

Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps (GulfCorps) Program

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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: Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps (GulfCorps) Program

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-HCPO-2017-2005141

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.463, Habitat Conservation

Dates: Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.Grants.gov by 11:59 PM Eastern Time on March 2, 2017. Use of a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted.

Please Note: It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline.

Funding Opportunity Description: The principal objective of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps ("GulfCorps") Program solicitation is to develop a Gulf-wide conservation corps that will contribute to meaningful Gulf of Mexico ecosystem restoration benefiting coastal habitat and water quality in each of the Gulf states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida), while economically benefiting coastal communities through education, job-driven training, and employment opportunities. NOAA's GulfCorps Program grant recipients will recruit, train, and employ workers to work on habitat restoration projects and develop skills in support of long-term Gulf coast restoration. Applications submitted under this solicitation should emphasize the applicant's ability to manage a conservation corps within one or multiple Gulf of Mexico states, while coordinating with NOAA and state and federal partners on project selection and promoting the value of corps labor within the restoration community. Successful applications will: 1) demonstrate technical and administrative capacity to implement a variety of projects, at times simultaneously, that restore habitat and water quality in each Gulf state using conservation corps labor, 2) demonstrate partnerships, resources, and knowledge to build a GulfCorps that is likely to be sustainable beyond the life of the NOAA award period, and 3) contribute to local employment and environmental stewardship by providing GulfCorps participants transferable skills, experience, and career-building opportunities in the field of conservation and restoration.

Application(s) selected for funding through this solicitation will be funded through cooperative agreement(s). NOAA anticipates awarding multi-year awards, lasting three years, and releasing

funds in annual increments to selected proposals through 2019 without further competition. NOAA will not accept applications requesting less than \$1 million or more than \$7 million under this solicitation. NOAA anticipates awarding as few awards as possible, while still meeting the full objectives of this Federal Funding Opportunity and NOAA's GulfCorps Program, including even distribution of funding across all five Gulf states; this includes the potential to award a single award. There is no matching requirement for these funds; however, leveraging federal funds awarded with non-federal or in-kind contributions is encouraged, as described in the evaluation criteria. NOAA's GulfCorps Program is administered by the Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program within the NOAA Restoration Center.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The principal objective of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Gulf of Mexico Coast Conservation Corps ("GulfCorps") Program solicitation is to develop a Gulf-wide conservation corps that will contribute to meaningful Gulf of Mexico ecosystem restoration benefiting coastal habitat and water quality in each of the Gulf states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida), while economically benefiting coastal communities through education, job-driven training, and employment opportunities. The GulfCorps Program grant recipients will recruit, train, and employ workers to work on habitat restoration projects and develop skills in support of long-term Gulf coast restoration and employment readiness. This program is funded under the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States Act (RESTORE Act), Public Law 112-141, Subtitle F. Information on the RESTORE Act, including more information on the funding provided to establish this conservation corps, and the other initiatives included on the Funded Priorities List (FPL) can be found at www.restorethegulf.gov (<https://www.restorethegulf.gov/council-selected-restoration-component/funded-priorities-list>). NOAA's GulfCorps Program is administered by the Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) within the NOAA Restoration Center.

1. Restoration Project Identification and Type: Restoration projects for NOAA's GulfCorps Program will be selected by a collaboration of NOAA, the award recipient(s), and state and federal partners, particularly the individual state members of the RESTORE Act Council (Council), periodically, throughout the award period. Project selection considerations may include 1) project readiness and implementation logistics, 2) benefit to habitats and communities affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and 3) opportunity for GulfCorps skillset development. Projects may include invasive species eradication, shoreline stabilization, wetland or stream buffer revegetation, oyster reef restoration, hydrologic restoration through light earthwork, conservation or land management activities, debris removal, habitat or water quality assessment, and ecological monitoring. Coastal habitats to be benefited may include tidal marshes, floodplains, riverine systems, shellfish reefs, coastal shorelines, or others affected by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The goal of NOAA's GulfCorps Program is to provide labor support to projects listed on the RESTORE Act FPLs, projects funded through Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlements, and other funded federal or state projects where applicable environmental compliance and

