

10-31-2014

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Ocean Exploration 2015 Funding Opportunity

Appropriations: OER

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: OAR-OER-2015-2004292

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.011, Ocean Exploration.

Dates: Complete, maximum two-page, pre-proposals are required in order to be allowed to submit a full proposal. Pre-Proposals must be received by 5:00 pm (EST) on December 4, 2014. Full proposal submissions must be received by 5:00 pm (EST) on January 29, 2015. Applications received after the above deadlines will not be considered.

Funding Opportunity Description:

NOAA's Office of Ocean Exploration & Research (OER) seeks to enhance ocean exploration and scientific knowledge in the Arctic by encouraging use of the rich Arctic data set collected since 2003 in support of [the U.S. Extended Continental Shelf \(ECS\) Project](http://continentalshelf.gov/) (<http://continentalshelf.gov/>).

OER challenges applicants to propose multi-partner interdisciplinary exploration projects that will capitalize and build on these Arctic ECS data, and target the mapped areas in new ways, using innovative technologies to inform some of NOAA's most pressing Arctic marine science needs, and stewardship responsibilities, pursuant to [NOAA's Arctic Vision and Strategy](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf) (http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf). The applicants' proposed projects should focus on one or more of the areas of the Arctic where ECS data have been collected; and use these data

as the foundation from which to launch additional explorations to identify, describe and create baseline characterizations of new habitats, marine resources and/or phenomena.

OER is seeking pre-proposals and, ultimately, full proposals to support its exploration mission, consistent with NOAA's Next Generation Strategic Plan (<http://www.ppi.noaa.gov/ngsp/>), to search, investigate, and document poorly known and unknown ocean areas through interdisciplinary exploration, and to advance and disseminate knowledge of the ocean environment and its physical, chemical, archaeological, and biological resources. Results will inform marine policy and marine resource management decisions. Proposals must address one or more NOAA's mission goals (e.g., Healthy Oceans, Climate Adaptation and Mitigation, Resilient Coastal Communities and Economies, NOAA's Science and Technology Enterprise).

Findings from these investigations are anticipated to result in new baseline characterizations, provide better scientific understanding of the processes on our continental margins, offer new insights into climate variability, marine ecosystems, previously unknown or unconventional energy sources, mineral resources, hazards resulting from extreme events such as earthquakes and tsunamis, and deliver technology advancements (platforms, sensors, methodologies, etc.) that will increase observational capability in the Arctic.

OER is soliciting proposals that will bring together scientists from different disciplines to use innovative techniques (where feasible) to investigate unexplored and/or poorly known ocean areas and reveal new understandings and interpretations about our marine environment. Competitive proposals must be bold, innovative and interdisciplinary in their approach. It is expected that the results of funded proposals will stimulate further exploration and research, as well as inform marine policy and marine resource management decisions.

Through this announcement, NOAA OER anticipates the availability of a total of approximately \$3,000,000 including costs for ship and submersible assets.

To familiarize themselves with past and present OER-funded activities, applicants are encouraged to visit the program's website <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov>. Background on how to apply and the **required proposal coversheets** are accessible through the OER Office Website:

<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html>

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. FUNDING OPPORTUNITY DESCRIPTION

A. Program Objectives

1. Background

a. What OER Does

The world's deep ocean remains largely unexplored, leaving significant gaps in the basic environmental intelligence needed to manage and protect ocean resources and forecast future environmental changes. OER is dedicated to exploring these unknown and poorly known areas of our ocean, filling those knowledge gaps, and delivering information critical to addressing current and emerging science and management issues by:

- i. Sponsoring interdisciplinary baseline characterizations of unknown or poorly known ocean areas, processes, and resources;
- ii. Advancing undersea technical capabilities through support for design/development, testing and implementation of new deep-sea technologies;
- iii. Fostering partnerships to accomplish national ocean exploration goals; Engaging and educating audiences by sharing information of ocean exploration through innovative means;
- iv. Ensuring, through our system of data management, collected information arrives quickly - and accurately - into the hands of those who need it to make timely decisions.

