

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:** Right Whale Research Grant Program (RWRGP)
- ! **Announcement Type:** Initial Announcement
- ! **Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number(s):** 11.472, Unallied Science Programs
- ! **Dates:** Proposals must be postmarked by 5 p.m. EST August 1, 2005.
- ! **Funding Opportunity Description:** The North Atlantic right whale is among the world's most endangered cetaceans. The population is believed to number only about 300 individuals and appears to be declining. The lack of recovery is due in part to high mortality from human sources, notably fishing gear entanglements and vessel collisions. A Recovery Plan is in effect, and conservation of this species is a high priority for NOAA Fisheries. Research directed at facilitating such conservation or to provide monitoring of the population's status and health, is also a high priority for the agency. The RWRGP is conducted by NOAA to provide Federal assistance to eligible researchers for: (1) detection and tracking of right whales; (2) behavior of right whales in relation to ships; (3) relationships between vessel speed, size or design with whale collisions; (4) modeling of ship traffic along the Atlantic coast; (5) population monitoring and assessment studies; (6) reproduction, health and genetic studies; (7) development of a Geographic Information System database or other system designed to investigate predictive modeling of right whale distribution in relation to environmental variables; (8) habitat quality studies including food quality and pollutant levels; and (9) any other work relevant to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of the North Atlantic Right Whale Research Grant Program (RWRGP) is to fund research or other activities that can provide information useful to management of North Atlantic right whales, with emphasis on understanding or mitigating factors inhibiting the species' recovery.

Successful applications will be those that have a high probability of providing novel information that can be used to monitor the status and health of the North Atlantic right whale population, or to improve management strategies aimed at reducing risk from human factors or at otherwise facilitating the population's recovery. Priority will be given to researchers with a demonstrated track record of publishing in peer-reviewed scientific literature.

B. Program Priorities

For this solicitation, all applications must fall within at least one of the 9 following categories: (1) Detection and tracking of right whales; (2) Behavior of right whales in relation to ships; (3) Relationships between vessel speed, size or design with whale collisions; (4) Modeling of ship traffic along the Atlantic coast; (5) Population monitoring and assessment studies; (6) Reproduction, health and genetic studies; (7) Development of a Geographic Information System database or other system designed to investigate predictive modeling of right whale distribution in relation to environmental variables; (8) Habitat quality studies including food quality and pollutant levels; and (9) Any other work relevant to the recovery of North Atlantic right whales.

Applicants must select the one category that best fits their application. Because NOAA recognizes that some projects could be designed to meet more than one category, applicants should determine which category best fits the goals of their proposed project.

The priorities are not listed in any particular order and each is of equal importance. Note that the purpose of the priority list is to guide applicants in application development by identifying those applications that will best compete during this grant cycle for these limited funds, and to provide technical reviewers with guidance for their evaluations. Applications will not be pooled or categorized by NMFS region, although regional funding priorities within NMFS may be a factor in the final ranking of applications. Details of the 9 categories are as follows:

1. **Detection and Tracking of Right Whales:** Studies, including those involving passive or active acoustic tracking, as well as tagging or other telemetry, which improve knowledge of the distribution and movements of right whales in order to (among other things) better assess risks from ship-strike and fishing gear entanglements.

2. **Behavior of Right Whales in Relation to Ships:** Investigations of behavior or other biological factors which govern the response of right whales to ships and thus may affect the likelihood that right whales will collide with, or successfully avoid, oncoming vessels. This component may also include experiments to assess the response of right whales to ship-

avoidance deterrence methods (e.g. Alarm stimuli).

3. Relationships Between Vessel Speed, Size or Design with Whale Collisions: Investigations (using modeling or any other means) of how collision risk varies with the speed, size or design of a ship.

4. Modeling or Other Studies of Ship Traffic Along the Atlantic Coast: Investigations which provide novel information on patterns of ship traffic along the Atlantic coast of North America (U.S. and Atlantic Canada), in order to better assess, by area, the risk of collisions between ships and right whales.