permitting is completed. These projects may be a continuation or extension of restoration efforts that pre-exist this award. In the event of 'down time,' between projects, NOAA encourages applicants to identify relevant training or educational opportunities that could keep participants active during their designated period of employment. Initial meetings (in person or virtual) between the recipient, NOAA, and each state's RESTORE point(s) of contact will happen soon after the award (or awards) is finalized to discuss potential restoration projects and timeframes for the coming year, and how they fit with the project selection considerations described above. NOAA does not anticipate projects will be available for GulfCorps participation before fall 2017. NOAA anticipates that project opportunities and implementation schedules will vary from state to state, and are expected to become available on a rolling basis throughout the year. NOAA will facilitate communication between the award recipient(s) and state and federal partners, and subsequent project identification and planning meetings will occur as needed with each state throughout the course of the GulfCorps Program, in order to achieve the goals of the RESTORE Act FPL, including equal investment of at least \$1 million in each Gulf state. All restoration efforts will be coordinated between NOAA, the grant recipient(s) and our state and federal partners throughout the course of GulfCorps implementation.

2. GulfCorps Participant Recruitment, Training, and Management: Recruitment, training and management of GulfCorps participants will be the responsibility of the GulfCorps recipient organization(s), and should be focused on the skillsets appropriate to complete the selected restoration projects. Recruiting may include, but is not limited to, developing program outreach materials and engaging in relationships with regional or local entities that can reach coastal populations for GulfCorps participation. These may include schools, community organizations, job fairs, workforce centers, or other partners that can generate interest, recruit, and evaluate potential GulfCorps participants within Gulf coast communities.

Training should be prioritized to first meet the needs of the jointly selected restoration projects; although additional job-driven training of practical job skills to enhance GulfCorps participants' long-term conservation-based career growth is encouraged. Technical training may be included as a program cost; as well as additional professional growth training described above. With the funds currently provided through the RESTORE Act, NOAA estimates that 300 participants or 300,000 labor hours or more can be achieved over a three-year period; however, this is an estimate and not a requirement.

Award recipient(s) are responsible for the oversight, transportation, per diem, insurance, and general supplies of GulfCorps participants at the selected restoration project sites. These costs and other needed supplies should be justified within the budget narrative. General

tools and supplies may be included as program costs as necessary to train and prepare GulfCorps participants for the anticipated restoration efforts; however, project-specific equipment and supplies will be provided by the project sponsor(s) for the restoration projects in which the GulfCorps will participate. General tools and supplies may include, but are not limited to, monitoring equipment, safety gear and protective field clothing, hand tools, and office supplies. Applicants should plan to participate in multiple types of habitat restoration projects that can be accessed by land. NOAA seeks, but does not require, applicants that can work in multiple Gulf coast states.

B. Program Priorities

The program priorities for this funding opportunity primarily support NOAA's goals for marine fisheries, habitats, and biodiversity sustained within healthy and productive ecosystems, as well as support goals for community resiliency. In addition to the primary objectives provided above, priority will be given to proposed project applications that also demonstrate a sound strategy and competency in the following:

- Creating synergy across existing groups and entities to establish a regional identity and network that would serve as the foundation of a persistent GulfCorps;
- Partnering with training opportunities across the Gulf that will provide focused skill development in restoration techniques applicable to the objectives of this solicitation, and that may foster longer-termed career growth in conservation and restoration sectors;
- Achieving the goals of the GulfCorps Program as described in the RESTORE Act FPL, such as allocating funding evenly across Gulf states;
- Prioritizing funding towards GulfCorps participant training and labor that directly leads to on-the-ground habitat restoration; and
- Developing program sustainability through creating relationships and awareness of program benefits with the public, future potential GulfCorps participants, Council members, public and private sector partners, economic development organizations, and workforce investment boards/councils.

C. Program Authority

The Secretary of Commerce is authorized under the following statutes to provide grants and cooperative agreements for habitat restoration and conservation: Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act 16 U.S.C. 661, as amended by the Reorganization Plan No. 4 of 1970; and Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006, 16 U.S.C. 1891a. In addition, this program is supported under the RESTORE Act, Public Law 112-141, Subtitle F, and any funding provided will be subject to requirements that may arise under RESTORE policies at www.restorethegulf.gov.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Total anticipated funding for all awards is up to \$7 million. NOAA anticipates awarding as few awards as possible, while still meeting the full objectives of this FFO and NOAA's GulfCorps Program, including even distribution of funding across all five Gulf states; this includes the potential to award a single award. NOAA anticipates awarding multi-year awards, lasting three years, and releasing funds in annual increments to selected proposals through 2019 without further competition. There is no matching requirement for these funds; however, leveraging federal funds awarded with non-federal or in-kind contributions is encouraged.