b. The U.S. Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) Project

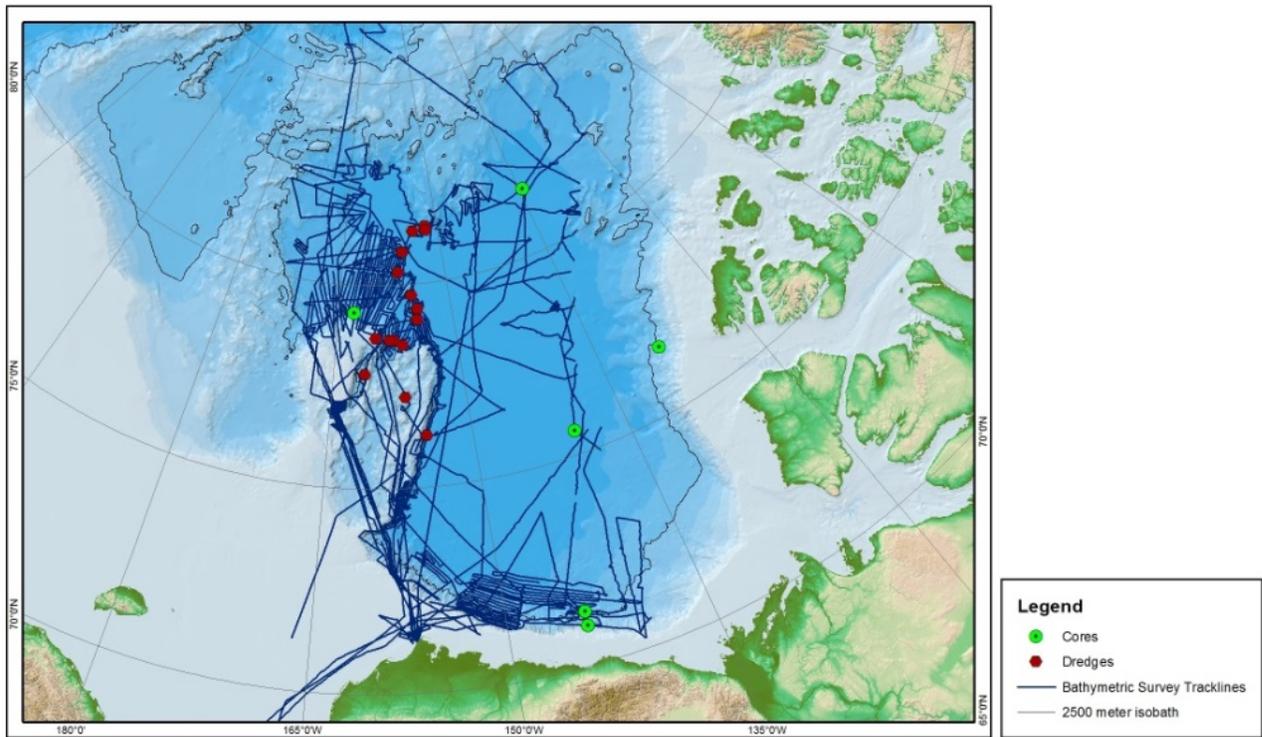
The U.S. ECS Project (for which NOAA is one of 13 Federal partners and shares a co-vice chairmanship with U.S. Geological Survey) represents the largest and potentially most significant interagency marine survey ever undertaken by the United States. Since the U.S. ECS Project was added to the President's budget in 2008, OER has assumed responsibilities for NOAA's ECS allocation annual funding and the agency's project coordination.

Coastal nations, including the United States, have spent considerable resources exploring the potential limits of their ECS beyond their 200 nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone. Although these shelf extension studies are funded to fulfill requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the investments

are producing new data sets in frontier ocean areas of the earth that can be used to better understand, explore, and manage the world's water column, seafloor and sub-seafloor for decades to come.

These data and analyses are a foundation upon which ecosystems can be discovered, defined and understood; they have the capacity to inspire new explorations that could, in turn, prompt research and, ultimately, support education, outreach, management and sustainable development of marine resources (e.g., investigations into the structure and history of the seafloor and the rocks beneath it, the distribution of habitats and resource potential, and implications for environmental diversity, climate change and plate tectonic processes). Project findings have already provided a framework for targeting future deep sea exploration and research priorities and for

ECS Arctic Surveys: Bathymetry, Cores, and Dredges



Computerized digital image from the National Geophysical Data Center, NOAA, <http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/>

understanding the diversity of this maritime zone. For example, ECS data from the Bering Sea are contributing to our understanding of gas hydrates. Data tools, developed for the ECS Project as a whole, are now used across federal agencies to better manage scientific data. Since 2003, the U.S. ECS Project has conducted both single-ship and joint U.S.-Canada cruises in the High Arctic to collect, in unprecedented detail, multibeam echosounder bathymetric data, high-resolution chirp subbottom profiler/backscatter data, seismic reflection/refraction data and geophysical data as well as some dredge samples. More than 310,000 square kilometers of bathymetric data and more than 13,000 linear kilometers of seismic data were collected over the span of nine Arctic cruises. The map provides an overview of the data collection effort (see: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html>).

The multibeam echosounder, gravity, magnetics and subbottom profiler data can be accessed via NOAA's National Geophysical Data Center at: <http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ecs/cruises.html>. The official repository for all of the data about the Arctic dredges, including descriptions and photographs is available at: http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ecs/samples_forms/. This site also provides the official dredge sample request policies and forms, along with contact information.

Detailed U.S. Arctic ECS cruise reports can be found at the University of New Hampshire, Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping, Joint Hydrographic Center website:

<http://ccom.unh.edu/theme/law-sea/cruise-reports/arctic>.
Canada's cruise reports are available through Natural Resources Canada's GSC library at: <http://geoscan.ess.nrcan.gc.ca>.

2. Rationale:

The Arctic Ocean is one of the least explored oceans on the planet and is undergoing rapid environmental change. As described in [NOAA's Arctic Vision and Strategy](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf) (http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf), critical environmental, economic, and national security issues are emerging -- many of which have significant impacts on human lives, livelihoods, and coastal communities.

