

C. Funding

This solicitation announces that a maximum of \$2.0M may be available for distribution under the 2003 RWGP, in award amounts to be determined by the applications and available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. If one incurs any costs prior to receiving any award agreement signed by an authorized NOAA official, one would do so solely at one's own risk of these costs not being included under the award. There is no set minimum or maximum amount for any award.

There is no limit on the number of applications that can be submitted by the same researcher during the 2003 competitive grant cycle. However, there are insufficient funds to award financial assistance to every applicant. Multiple applications submitted must clearly identify different projects and must be successful in the competitive review process.

Other researchers may be identified as Co-Investigators or collaborators on as many RWGP applications as needed so long as the total of all support does not exceed 100 percent of their time. In addition, Department of Commerce may act as collaborators if they are responsible for performing analyses on data collected under a RWGP award. See section I.D. for Eligibility Requirements.

There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all qualified projects. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. If an application for a financial assistance award is selected for funding, NOAA/NMFS has no obligation to provide any additional funding in connection with that award in subsequent years. However, multiple-year projects will be considered under the RWGP.

Notwithstanding any verbal or written assurance that applicants have received, pre-award costs are not allowed under the award unless the Grants Officer approves them in accordance with 15 CFR 14.28.

D. Eligibility

Eligible applicants are individuals, institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and state, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies, or

employees of Federal agencies are not eligible to apply.

We support cultural and gender diversity in our programs and encourage eligible women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications. Furthermore, we recognize the interest of the Secretary of Commerce in defining appropriate marine management policies and programs that meet the needs of the U.S. insular areas, so we also encourage applications from eligible individuals, government entities, universities, colleges, and businesses in U.S. insular areas as defined by the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) (section 3(14), 16 U.S.C. 1362). This includes the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the U. S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

We are strongly committed to broadening the participation of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), which include Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities, in our programs. The DOC/NOAA/NMFS vision, mission, and goals are to achieve full participation by MSIs, to advance the development of human potential, strengthen the Nation's capacity to provide high-quality education, and increase opportunities for MSIs to participate in and benefit from Federal financial assistance programs. Therefore, we encourage all eligible applicants to include meaningful participation of MSIs whenever practicable.

NOAA/NMFS employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not allowed to help in the preparation of applications. NMFS staff are available to provide information regarding statistics on right whales, programmatic goals and objectives, ongoing marine mammal programs, Regional funding priorities, and, along with other Federal Program Officers, can provide information on application procedures and completion of required forms. Since this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees shall not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring applications, or write letters of support for any application. However, for activities that involve collaboration with current NMFS programs on North Atlantic right whales, employees of NMFS can write a letter verifying that they are collaborating with the project. Federal employee travel and salaries are not allowable costs under this program.

E. Permits and Approvals

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.

Applicants are expected to design their proposals so that they minimize the potential adverse impact on the environment. If applicable, documentation of requests or approvals of environmental permits must be included in the proposal package. These documents will help the NMFS staff determine if the application requires the preparation of an environmental assessment. Applications will be reviewed to ensure that they have sufficient environmental documentation to allow program staff to determine whether the proposal is categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis or whether an environmental assessment is necessary. For those applications needing an environmental assessment, affected applicants will be informed after the peer review stage and will be requested to assist in the preparation of a draft of the assessment (prior to award).

If the proposed research involves intrusive research (50 CFR 216.27(c)(6)) or an approach to within 500 yds of a right whale, the applicant must have submitted a complete MMPA/ESA scientific research and enhancement permit application before funding will be awarded. Intrusive research is defined under 50 CFR 216.3 as a procedure that involves: a break in or cutting of the skin or equivalent, insertion of an instrument or material into an orifice, introduction of a substance or object into the animals' immediate environment that is likely either to be ingested or to contact and directly affect animal tissues (*i.e.*, chemical substances), or a stimulus directed at animals that poses a risk to the health or welfare of the animal or has the potential to impact normal function or behavior (e.g., audio broadcasts directed at animals that potentially affects behavior, brainstem auditory evoked responses, etc.).

If proposed activities will take place within National Marine Sanctuaries, National Parks, National Seashores, and other Federally designated protected areas, it is the applicant's responsibility to request and obtain from the appropriate government agencies any necessary permits or letters of agreement prior to award.

For further information on permit requirements and applications procedures for federal natural resource permits, contact the NMFS Office of Protected Resources or see http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR1/Permits/pr1permits_types.html.