5. Population Monitoring and Assessment Studies: Field or modeling studies that provide data or analysis for monitoring/assessment of population size and trend, vital rates, population structure, or distribution.

6. Reproduction, Health and Genetic Studies: Studies of the reproductive biology of right whales, of individual animal health (incorporating physiology, pathology or other methods), or of genetics (including but not limited to genetic diversity, population structure, effective population size, and paternity).

7. Development of a Geographic Information System Database or Other System Designed to Investigate Predictive Modeling of Right Whale Distribution in Relation to Environmental Variables: Studies seeking to correlate right whale distribution and environmental variables in order to reliably predict future aggregations of right whales from remotely sensed (or other) environmental data.

8. Habitat Quality Studies Including Food Quality and Pollutant Levels: Investigations of habitat quality, including abundance and quality of available prey resources, pollutant levels, and interactions of environmental variables with prey resources.

9. Any Other Work Relevant to the Recovery of North Atlantic Right Whales: Studies or other projects on topics not specifically covered in Categories 1-8 above, but have the potential to contribute important information about North Atlantic right whales or to enhance their recovery.

C. Program Authority 16 USC 1380

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

This solicitation announces that a maximum of \$1.0M may be available for distribution under the FY 2006 RWRGP, in award amounts to be determined by the proposals and available funds. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds have not yet been appropriated for this program. The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Publication of this notice does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. There is no set minimum or maximum amount for any award, and there is no limit on the number of applications that can be submitted by the same researcher during the 2006 competitive grant cycle. Note that in FY 2004, the last year in which there was a competition in this program, 15 awards were made, with a range of \$35,000 to \$200,000 per year. 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.

B. Project/Award Period

Multi-year projects for a period of up to 3 years will be considered under the RWRGP. Applicants must submit project plans and budgets for each of the three years. Projects will be funded for no more than one year at a time. Funding for subsequent years will be at the sole discretion of the Department of Commerce and will depend on satisfactory performance by the recipient, the availability of funds to support the continuation of the project, and Agency priorities. Project proposals accepted for funding will not compete for funding in subsequent budget periods within the approved award period. If an applicant wishes to continue work on a project funded through this program beyond the project period and obligated award funds have not been expended by the end of this period, the applicant can notify the assigned Federal Program Officer 30 days prior to the end of the period to determine eligibility for a no-cost extension.

C. Type of funding instrument

Under this solicitation, NOAA will fund RWRGP as 12-month grants.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

1. 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.

2. The Department of Commerce/ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (DOC/NOAA) is strongly committed to broadening the participation of historically black colleges and universities, Hispanic serving institutions, tribal colleges and universities, and institutions that work in underserved areas. The RWRGP encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

No cost sharing is required under this program.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

To apply for this NOAA Federal funding opportunity, please go to www.grants.gov, and use the following funding opportunity # NMFS-NEFSC-~~2005~~²⁰⁰⁶2000252. Applicants without Internet access can contact Kelly Taranto, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543 or by phone at 508-495-2312, or fax at 508-495-2004, or via e-mail at Kelly.taranto@noaa.gov.

B. Content and Form of Application Submission

Applications must adhere to the provision under "Applications" and the requirements under "Required Elements" by the application deadline. Failure to follow these restrictions will result in proposals being returned to the applicant without review.

1. Applications

a. Applications submitted to the 2006 Right Whale Research Grant Program (RWRGP) must include a Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance), including a detailed budget using Standard Form 424A, (Budget Information--Non-Construction Programs), Standard Form 424B (Assurances-Non-Construction Programs), Commerce Department Form CD-511, (Certifications Regarding Debarment, Suspension and Other Responsibility Matters: Drug-Free Workplace Requirements and Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). These forms are available at www.grants.gov or at <http://www.ofa.noaa.gov/%7Egrants/appkit.html>. They should be submitted through www.grants.gov. Applicants submitting hard copy must include one signed original and two signed unbound copies of the application (including supporting information).