In the [White House National Strategy for the Arctic Region](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf) (http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf), President Obama asserts, "The unique Arctic environment

requires a commitment by the United States to make judicious, coordinated infrastructure investment decisions, informed by science." NOAA, the [Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee \(http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/arctic/iarpc/start.jsp\)](http://www.nsf.gov/geo/plr/arctic/iarpc/start.jsp) and other marine Arctic-affiliated Federal entities also advocate further study to increase fundamental understanding of these environmental challenges and to support development of sound, science-based solutions. Scientific communities agree that the Arctic is in need of additional measurements, observations, analyses and modeling to accurately monitor, predict and adapt to future changes. The demand for scientific knowledge and technical capabilities is only going to grow as melting ice, increasing global demand for resources, and development of new technologies drive interest in this region.

B. Program priorities:

OER challenges applicants to propose multi-partner, interdisciplinary exploration projects, capitalizing on the rich Arctic Ocean data set collected since 2003 in support of [the U.S. Extended Continental Shelf \(ECS\) Project \(http://continentalshef.gov/\)](http://continentalshef.gov/). Using ECS data as the starting point, the fundamental goal is to expand our marine science knowledge base and technical/observational capabilities to help inform NOAA's most pressing Arctic marine science and management needs, as well as stewardship responsibilities, pursuant to [NOAA's Arctic Vision and Strategy \(http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf\)](http://www.arctic.noaa.gov/docs/NOAAArctic_V_S_2011.pdf).

OER's explicit aim is to augment baseline biological, chemical, geophysical and cultural observations and understanding of Arctic marine ecosystems and ecosystem processes through strategically planned and leveraged efforts, thereby enhancing NOAA's and the nation's ability to assess, predict, accommodate and respond to impacts on an environment undergoing rapid change.

OER program priorities to consider are:

- 1) Leverage the [ECS Arctic dataset](#);
- 2) Undertake a multi-partner, interdisciplinary, exploratory approach;
- 3) Leverage planned projects to be undertaken by other programs/organizations with compatible objectives and investment strategies (e.g., NOAA Arctic Research Program FFO-funded projects,

Bureau of Ocean Energy management and Office of Naval Research projects);

4) Use innovative platform and sensor technologies to further explore and characterize these Arctic areas;

5) Produce information that will be valuable to state and Federal marine resource managers;

6) Give consideration to environmental impacts in the project planning and represent the applicants' ability to acquire all necessary permits; and

7) Describe the applicants' plan for making data and results publicly available to advance scientific knowledge and inform environmental management decisions.

C. Program Authority: 33 USC 3403(a)

D. Cost Principles

N.A.

II. AWARD INFORMATION

A. Funding Availability

At present, OER anticipates a total of approximately \$3,000,000 will be available through this announcement. Depending on specifics of proposals received, OER hopes to be able to support approximately 3-10 awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$1,500,000 through this solicitation. The amount of funding available through this announcement will be subject to the final FY15 appropriation for the Office of Ocean Exploration and Research. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to fund any specific project or to obligate all or any part of available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to initiate or continue exploration activities where funding has been recommended by OER. The amount of funding that OER may recommend for a grant will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and OER. The OER Director may defer selected 2015 proposals for consideration for funding in the subsequent, or later, fiscal year(s).

B. Project/Award Period

OER will accept proposals for projects that are one or two years in length. FY15 funds would most likely be used for FY 2016 field work.

The earliest date for receipt of awards will be approximately 120 days after NOAA and OER receive their annual funding appropriation from Congress. Applicants should factor in this time when proposing research activities. Activities contingent upon this funding should not be planned to start before September 2015.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding from non-Federal applicants will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement under the terms of this notice. Proposals selected for funding from NOAA scientists will be funded through an intra-agency transfer. Proposals selected for funding from a non-NOAA Federal agency will be funded through an inter-agency agreement transfer.

For applications funded through cooperative agreements, substantial involvement of the Federal government may include, but is not limited to, activities such as specifying direction or redirection of the scope of work due to interrelationships with other projects or stipulating that the recipient must meet or adhere to specific procedural requirements before subsequent stages of a project may continue. By receiving funding from OER, all applicants agree to certain requirements for sample collection, education and outreach, data management, and website development. To help meet these requirements, one or more NOAA staff or NOAA designee(s) may become members of the at-sea science party serving roles as Expedition Coordinators, Data Managers, or Web Coordinators. For more details please refer to section VIII of this document.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education;

nonprofits organizations; commercial organizations; foreign governments; organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments; international organizations; state, local, and Indian tribal governments; and Federal agencies.

PLEASE NOTE: Before non-NOAA Federal applicants may be funded, they must demonstrate that they have legal authority to receive funds from another Federal agency in excess of their appropriation. Because this announcement is not proposing to procure goods and services from applicants, the Economy Act (31USC 1535) is not appropriate.

B. Cost-sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing, including matching funds and in kind, is not required but encouraged. This will be assessed under Evaluation Criterion 4.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

1. Permits and Approvals

It is the applicants' responsibility to obtain all necessary international, Federal, state, and local government permits and approvals where necessary for the proposed work to be conducted. Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize potential adverse environmental impacts. If applicable, documentation of requests for or approvals of cultural resource or environmental permits must be included in the proposal package. Applications will also be reviewed to ensure the [National Environmental Policy Act \(NEPA\) questionnaire](#) (<http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf>) has been completed, i.e., to ensure there is sufficient environmental documentation to allow OER to analyze the project's potential environmental impacts, pursuant to NEPA.