The exact amount of funds that may be awarded will be determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA. Any funds provided to successful applicants will be at the discretion of the DARRP and the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD). The DARRP, in coordination with the NOAA Grants Officer, may choose to establish these cooperative agreements as "institutional awards." If a cooperative agreement is established as an institutional award, NOAA may issue new cooperative agreements to the recipient through a non-competitive selection process, after an independent merit review, provided the recipient demonstrates continued satisfactory performance and long-term common interests between the DARRP and the recipient. Funding for future awards is dependent upon the Council's FPL process (<https://restorethegulf.gov/council-selected-restoration-component>).

In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for application preparation costs if programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not obligate NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. There is no guarantee that sufficient funds will be available to make awards for all top-ranked applications. The number of awards to be made as a result of this solicitation will depend on the number of eligible applications received, the amount of funds requested by applicants, the merit and ranking of the applications, and the amount of funds made available by the Council through an Interagency Agreement, based on the RESTORE Council FPL.

B. Project/Award Period

NOAA anticipates that the period of performance for most awards will be for 36 months, but may award a project where the period of performance extends up to 48 months. The earliest anticipated start date for awards will be July 1, 2017.

Applicants should prepare an application that divides their funding request into three one-year allocations. Once funds are awarded in Fiscal Year 2017, recipients of multi-year awards will not need to compete for funding in subsequent years. NOAA expects, but is not obligated, to provide additional funding to these awards in subsequent years. Adding funds to multi-year awards, or continuing an award non-competitively after the original award period as an "institutional award," is at the discretion of NOAA, and will be based on progress towards milestones, the availability of restoration projects that meet the project selection considerations described in Section I.A- Program Objectives, and future allocations of funding from the Council as awarded through an Interagency Agreement between NOAA and the Council.

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable, however, pre-award costs may be considered during pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA. Incurring pre-award costs before NOAA GMD provides an award document is at the applicant's own risk. Permission to extend the period of performance beyond that stated in award documentation should be requested in writing at least 60 days in advance of an award's expiration date, as per NOAA Award Conditions.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Selected applications will be funded through cooperative agreements, as described in 2 C.F.R. Sec. 200.24, meaning that NOAA expects to be substantially involved in many aspects of the awards. Substantial involvement may include, but is not limited to, collaboration on the scope of work including restoration site selection, providing assistance with technical aspects of the program, review and comment on strategies and plans, review of procurement materials to the extent authorized by 2 C.F.R. Sec. 200.324, and tracking the progress towards the successful completion of the program and its related projects.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants are institutions of higher education, non-profits, commercial (for profit) organizations, U.S. territories, and state, local and Native American tribal governments. Applications from individuals, federal agencies, or employees of federal agencies will not be considered. Individuals and federal agencies are strongly encouraged to work with states, non-governmental organizations, municipal and county governments, and others that are eligible to apply.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

There is no matching requirement for these funds, but match is included in the evaluation criteria in Section V.A.4(d). If match is proposed, please note that federal sources cannot be considered as matching funds, but can be described in the budget narrative to demonstrate additional leverage and collaboration. Match to NOAA funds can come from a variety of public and private sources and can include third party in-kind goods and services. Refer to 2 C.F.R. 200.306 for cost sharing or matching policies. Applicants are permitted to combine contributions from non-federal partners, as long as such contributions are not used to match any other federal funds and are available within the project period stated in the application. Applicants with approved indirect cost rates planning to provide cost sharing may find it convenient to propose a portion or all of their indirect costs as match, since the valuation of such costs has already been federally approved and documentation is readily available. Refer to Section IV.F. "Funding Restrictions" for information on indirect costs.

Applicants whose proposals are selected for funding will be bound by the percentage of cost sharing reflected in the award document signed by NOAA's GMD, unless amended based on extenuating circumstances. NOAA is under no obligation to amend the matching contributions once agreed to by the recipient. Successful applicants should be prepared to carefully document matching contributions, including the overall number of non-paid volunteers and third party in-kind participation hours devoted to habitat restoration projects. Letters of commitment for any secured resources that will be used as match for an award under this solicitation should be submitted as an attachment to the application (see Section IV.B).