b. Applicants must identify the specific research priority or priorities to which they are responding. If the proposal addresses more than one priority, it should list first on the application the priority that most closely reflects the objective of the proposals. For applications containing more than one project, each project component must be identified individually using the format specified in this section. If an application is not in response to a priority, it should so state. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of RWRGP as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposal format must be in at least a 10-point font and double-spaced. Brevity will assist reviewers and program staff in dealing effectively with proposals. Therefore, Project Description may not exceed 15 pages for each project within an application. Tables and visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps, photographs, and other pictorial presentations are not included in the 15-page limitation. Appendices may be included but must not exceed a total of 15-pages in length. Appendices may include information such as curriculum, resumes, and/or letters of endorsement. Additional informational material will be disregarded. Proposals must

include the following information:

1. Cover Sheet: Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Standard Forms 424 (7/03) and 424B or 424D must be the cover sheets for each application. To complete item 10 of Standard Form 424, the "Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance" number is 11.472 and the title is "Unallied Science Program". For item 13 of Standard Form 424, a start date no earlier than 1 July 2006 should be selected.

2. Title Page: A Title Page must be included for each project. The Title Page must list the project title, project duration (with a start date no earlier than 1 July 2006), applicant name, name of Principal Investigator or Contact, address and phone number of the Principal Investigator or Contact, the RWRGP application category under which the project fits (see Section I.B. of this document), the project's objective(s), and a statement regarding the total costs of the project.

3. Project summary (1-page limit): It is recommended that each proposal contain a summary of no more than one page that provides the following:

- a. Organization title.
- b. Address, telephone number, and email address of applicant.
- c. Priority or priorities for which you are applying (see section I.B.).
- d. Project title.
- e. Project duration (project/funding periods for each year beginning to end dates, starting on the first of the month and ending on the last day of the month).
- f. Principal Investigator(s) (PI).
- g. Project objectives.
- h. Summary of work to be performed.
- i. Total Federal funds requested.
- j. Cost-sharing to be provided from non-Federal sources, if any. Specify whether contributions are cash or in-kind.
- k. Total project cost.

4. Project description (15-page limit): Each project must be completely and accurately described. The main body of the proposal should be a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and should include: specific objectives and performance measures for the period of the proposed work and the expected significance; relation to longer-term goals of the PI's project; and relation to other work planned, anticipated, or underway under Federal Assistance. Each project must be described as follows:

a. Identification of problem(s): Identify the problem/opportunity the project intends to address and describe its significance to the understanding and management of North Atlantic right whales.

b. Project objectives: Identify the RWRGP objective, listed earlier in this document, to which the project's objective(s) correspond. Objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; clear as to the "what and when," but should avoid the "how and why", and; attainable within the time, money and human resources available. Projects should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures.

c. Project narrative: The project narrative is the scientific or technical action plan of activities that are to be accomplished during each budget period of the project. This description should include detailed descriptions of activities, collaborators, milestones, and expected

products resulting from a successfully completed project. The narrative should respond to the following questions:

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

(2) Who will be responsible for carrying out each activity? Highlight activities that will be conducted by Co-investigators or Cooperators, or by sub-contractors, volunteers, and others designated as Co-investigators or Cooperators. For all projects, highlight activities that will be subcontracted. Use of volunteer staff time to complete project activities and oversight of those volunteers should be discussed. The Principal Investigator is responsible for all technical oversight and implementation of the approved work plan as delineated in this Statement of Work.