IV. APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Address to Request Application Package

The two-page pre-proposal application must be accompanied by the required cover sheet obtainable through the OER website at: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html> . For

applicants without internet access, hard copies of the cover sheet and forms can be obtained via mail: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, ATTN: Yvette Jefferson, FFO 2015, SSMC3, Rm 10315, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, or requested by phone at: (301) 734-1014.

For full proposals, grant application information and forms are available through Grants.gov. In addition, a proposal cover sheet (available at the OER web site as referenced above) must be submitted with the application. For applicants without internet access, hard copies of the cover sheet and the application package can be obtained via mail at NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, ATTN: Yvette Jefferson, FFO 2015, SSMC3, Rm 10315, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, or requested by phone at: (301) 734-1014.

B. Format and Content of Application

1. Pre-proposal Contents

A pre-proposal should be compelling, concise, and clear. It should identify the project's priorities and objectives and describe how these relate to NOAA's mission goals and OER's mission, objectives, and priorities (as described in Sections I.A.B and C above).

Complete, two-page pre-proposals are required for all applications. No more than two pages will be reviewed. Incomplete pre-proposals will not be considered and subsequent full proposal will not be accepted. All information must be included in the designated two pages or on the cover sheet. Such information may include: vessels, platforms, or other critical assets required to technically achieve the goals and their costs; auxiliary funding sources for the proposed project; dates of anticipated field operations and any operational constraints, especially with regard to field operations; anticipated outputs (e.g., potential discoveries, knowledge and impact, published papers, reports, meetings, and/or education and outreach material).

All pre-proposal submissions must:

- a. Include the two-page OER coversheet that can be found at: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html> ;
- b. Not exceed two additional single-sided typewritten pages; and
- c. Be written on 8.5" x 11" paper, in at least 12-point font, with

1-inch margins. The Principal Investigator's last name should be typed in the bottom right-hand corner of each page. See Section IV.C for submission due dates, IV.F. for submission procedures and addresses and V.A.1 for pre-proposal evaluation criteria.

All digital files should be named with the applicant's name and a descriptor of the file, e.g. "Jones coversheet 2015".

- d. Be sure to address the following questions (Sections IV. B. 1 and V. A. 1 describe pre-proposal content and review criteria):
 - i. How is the proposal relevant to NOAA and OER missions and goals? Describe the project's intrinsic value, how it is exploratory rather than research based, and what is its expected scientific impact?
 - ii. What is the scientific and technical merit of the proposal? Include plans for information and data sharing. Describe how the project is innovative and interdisciplinary, its exploration value, and the logistical feasibility of the project.
 - iii. What are the qualifications and competence of the applicant(s)? Include past performance on any prior OER award.
- e. Describe and justify project costs and budget. Include the value of non-OER funding and in-kind contributions. Provide a simple budget summarizing the major categories of effort (including costs associated with analysis, publication of the results, and archiving of data).

Pre-proposals submitted after the due date will not be reviewed.

2. Full Proposal Content

Successful full proposals will demonstrate relevance to NOAA's and OER's mission goals and priorities (as described in Sections I.A & I.B); leverage the [ECS Arctic Ocean dataset \(http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ecs/cruises.html\)](http://www.ngdc.noaa.gov/mgg/ecs/cruises.html); undertake a multi-partner, interdisciplinary, bold and innovative exploration approach; leverage planned projects to be undertaken by other programs/organizations with compatible objectives and investment strategies (e.g., NOAA Arctic Research Program FFO-funded projects, ongoing Bureau of Ocean Energy management, Office of Naval Research

projects); use advanced technology platform and sensor technologies to further explore and characterize these Arctic areas ; produce information that will be valuable to state and Federal marine resource managers; give consideration to environmental impacts in the project planning and represent the applicants' ability to acquire all necessary permits; and explain the applicants' plan for making data and results publicly available to advance scientific knowledge, outreach, education, and inform environmental management decisions.

Full proposals must include the content described below, unless otherwise indicated, in the order listed. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in the application not being reviewed.

Excluding the coversheet, number each page and label it with the Principal Investigator's last name in the bottom right-hand corner. (This is not required but highly recommended for tracking purposes). All digital files should be named with the applicant's last name and a descriptor indicating the file content, e.g. "Jones coversheet 2015".

All full proposal text should be written on 8.5" x 11" paper, in at least 12-point font, with 1-inch margins. See Section IV.C for submission due date, IV.F. for submission procedures and addresses.

Proposals submitted after the due date will not be considered and subsequent full proposal will not be accepted.
No appendices are permitted.

All full proposals must include:

- a. *Completed Proposal Coversheet*: Principal and Co-Principal Investigators are to be identified. The form can be found at: <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html> .
- b. *Maximum One-Page Executive Summary*: Describe the essential elements of the project being proposed. Include: 1) Title, 2) List of names, contact details, and affiliations of each investigator who will significantly contribute to the project, 3) A concise statement of the compelling objectives and benefits of the project and the rationale for the work proposed, and 4) Funding request for each year of the project and the total funding requested.