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

NOAA will not accept applications requesting less than \$1 million or more than \$7 million in federal funds from NOAA under this solicitation. Applications must be submitted by the due date and time provided in Section IV.D. Late applications will not be considered for funding. Submission time will be documented by electronic submission to Grants.gov, a U.S. Postal Service postmark, or a delivery service receipt. Information regarding electronic submission through Grants.gov is contained in Section IV.G. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. Applications submitted via the U.S. Postal Service must have an official postmark; private metered postmarks are not acceptable. Applications received later than seven (7) business days following the closing date will not be accepted. All applications **MUST** contain **ALL** required forms; if these forms are not signed via the www.Grants.gov application process, they **MUST** be signed in ink (SF-424, SF-424b, CD-511). Failure to submit necessary signed forms shall result in disqualification from this competition.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Complete application packages, including required federal forms and instructions, can be found on www.Grants.gov. If a prospective applicant is having difficulty downloading the application forms from www.Grants.gov, contact www.Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov. Instructions for these forms are available at <http://www.grants.gov/web/grants/form-instructions.html>.

B. Content and Form of Application

Applicants should apply through the www.Grants.gov website. A complete standard NOAA financial assistance application package should be submitted in accordance with the guidelines in this document. Each application must include the application forms from the SF-424 form family:

- Application for Federal Assistance: Form SF-424 (7/03 version or newer)
- Budget Information for Non-construction Programs: Form SF-424A (prior to award, an SF-424A for each year of funding will be required)
- Assurances for Non-construction Programs: Form SF-424B
- Certification Regarding Lobbying: Form CD-511
- Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: Form SF-LLL (if applicable)

In addition, NOAA recommends the following as part of a complete application package:

- Project summary (described below, 2 page limit);
- Project narrative (described below, 15 page limit);
- A data management plan (described below, 2 page limit);
- A detailed budget justification (described below, 6 page limit);
- Other relevant supporting materials (15 page limit) such as:
 - Brief curriculum vitae or resume for up to four (4) key personnel (maximum of one page per person); and discussion of partner contribution(s) to the proposed activities;
 - Examples, with documentation and photos as available, of projects similar in scope and nature that have been successfully completed by the project team;
 - Any other relevant supporting materials such as letters of support from proposed partners, and documentation of a federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement. See IV.F., Funding Restrictions.

Applications submitted through the www.Grants.gov website should include a maximum of three files (PDF files only) in addition to the Federal application forms: 1) Summary, narrative, and data management plan (not to exceed 19 pages total, as outlined above); 2) Budget justification (6 pages); and 3) Supplemental information - all other attachments combined into one indexed file, such as maps, curriculum vitae, and support letters, not to exceed 15 pages. Page limits assume a 12 point font and 1 inch margins.

1. Project Summary (2 page limit):

- Applicant Organization(s)
- Project Title
- Location: geographic area in which the applicant is prepared to provide GulfCorps labor
- Proposed Partners: Provide a list of other partners that will be meaningfully contributing to the program, if known.
- Brief Project Description/Executive Summary: Briefly describe the activities to be implemented with the requested funds including: 1) an understanding of, and experience with, conducting coastal habitat restoration similar to that described in this solicitation; 2) an understanding of, and experience with, conservation corps groups, including knowledge of typical operations and training that supports post-participation career development; and 3) a proposed approach to effectively establish a regional GulfCorps program, including how the approach supports GulfCorps sustainability post-award.
- Implementation Start Date for the proposed project activities (not proposed award start date)
- Roles and Responsibilities: Discuss the roles and general responsibilities of the primary project partners, and co-applicants if applicable, and how the work will be distributed across the team.
- Amount of Federal Funding Requested per year
- Total Federal Funds Requested & Non-Federal Match Proposed, if applicable
- Overall Project Cost

2. Project Narrative (15 page limit):

The project narrative should closely follow the organization of the evaluation criteria (see Section V. A. Evaluation Criteria) for the application to receive a consistent review against competing applications. Applications submitted under this solicitation should demonstrate how the proposed program will result in coastal habitat or water quality restoration, and generate a sustainable GulfCorps across the Gulf states. Successful applications will: 1) demonstrate technical and administrative capacity to implement a variety of projects, at times simultaneously, that restore habitat and water quality in each Gulf state using conservation corps labor, 2) demonstrate partnerships, resources, and knowledge to build a GulfCorps that is likely to be sustainable beyond the life of the NOAA award period and foster longer-term employment, and 3) contribute to local employment and environmental stewardship by providing GulfCorps participants transferable skills, experience, and career-building opportunities in the field of conservation and restoration.