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

(4) What are the major outcomes, results, or products expected? Describe expected outcomes, results, or products that will directly relate to the RWRGP objectives (i.e., under Categories 1-9).

d. Benefits or results expected: Identify and document the results or benefits to be derived from the proposed activities. Describe the potential impacts of this proposed project on the recovery of North Atlantic right whales.

e. Need for Government financial assistance: Demonstrate the need for assistance. Explain why other funding sources cannot fund all the proposed work. List all other sources of funding that are or have been sought for the project.

f. Federal, state and local government activities: List any programs (Federal, state, or local government activities) this project would affect and describe the relationship between the project and those plans or activities.

g. Project management: Describe how the project will be organized and managed. The lead organization/individual and person listed as the technical contact, should be identified as the Principal Investigator. The Principal Investigator may or may not be the applicant. However, if the applicant is not the Principal Investigator, there must be an explanation of the relationship between the applicant and Principal Investigator (e.g., applicant will be responsible for managing the grant funds and the Principal Investigator will be responsible for completing the project milestones on time and within budget, etc.). One Principal Investigator must be designated on each project. If a Principal Investigator is not identified, we will return the application. You may correct the application and resubmit it; however, the resubmission must be received by the established deadline. We do not guarantee that we will be able to return all such applications in time for resubmission. Project participants or organizations that will have a significant role in conducting the project should be listed as Co-investigators. Organizations or individuals that support the project, for example, researchers contributing data or materials, should be referred to as Cooperators. Copies of the Principal Investigator's and all Co-investigator's current resumes or curricula vitae must be included in the package's Supporting Documentation section. In addition, the proof of eligibility documents provided and listed in the Supporting Documents section of the application must name the Principal Investigator and/or Co-investigator. Other researchers may be identified as Co-Investigators or collaborators on as many RWRGP

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 RWRGP award. List any Federal awards the Principal Investigator and Co-investigators have received within the last five years and describe resultant products of such awards. Provide a statement of no more than one page on the qualifications and experience (e.g., resume or curriculum vitae) of consultants and/or subcontractors that are not named as Co-investigators and any Cooperators.

Include copies of agreements between the Principal Investigator and other participants in the project, describing the specific activities each participant would perform. Include copies of any endorsements received from institutions related to this project.

If any portion of the project will be conducted through consultants and/or subcontracts, procurement guidance found in 15 CFR part 24, "Grants and Cooperative Agreements to State and Local Governments," and 15 CFR part 14, "Uniform Administrative Requirements for Grants and Agreements with Institutions of Higher Education, Hospitals, Other Non-Profit, and Commercial Organizations" must be followed. Describe how provisions for competitive subcontracting will be met if applicable.

h. Results from prior NOAA Right Whale Program funding support: If any PI or co-PI identified on the project has received support from the NOAA Right Whale Program in the past 5 years, information on the prior award(s) is required. The following information should be provided:

- (1) The NOAA award number, amount and period of support;
- (2) The title of the project;
- (3) Summary of the results of the completed work, including, for a research project, any contribution to the development of human resources in science/biology;
- (4) Publications resulting from the award (Reprints may be submitted, and are requested, for documentation if applicable);
- (5) Brief description of available data, samples, physical collections and other related research products not described elsewhere; and
- (6) If the proposal is for renewed support, a description of the relation of the completed work to the proposed work.

i. Monitoring of project performance: Identify who will participate in monitoring the project.

j. Project impacts: Describe how these products or services will be made available to the fisheries and management communities.

k. Education and outreach: How will this project provide a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nations' natural resources?

l. Evaluation of project: The applicant is required to provide an evaluation of project accomplishments and progress towards the project objectives and performance measures at the end of each funding period and in the final report. The application must describe the methodology or procedures to be followed to determine technical feasibility, or to quantify the results of the project in promoting increased production, product quality and safety, plant survival, or other measurable factors.

5. Total project costs and budget narrative: Total project costs are the amount of funds

required to accomplish what is proposed in the Project Description and include contributions and donations. Each application must include clear and concise budget information, both on the required Federal forms, in summary and in narrative detail.

Applications must use OMB standard form 424A, "Budget Information - Non Construction Programs" and associated form instructions. All instructions should be read before completing the appropriate form. Federal columns on these forms must be filled in completely and separately and the amounts per category and total amounts must correspond with the budget narrative and justification. Applicants unfamiliar with the standard requirements are invited to ask for specific guidance.