- c. *Project Description*: The project description is not to exceed 15 pages, including all text and any tables and visual materials (e.g., charts, graphs, maps, photographs). This is a firm requirement. Any project description pages beyond the 15-page limit will be deleted prior to review.

The 15-page limit does not include the Coversheet, Executive Summary, Budget and Budget Justification, Data Information and Sharing Plan (see VIII.C.), Literature Citation, Current and Pending Support, Curriculum Vitae, Letters of Commitment, and Required Forms (e.g., NEPA).

Contents of the Project Description:

- i. Description of the project's scientific, technical, historical, cultural, or socioeconomic importance and merit. Will it potentially challenge existing paradigms or lead to the formulation of new paradigms?
- ii. Description of the project's goals and objectives and the proposed methodology.
- iii. Provision of brief descriptions of the contributions of participating personnel.
- iv. Description of any complementary funding.
- v. Clarification of date of field operations and any operational constraints.
- vi. Anticipated outputs (e.g., potential discoveries, knowledge and impact, published papers, reports, meetings, and/or education and outreach material).
- vii. The value to NOAA and the Nation and how this project's anticipated outcomes will benefit the science community, our understanding of the Arctic, and society as a whole.
- viii. State willingness to participate in OER outreach/education activities as described in VIII.B.1.

- d. *Data/Information Sharing Plan*: A Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages is required. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information expected to be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. A public website discusses Data Management Best Practices and provides data

sharing and data management plan examples.

(<http://www.ncddc.noaa.gov/activities/science-technology/data-management/>).

- e. *A concise summary of significant results and achievements:* This summary should include publications and outputs, and data/information sharing experience from any prior, or ongoing, Ocean Exploration and Research funding.
- f. *A summary of current funding support:* Applicants must provide information on all their current and pending Federal support for ongoing projects and proposals, including potential subsequent funding in the case of continuing grants. The proposed project and all other projects or activities using Federal assistance or that requires a portion of time of the Principal Investigator or other senior personnel should be included. The relationship between the proposed project and these other projects should be described, and the number of person-months per year to be devoted to the projects must be clearly stated.
- g. *Brief résumés for each investigator:* A maximum of two pages for each Principal and Co-Principal Investigator(s), including a representative reference list of relevant recent publications.
- h. *Detailed tabular budget:* Separate budgets within the proposal must be provided if more than one funding action is anticipated (e.g., if funds are to be allocated to more than one institution or agency through subcontracts).
- i. *Budget justification:* Should include justifications of salary and travel costs; analysis and publication; non-standard items, including ship time and submersibles; and any cost sharing or in-kind contributions. Proposals must include sufficient resources to analyze, interpret, publish, and archive data (in accordance with the Data Information and Sharing Plan) and results of the project. Applications must include a scope of work, budgets for each year (if more than one), and a summary budget for the entire award period. The narrative budget justification must include a detailed breakdown by category of cost (object class) separated into

Federal and non-Federal shares as they relate to specific aspects of the project, with appropriate narrative justification for both the Federal and non-Federal (if applicable) shares. The object classes should match those found on the SF-424A. The narrative budget justification should be sufficiently detailed to enable a clear understanding of the cost breakdown and calculations used to come up with the line item totals in each object class of the 424A budget form.

- j. *NEPA statement*: Applicants are required to submit comprehensive answers to questions in sections A-F of the [NEPA questionnaire](#) (also section H, if the applicant's proposed activities are related to fisheries sampling and research). The answers to these questions will provide NOAA with the information required to comply with NEPA. Applicants may contact margot.bohan@noaa.gov with any difficulties they may have answering the questions. The NEPA questionnaire can be found at:
<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/funding-opportunities.html> .
- k. *Forms*: Non-Federal applicants must submit a complete NOAA grant application package provided from Grants.gov.
- l. *A list of suggested reviewers*: If the applicant chooses to do so, the application may include a list of suggested reviewers (submit names, e-mail addresses, and phone numbers) of five unconflicted potential peer reviewers. Applicants may also identify individuals recommended for exclusion from the review process (including justification for any such recommendation).

C. Submission Dates and Times

Completed pre-proposals are required and must be received by 5:00 pm (EST) on December 4, 2014. Before 5:00 pm (EST), an auto-reply message will notify each applicant that their email with pre-proposal material was received. After 5:00 pm (EST), an auto-reply message will notify applicant that their email with pre-proposal material submission is late and will not be considered. A complete pre-proposal is a prerequisite for submission of a full proposal. Applicants will

receive an email encouraging or discouraging a full proposal submission by December 19, 2014. If you have not received a reply by December 19, 2014 contact OER at oer.ffo2015@noaa.gov or (301) 734-1014 as soon as possible. The final decision to submit a full proposal is up to the applicant.

Full proposals must be received by 5:00 pm (EST) January 29, 2015. For non-Federal applications submitted through Grants.gov, a date and time receipt indication is included and will be the basis for determining timeliness. For Federal applications submitted via email or hard copy, proposals will be date-and time-stamped when they are received in the Program Office.

