Eastern Daylight Time on April 26, 2011. Applications submitted by U.S. Postal Service must be postmarked on or before the submission date; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. Use of U.S. mail or another delivery service must be documented with a receipt indicating a date on or before the submission date. Proposals submitted, postmarked, or documented after the submission date may not be considered for funding. PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject an application. Please keep this in mind when developing your submission timeline.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs," relating to state and local government coordination and review of proposed federal financial assistance. Applicants should visit the Office of Management and Budget's Intergovernmental Review website for more information and to see if their state has chosen to participate in the intergovernmental review process (http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoc/).

E. Funding Restrictions

Budgets may include indirect costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate agreement with the Federal government. The indirect cost rate agreement should be included with the application materials.

F. Other Submission Requirements

It is the applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary Federal, State, and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of permits must be included in the proposal package. For further information on permit requirements and application procedures for federal natural resource permits, contact the NMFS Office of Protected Resources Permits Division (301-713-2289) or visit their website at: <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/permits/>.

Failure to obtain the necessary Federal, State, and local permits, approvals, letters of agreement, or failure to provide information necessary to complete environmental analyses where necessary (i.e., NEPA environmental assessments or documentation) may delay the award of funds if a project is otherwise selected for funding.

Applications should be submitted electronically through the Grants.gov website at <http://www.grants.gov>. For application submittals through Grants.gov, NOAA strongly recommends that applicants do not wait until the application deadline to begin the application process. To use Grants.gov, applicants must have a DUNS number and registration within the Central Contractor Registry (CCR). Instructions for the Grants.gov registration process can be found on the Grants.gov website at http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp. Note that it may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject an application. Please keep this in mind when developing your submission timeline. Following submission of applications through Grants.gov, applicants should receive two automated responses from Grants.gov: one confirms receipt of the application and the other confirms that the application has been forwarded to NOAA. If both confirmation messages from Grants.gov are not received, applicants should contact both the Grants.gov Helpdesk and Amanda Johnson, the Federal Program Officer for this grant program, to confirm that the application has been transmitted to and received by NOAA.

For applicants lacking internet access, hard copies may be submitted (by postal mail or commercial delivery) to the NMFS Northeast Regional Office, Attn: Amanda Johnson, 55 Great Republic Drive, Suite 04-400, Gloucester, MA 01930. No other methods of submission are permissible.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The proposals will be evaluated and scored based on the following weighted criteria (each proposal can receive a total score between 1 and 5 points):

1) Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project to the program goals (weight=30%): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, State, or local activities. For this competition, the proposal should demonstrate that the applicant has a clear knowledge and understanding of the purpose and relevance of the proposed work as it relates to the specific sub-program priority described in Section I.B. (Program Priorities). For this criterion, reviewers will base their assessments on the following scoring system: 1 = lack of

importance/relevance; 3 = intermediate level importance/relevance; 5 = very important/relevant.

2) Technical/scientific merit (weight=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. The proposal should clearly address the program priorities and components that were discussed earlier in this document. For this criterion, reviewers will base their assessments on the following scoring system: 1 = completely unsound, unlikely to meet the project's objectives; 3 = intermediately sound, reasonably likely to meet the project's objectives; 5 = extremely sound and likely to meet the project's objectives.

3) Overall qualifications of applicants (weight=15%): This ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For this criterion, reviewers will base their assessments on the following scoring system: 1 = lack of qualification and/or resources to accomplish project; 3 = intermediate level of qualification and/or resources to accomplish project; 5 = extremely qualified and able to accomplish project.

4) Project costs (weight=15%): The budget is evaluated 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 with the funding amount and timing proposed. For this criterion, reviewers will base their assessments on the following scoring system: 1 = lack of information and detail provided, unrealistic; 3 = sufficient amount of information and detail provided, realistic; 5 = extremely informative, detailed, and realistic.

5) Outreach and education (weight=10%): NOAA assesses whether the proposed project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. Collaborations with other agencies and partners to accomplish this component should also be described. For this criterion, reviewers will base their assessments on the following scoring system: 1 = insufficient outreach/education; 3 = adequate outreach/education; 5 = extremely effective outreach/education.

B. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 3 steps: initial evaluation, merit review, and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., the NMFS Regional Administrator in the Northeast). Initial evaluation of applications will be conducted to ensure that the submitted application packages contain the required forms and application elements, and meet the eligibility criteria.

Applications meeting the requirements of this solicitation will then undergo

merit review. Each application will be reviewed by a minimum of three reviewers, who will independently evaluate and score proposals using the evaluation criteria provided in Section V.A. (Evaluation Criteria). Merit reviewers will be federal employees with appropriate subject-matter expertise. The reviewers' ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the proposals.

After applications have undergone merit review, the Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the numerical rankings and evaluations of the applications by the merit reviewers as well as the selection factors set forth in Section V.C. (Selection Criteria).

C. Selection Factors

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final recommendation to the NOAA Grants Officer. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order of the review ratings unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon the following factors, where applicable:

1. Availability of funding.
2. Program priorities and policy factors.
3. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. Geographically.
 - b. By type of institutions.
 - c. By type of partners.
 - d. By research areas.
 - e. By project types.
4. Whether this project duplicates other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA or other Federal agencies.
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.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of proposals will occur in the spring of 2011, and funding is expected to begin in the fall of 2011. To ensure adequate time is provided to process, review, and recommend projects for funding, project start dates may be no earlier than September 1, 2011.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Management Division. 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 to the Authorizing Official and the Project Manager/Principal Investigator of the project either electronically or in hard copy. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposal was not selected for recommendation.

To enable the use of a universal identifier and to enhance the quality of information available to the public as required by the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006, to the extent applicable, any proposal awarded in response to this announcement will be required to use the Central Contractor Registration and Dun and Bradstreet Universal Numbering System and be subject to reporting requirements, as identified in OMB guidance published at 2 CFR Parts 25, 170 (2010), http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr25_main_02.tpl , http://ecfr.gpoaccess.gov/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=ecfr&tpl=/ecfrbrowse/Title02/2cfr170_main_02.tpl .

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification 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 on February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696). You may obtain a copy of this notice by contacting the agency contact(s) under Section VII., or by going to the Federal Register website at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> .

2. Limitation of Liability.

Funding for the grant program described in this notice is contingent upon the availability of Fiscal Year 2011 appropriations. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if submitted projects 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.

3. Universal Identifier.

Applicants should be aware that they are required to provide a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number during the application process. See the October 30, 2002 Federal Register, Vol. 67, No. 210, pp. 66177-66178, for additional information. Organizations can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or via the internet (<http://www.dnb.com/us/>).

4. 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.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, 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, 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, etc.). 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.

C. Reporting

Grant recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) reports (also known as progress reports). All financial reports shall be submitted to NOAA's Grants Management Division in accordance with the award conditions. Performance reports should be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer for this award, Amanda Johnson, NMFS Northeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division. Electronic submission of performance reports is preferred, using Grants Online. 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. The comprehensive final report is due 90 days after the award expiration. Grants Online generates reminder e-mails that are sent to both the award recipient and the Program Officer.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards 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 Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards over \$25,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

If you have any questions regarding this proposal solicitation, please contact Amanda Johnson at the NOAA/NMFS/Northeast Regional Office, Protected Resources Division, 55 Great Republic Drive, Suite 04-400, Gloucester, MA 01930, by phone at 978-282-8463, or by email at Amanda.Johnson@noaa.gov.

If you have questions related to specific sub-program priorities, please use the below guide to contact the appropriate NMFS Northeast Region PRD staff member:

- Take Reduction Planning: Kate Swails (Kate.Swails@noaa.gov ; 978-282-8481)

- Ship Strike Reduction Program: Michael Asaro (Michael.Asaro@noaa.gov ; 978-282-8469)

- Marine Mammal Viewing Program and Outreach and Education Program: Allison Rosner (Allison.Rosner@noaa.gov ; 978-282-8462)

- Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program: Mendy Garron
(Mendy.Garron@noaa.gov ; 978-282-8478)

- Large Whale Disentanglement Program: Jamison Smith
(Jamison.Smith@noaa.gov ; 978-281-9336)

VIII. Other Information

NOAA and NMFS employees shall not provide assistance in writing applications, write letters of support for any application, or otherwise confer any unfair advantage on a particular application.