6. Supporting documentation: Provide any required documents and any additional information necessary or useful to the description of the project. These materials are not included in the 15-page limit. The applicant should present any information that would emphasize the value of the project in terms of the significance of the problems addressed. Without such information, the merits of the project may not be fully understood, or the value of the project may be underestimated. The absence of adequate supporting documentation may cause reviewers to question assertions made in describing the project and may result in lower ranking of the project. Information presented in this section should be clearly referenced in the project description.

Applicants requiring MMPA/ESA scientific research and enhancement permits or a Letter of Authorization (LOA) to conduct work on entangled animals, must include evidence they have submitted a complete MMPA/ESA application or a copy of their LOA in this section.

Applicants proposing activities that may require an environmental assessment under NEPA must include sufficient environmental analyses (i.e., permit documentation) to allow program staff to determine whether or not the proposal can be categorically excluded from further NEPA analysis. If the project cannot be categorically excluded then the applicant may be requested to prepare an environmental assessment of their project's impacts.

Curricula vitae or resumes of the Principals and Co-Investigators and all other required federal forms (i.e., CD-511, SF-LLL, CD-346) must be included here.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Competition: 2006 Right Whale Research Grant Program (RWRGP)

Application Due Date: (30 days after publication)

Applications must be received on or before 5PM EST of the application due date. Applications submitted through www.grants.gov will be accompanied by a date and time receipt indication on them. If an applicant does not have Internet access, hard copy proposals will be accepted and date recorded when they are received in the program office. Electronic or hard copies received after the deadline will not be considered and hard copy applications will be returned to the sender.

D. Funding Restrictions

None.

E. Other Submission Requirements

1. Applications should be submitted through www.grants.gov. If an applicant does not have Internet access, hard copies should be sent to NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543. Mark proposals "Attention-Right Whale Research Grant Program."

2. 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.

3. Permits and Approvals

a. 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. 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 in conformance with requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. For those applications needing an Environmental Assessment, affected applicants will be informed after the peer review stage and may be requested to prepare an environmental assessment of the impact of their project (prior to award).

b. If the proposed research involves intrusive research (50 CFR 216.27(c)(6)) or an approach to within 500 yards 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.).

- c. 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.
- d. For further information on permit requirements and applications procedures for federal natural resource permits, contact the NMFS Office of Protected Resources (301-713-2332) or see http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/prot_res/PR1/Permits/pr1permits_types.html.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria: The proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria (with their relative weights):

1. Importance/Relevance and Applicability of Proposal to the Program Goals: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities. Applications will be evaluated on clear identification of project goals and objectives and the ability to link those goals and objectives to project activities and the applicability of the project's goals and objectives to the RWRGP goals. Reviewers should consider: the likelihood of meeting milestones and achieving anticipated results in the time line specified in the statement of work; the sufficiency of information to evaluate the project technically; if such information is sufficient, the strengths and/or weaknesses of the technical design relative to securing productive results; and if data collection is proposed, the inclusion of quality assurance considerations; the contribution of potential outcomes, results, or products to North Atlantic right whale biology and management; and, the amount of collaboration with other researchers in the right whale field. (Score = 0-50)
2. Technical/ Scientific Merit: This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. Applications will be scored based on their clear identification of performance evaluation methods and the suitability of those methods for evaluating the success or failure of the project in terms of meeting its original goals and objectives. (Score = 0-10)
3. Overall Qualification of Applications: This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. The management of the project will be evaluated based on documentation of previous related experience and qualifications of the project's Principal Investigator, Co-investigator(s) and other personnel, including designated contractors, consultants, and Cooperators. Consideration will be made to previous awards received by the Principal Investigator and outcomes, results, or products (notably peer-reviewed scientific publications) resulting from such awards. (Score = 0-25)
4. Project Costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. The proposed costs and overall budget of

the project for all proposed project years will be evaluated in terms of the work proposed. The itemized costs and the overall budget must be justified and allocated appropriately. (Score = 0-15).