Pre-proposals and full Proposals received after their respective cutoff dates and times will not be considered.

Important:

All applicants, submitting either electronic or paper proposals, should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant schedules for delivery of the application. Applications postmarked before the deadline but received by OER after the deadline will not be reviewed.

Please note:

Applicants may have to register or renew their central contractor registration prior to submitting to Grants.gov. Grants.gov will not accept submissions if the applicant has not been authorized or if credentials are incorrect. Authorizations and credential corrections can take several days to establish. Please plan your time accordingly to avoid being disqualified for a late submission. For further information please visit the System for Award Management website: <https://www.sam.gov>. For questions please visit the Federal Service Desk website: <https://www.fsd.gov>.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this office's announcement are subject to Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Applicants must contact their State's Single Point of Contact (SPOC) to find out about and comply with the State's process under EO 12372. The names and addresses of the SPOCs are listed on

the Office of Management and Budget's website:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

No special restrictions apply.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Address for Submitting Proposals

Pre-proposal submissions can be submitted either by e-mail (preferred; send to oer.ffo2015@noaa.gov) or by hard copy (see address below). If submitting by e-mail, please put your last name in the subject heading, along with the words "ocean exploration pre-proposal," e.g., "Jones ocean exploration pre-proposal." Adobe PDF format is preferred.

No facsimile pre-proposals will be accepted.

Full proposal submissions for non-Federal applicants must be submitted through Grants.gov. Non-Federal applicants without internet access may submit hard copies to the address below. Federal applicants are ineligible to submit via Grants.gov and may submit their submissions by e-mail (preferred, send to oer.ffo2015@noaa.gov) or by hard copy.

Address for hard copy submissions of pre-proposals and full proposals is the same: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, ATTN: Yvette Jefferson, FFO 2015, SSMC3, Rm 10315, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

V. APPLICATION REVIEW INFORMATION

A. Evaluation Criteria

The same criteria will be used to evaluate both the pre and the full proposals.

1. Pre-Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Pre-proposals will be evaluated by a small team of OER program representatives who will use the following criteria to either

encourage or discourage submission of full proposals:

- a. Relevance to NOAA and OER missions and goals (e.g., intrinsic value of the project);
- b. Scientific and technical merit (e.g., exploration value, logistical feasibility, etc.);
- c. Qualifications and competence of the applicants (including past performance on prior OER awards);
- d. Reasonableness of costs/budget (including value of additional funding and in-kind contributions).

The final decision to submit a full proposal is up to the applicants.

2. Full Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Full proposals will be evaluated and rated individually by three independent peer reviewers (Mail reviews) and/or a peer-review panel representing expertise in the relevant disciplines. The review will consist of a determination and analysis of strengths, weaknesses, deficiencies and risks associated with each proposal. All peer reviewers will be required to sign confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements. To follow are the criteria, and corresponding weight values, to be used to evaluate the full proposals. Peer reviewers will assess the extent to which the proposal has demonstrated the following:

- a. *Importance/Relevance and applicability of proposal to NOAA's mission and OER goals (40%):* This criterion asks reviewers to consider the extent to which 1) the proposal is exploration focused (expanding the breadth of knowledge) versus being research-focused (expanding the depth of knowledge on any particular topic), 2) the anticipated results could have high downstream impact, and 4) the work is germane to NOAA's mission goals, and 3) the plans for documentation, archive, and sharing of data, multimedia and specimen collections are adequately outlined;
- b. *Scientific and technical merit (40%):* This criterion asks the reviewers to determine 1) if the proposed approach is scientifically and technically sound and/or innovative, including feasibility of high risk advanced technology, 2) if there are clear project goals and objectives, 3) if the project is interdisciplinary, and 4) if the methods are commensurate

with the goals and objectives;

- c. *Overall qualifications of applicants (10%)*: This criterion asks the reviewers to ascertain whether the applicant(s) possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For the OER review process this includes judging: 1) the qualifications of the applicant(s) and 2) the strength, diversity, and depth of any partnership to accomplish the work proposed. If the applicant has previously received OER funding, this criterion also asks the reviewers to assess the applicant's prior OER award performance (e.g., timely publication of results and sharing of data);
- d. *Project costs (10%)*: This criterion ask the reviewers to evaluate the proposal budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the proposed project needs and time-frame. They will also assess the value of additional funding and in-kind contribution.

B. Review and Selection Process

Once a full proposal is received by NOAA, an initial administrative review is conducted to determine compliance with requirements and completeness of the application. When a proposal is determined to be in compliance and complete, the proposal will be subjected to peer review.

Peer reviewers will rate the individual proposals using the evaluation criteria and percentage weights provided above and will provide summary comments. Both Federal and non-Federal experts in the field may be used in the peer-review process, which will include external mail reviews and/or a peer-review panel. Peer-review panelists will not be asked to reach consensus on individual proposals. Based on external mail reviewer scores, summary comments, and, as appropriate, summaries and scores from review panelists, the OER Director, in consultation with appropriate OER scientific and technical staff, will make the final decision.

C. Selection Factors

In making final selections, the OER Director will award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;

2. Balance/distribution of 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. Office priorities and policy factors;

5. Applicants' prior award performance, including data/information sharing;

6. Partnerships;

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

OER's intent is to notify all applicants (Federal and non-Federal) of the results of the peer review of their proposal, as well as OER's final recommendation to award or decline funding, by email, within approximately 180 days after receipt of the full proposal. Progress of the peer-review process may affect this timeline. Successful non-federal applicants will receive notification that their proposal has been funded from the NOAA Grants Management Division. Official notification of funding, signed by a NOAA Grants Officer, is the

authorizing document that enables OER to distribute funding. Notifications will be issued via email to the proposal's Authorizing Official.

VI. AWARD ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

A. Award Notices

1. Use of Universal Identifier

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.

2. Modification to Applications

Successful applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of an award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the collaboration duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement in the activities of each partnership will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and OER. Project activities should not be initiated in the expectation of grant funding until a notice of award document is received from the NOAA Grants Management Division.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. Department of Commerce Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 17, 2012 (77 FR 74634) are applicable to this solicitation. This notice can be viewed at:

<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-12-17/pdf/2012-30228.pdf>.

2. *Limitation of Liability*

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal or project preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project.

3. *National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)*

If recommended for funding, applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact will be asked to furnish sufficient information to assist NOAA in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project.

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for each project which seeks NOAA funding. Detailed information on NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: www.nepa.noaa.gov including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, www.nepa.noaa.gov/NOAA/NAO216_6.pdf, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.hhs.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm.

If needed by NOAA for NEPA assessment, applicants will be asked to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species, and habitats 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 an environmental assessment if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA to identify 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 projects may have on the environment.

4. Unpaid or Delinquent Tax Liability> In accordance with current Federal appropriations law, NOAA will provide a successful corporate

applicant a form to be completed by its authorized representatives certifying that the corporation has no Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal Law.

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

C. Reporting

Grants, cooperative agreements, and intra or interagency agreements have the same reporting requirements. An OER point of contact will work with awardees to facilitate reporting requirements described here and in section VIII "Other Information".

1. An *expedition/field work plan* must be submitted to OER prior to the start of field work, in time to meet ship/platform requirements but no later than 30 days prior to the beginning of the expedition/field work.

2. Within 15 days of the completion of the expedition/field work recipients must provide a *"quick-look report"* and an expedition summary report.

These three documents will be made publicly available along with the cruise datasets, no later than two years following completion of the expedition.

3. In addition, *progress reports* are due semi-annually and cover 6-month periods that begin with the start date of the project. Progress reports are due electronically to OER through grants on-line no later than 30 days after each 6-month project period. A final report is due no later than 90 days after the expiration date of an award. Progress reports should detail collaborative activities that have occurred during the reporting period that correspond with the goals and objectives identified in the narrative, as well as provide specific,

project-related information, including financial reports.

4. Within 60 days of completion of the expedition/field work (or annually if the work is multi-year) grant recipients must provide:

- a. *An updated collection level metadata* record identifying completed collections and including Digital Object Identifiers (if assigned);
- b. *A data inventory* identifying data types collected, data release dates, and/or documents specific proposed exceptions to the open data access policy (e.g., data that may have homeland/national security, cultural heritage, or protected resources value in accordance with NAO 212-15¹;
- c. *Expedition/field work* location data (e.g.: ship navigation track or area of operations for public GIS display).

For continuing observations, data inventories should be submitted periodically if there is a significant change in location, type, or frequency of such observations.

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

VII. AGENCY CONTACTS

For further information, contact the NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research at (301) 734-1014 or oer.ffo2015@noaa.gov. Email inquiries should include the Principal Investigator's name in the subject heading. Inquiries can also be mailed to: NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration and Research, ATTN: Yvette Jefferson, FFO 2015, SSMC3, Rm 10315, 1315 East West Highway, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910.

VIII. Other Information

By receiving funding from OER, all applicants agree to the following expectations for sample collection, education and outreach, data management, and website requirements. To help meet these requirements, one or more NOAA staff or NOAA designee(s) may become members of, and assist, the at-sea science party serving roles as Data Managers or Web Coordinators.

A. Sample Collection

In certain cases, OER may require the collection of living/non-living samples during the exploration aboard a NOAA or NOAA-chartered vessel. This may occur even when an expedition does not call for collection of samples. In such cases, OER will work with the at-sea expedition team to ensure any such sampling will not significantly interfere with or jeopardize the principal objectives of the expedition. Cultural heritage materials will only be collected under the appropriate permits and with prior accommodation for conservation and curation as described in the Annex Rules of the UNESCO Convention for the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage.

B. Education and Outreach

1. All funded applicants and collaborators are strongly encouraged to cooperate with OER in facilitating education and outreach activities associated with their projects. NOAA's Ocean Explorer website (<http://www.oceanexplorer.noaa.gov>) is the principal vehicle for chronicling and documenting all missions supported by OER. OER will assess and provide support for education and/or outreach activities in collaboration with the applicant, as warranted.