5. Outreach and Education: This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This criterion is not used in the Right Whale Research Grant Programs. (Score = 0).

B. Review and Selection Process

Screening, review, and selection procedures will take place in 3 steps, described in detail in this section: initial evaluation, technical review, and final selection by the Selecting Official (i.e., the Science and Research Director, Northeast Fisheries Science Center). The peer review step will involve at least 3 individual reviewers per application. The Selecting Official will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based upon the numerical ranking of the applications and the evaluations by the peer reviewers as well as the selection factors set in V.C. below.

1. Initial Evaluation of the Applications: The initial screening will ensure that application packages have all required forms and application elements, clearly relate to the 2006 RWRGP, and meet all of the eligibility criteria.

Application packages received by the Protected Species Branch, Northeast Fisheries Science Center and postmarked by the submission deadline will be screened to ensure that they: were postmarked by the due date (see Submission Dates and Times); include the correct OMB forms (424, 424A or 424D, and 424B) signed and dated; identify a Principal Investigator and provide current resumes or curricula vitae for both the Principal and Co-Investigators; identify one of the 9 project categories; include all application package elements; and include MMPA or ESA permit application cover letters, and other environmental documentation, if applicable. Applications that pass this initial screening will be pooled based on the application category (i.e., Categories 1-9) identified by the applicant.

Our ability to pre-screen is dependent upon the submission deadline and the availability of resources.

2. Technical Review: Applications meeting the requirements of this solicitation will undergo an external technical review. Technical review is conducted by a minimum of three reviewers. Each reviewer will individually evaluate and score proposals (0-100 points) using the evaluation criteria provided in Section IVA. This review will involve experts from both NOAA and non-NOAA organizations. The technical reviewers' ratings will be used to produce a rank order of the proposals. The technical reviewers will give no consensus advice.

3. Final Selection: After applications have undergone technical review, NMFS Protected Species staff will summarize panel rankings by averaging the scores and prepare recommendations for funding to the Selecting Official (i.e. the Science and Research Director (SRD), Northeast Fisheries Science Center). Only those applications having an average score higher than 60 points in the peer review will be considered for funding.

C. Selection Factors

The technical 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 rank order of the technical review ratings unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon the following factors:

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

For Factor 4, see Section IB. For Factor 7, the necessary documentation must include required permits.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of proposals will occur during the two months following the date given in this announcement that the full proposals are due to the RWRGP. Funding should begin during late summer 2006 for most approved projects. Projects should not be expected to begin prior to July 1, 2006, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

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 Principle Investigator of the project. Notification may occur electronically or in writing.

NMFS will notify unsuccessful applicants, in writing, by postal mail. If an application is not selected, NOAA will return the proposal and related documents to the applicant.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements

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

Limitation of Liability

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals which are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216--6--TOC.pdf>, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc_ceq.htm. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment on any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

Recipients will be required to submit the following financial and performance (technical) reports. These reports are to be submitted electronically unless the recipient does not have Internet access, in which case hard copy submissions will be accepted.

Financial Status Reports (SF-269 and SF-272) are required to be submitted to the Grants Officer semi-annually.

Performance or progress reports must be submitted to the NOAA Program Officer semi-annually. These reports will be due no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of an award. The final report is due 90 days after the award expiration.

The format of the final report may vary, but should contain:

1. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);
2. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;
3. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;
4. A discussion of results and any relevant conclusions presented in a format that is understandable to a non-technical audience. This should include benefits and/or contributions to management decision-making;
5. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished;
6. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS as requested.

VII. Agency Contact(s)

Please visit the Right Whale Research Grant Program website at:
[http:// www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/grantforms](http://www.nefsc.noaa.gov/psb/grantforms) or contact Dr. Richard M. Pace, III at the NOAA/NMFS Right Whale Grants Program, Protected Species Branch, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, 508 495-2316, email rightwhalegrants@noaa.gov.