2. All PIs are required to provide a **summary article for the website** following completion of the field work or project. In consultation with the PI, OER selects several projects each field season to be fully documented on the Ocean Explorer website during the exploration. An OER Web Coordinator will work with the applicant and science party to determine the content of web offerings, and to develop and implement a web production plan for these select projects. A berth on the host research vessel should be dedicated for the Web Coordinator if feasible. Documentation may include accompanying education

materials, and OER Education team members will facilitate these activities. PIs may be asked to participate in the development of lesson plans, professional development for teachers, accommodation of a teacher/educator-at-sea, participation in a media event or press conference to describe the expedition and its findings, and at-sea media participation.

C. Data Management Guidance (Sharing of Findings, Data, and Other Information)

Applicants receiving funds under the NOAA OER Program are required to comply with NOAA Administrative Order 212-15¹ *Management of Environmental Data and Information* and specifically with the guidance provided in *The NOAA Data Sharing Policy for Grants and Cooperative Agreements*². *This policy is consistent with all Government agencies including NSF.*

Environmental data and information collected and/or created under an awarded grant/cooperative agreement and for any other projects supported by OER, will be made visible, accessible and independently understandable to users in a timely manner (e.g., no later than two (2) years after the data are collected or created) free of charge or at minimal cost that is no more than the cost of distribution to the user, except where limited by law, regulation, policy or by security requirements.

1. A Data/Information Sharing Plan of no more than two pages is required as part of the Project Description. This plan will be reviewed and evaluated. A typical plan should include descriptions of the types of environmental data and information that will be created during the course of the project; the tentative date by which data will be shared; the standards to be used for data/metadata format and content; policies addressing data stewardship and preservation; procedures for providing access, sharing, and security; and prior experience in publishing such data. The Data/Information Sharing Plan will be reviewed as part of the Full Proposal Evaluation Criteria.

¹ NOAA Administrative Order 215-101
https://www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/nao_212-15.php

² NOAA Data Sharing Policy for Grants and Cooperative Agreements Procedural Directive
https://www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/documents/EDMC_PD-DSPNG_final_v2.pdf

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

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

Implementation of data management in OER is also guided by the 2000 President's Panel³ on Ocean Exploration's recommendation for a rapid and unfettered data management and dissemination process, and by Public law 111-11 Section XII Ocean Exploration see 33 USC 3403. **Applicants awarded funding under the NOAA OER Program must state their intent to comply with above regulations.**

To ensure broad public access to information, OER publishes the Digital Atlas http://www.ncddc.noaa.gov/website/google_maps/OE/mapsOE.htm?textSearch=Okeanos. The Atlas is an online geospatial index that is the principal method of providing public access to data associated with all missions supported by OER. The metadata produced to satisfy the NOAA data descriptions of the types of environmental data and information sharing requirements will be published to the NOAA catalog and to the home of the U.S. Government's open data (<http://www.data.gov/geospatial>).

In coordination with receipt of the project work plan listed under Section VI C on or about fifteen (15) days prior to the mission, participants will be required to provide information to the OER Data Management Coordinator to initialize metadata and facilitate Digital Atlas publication. The OER Data Management Coordinator, when not otherwise specifically designated in each Grant or Contract award, will be the NOAA National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC) OER Liaison Officer that can be contacted at: oer.info.mgmt@noaa.gov or Tel: 228-688-2256 or toll-free 1-866-732-2382.

A public website discusses Data Management Best Practices and provides data sharing and data management plan examples.

³ Discovering the Earth's Final Frontier: A U.S. Strategy for Ocean Exploration. A Report of the Presidents Panel for Ocean Exploration <http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/about/what-we-do/program-review/presidents-panel-on-ocean-exploration-report.pdf>

(<http://www.ncddc.noaa.gov/activities/science-technology/data-management/>).

D. Proprietary or Privileged Information

Patentable ideas, trade secrets, and privileged or confidential commercial or financial information, disclosure of which may harm the proposer, should be included in proposals only when such information is necessary to convey an understanding of the proposed project. Such information should be clearly marked in the proposal or included as a separate statement accompanying the proposal and should be appropriately labeled with a legend such as, "The following is (proprietary or confidential) information that (name of proposing organization) requests not be released to persons outside the Government, except for purposes of review and evaluation." While NOAA will make every effort to prevent unauthorized access to such material, it is not responsible or in any way liable for the release of such material.

E. Release of Grantee Proposal Information

A proposal that results in a NOAA award will be available to the public on request, except for privileged information or material that is personal, proprietary, or otherwise exempt from disclosure under law. Appropriate labeling in the proposal aids identification of what may be specifically exempt. Such information will be withheld from public disclosure to the extent permitted by law, including the Freedom of Information Act. Without assuming any liability for inadvertent disclosure, NOAA will seek to limit disclosure of such information to its employees and to outside reviewers only when necessary for merit review of the proposal or as otherwise authorized by law.

Portions of proposals resulting in grants that contain descriptions of inventions in which either the Government or the grantee owns a right, title, or interest (including a non-exclusive license) will not normally be made available to the public until a reasonable time has been allowed for filing patent applications. NOAA will notify the grantee of receipt of requests for copies of funded proposals so the grantee may advise NOAA of such inventions described, or other confidential, commercial, or proprietary information contained in the proposal.