The narrative should discuss:

- a logistical strategy for GulfCorps implementation that includes GulfCorps personnel

- management, program management, and vision for NOAA, state, and other partner collaboration;
- how recruiting, focused on disadvantaged populations, will be pursued across the region, including how outreach and education will improve awareness of the GulfCorps in the region over time;
 - how the GulfCorps participants will be trained and mobilized to participate in restoration projects;
 - whether the applicant has the capacity and capability to develop training and educational opportunities for GulfCorps participation to help provide continuity of operations and employment between project mobilizations;
 - areas of program implementation where synergy or resource leveraging is possible to expand or optimize GulfCorps function;
 - how the GulfCorps participants could be equipped to transfer training gained into career growth in restoration-based vocations; and
 - specific metrics regarding crew data, training, employment, and other societal benefits that may be relevant to determine outcome-based performance.

The project narrative should include a discussion of how activities will generally be sequenced and the anticipated time table for completing program development milestones. This includes providing a sense of scale or context as to the probable capacity of the GulfCorps to conduct work during the grant period, such as how many crews can be simultaneously active across the region, and the typical size of each crew.

Applications should identify annual/interim milestones that correspond to funding increments. As described in Section II.B, NOAA will consider progress towards identified milestones when making funding decisions for multi-year awards in subsequent years. In addition to training to perform restoration labor, applicants should indicate their level of experience in training corps participants to complete basic ecological monitoring for the restoration types described in Section I.A. "Program Objectives," should GulfCorps participants be deployed to perform ecological monitoring on some projects. As an example, the NOAA Restoration Center has provided recommendations for implementation monitoring of four specific habitat types in "NOAA Restoration Center Implementation Monitoring- Guidance for Proposing and Conducting 'Tier 1' Monitoring" available at http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/pdf/NOAA_RC_Tier1_Monitoring_Guidance.pdf. Crew capacity and training should be described; however, GulfCorps participant activities will be based on existing monitoring plans.

3. Data Management Plan (2 pages)

Proposals submitted in response to this FFO should include a Data Management Plan of up

to two pages describing how data management requirements will be satisfied. The Data Management Plan should be aligned with the Data Sharing Plan examples provided by NOAA at: <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>. 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; methods for providing data access; approximate total volume of data to be collected; and prior experience in making such data accessible. The costs of data preparation, accessibility, or archiving may be included in the proposal budget unless otherwise stated in the Guidance. Accepted submission of data to the NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) is one way to satisfy data sharing requirements; however, NCEI is not obligated to accept all submissions and may charge a fee, particularly for large or unusual datasets. Final Data Management Plans will be developed in coordination with NOAA as part of NOAA's substantial involvement, as described in Section II.C. If the applicant does not propose to generate environmental data, a Data Management Plan is not required as part of the proposal, but the reason for omitting the Data Management Plan should be clearly stated.

This program is supported under the RESTORE Act, Public Law 112-141, Subtitle F, and any funding provided will also be subject to Data Management requirements that arise under RESTORE policies during the course of the award, such as those at <https://www.restorethegulf.gov/gcerc-grants-office/gcerc-grants-resources>.

4. Budget Justification (6 pages):

The budget justification narrative 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 award, with a detailed narrative justification for both the federal and non-federal shares, if applicable. The object classes should match those found in the Form SF-424A. Award costs should be broken into annual/interim funding requests up to three years in duration, based on logical milestones in the implementation plan. Additional budget development guidance is available at https://coast.noaa.gov/funding/_pdf/forms/budget-narrative-guidance-GMD-04.09.2015.pdf. The NOAA Restoration Center and GMD staff will review budget information in recommended applications to determine if costs are allowable, allocable, reasonable, and realistic. The narrative budget justification should be sufficiently detailed to enable a clear understanding of the cost breakdown and calculations used to derive the line item subtotals in each object class of the SF-424A budget form. Additionally, the budget narrative should be clear in cost breakdown per project partner or sub-award/sub-contract, as applicable.

C. Unique Entity Identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Applicants should: (1) Be registered in the System for Award Management (SAM) before submitting an application; (2) provide a valid Data Universal Number System (DUNS) number on an application; and (3) continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a federal awarding agency. The federal awarding agency may not make a federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable DUNS and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time the federal awarding agency is ready to make a federal award, the federal awarding agency may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a federal award to another applicant.

Applicants should allow a minimum of seven to ten (7-10) days to complete the SAM registration

(https://www.sam.gov/sam/transcript/Quick_Guide_for_Grants_Registrations.pdf); registration is required only once but must be periodically renewed. Applicants can receive a DUNS number at no cost by calling the dedicated toll-free DUNS Number request line at 1-866-705-5711 or online at <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform>. Your organization's Employer Identification Number (EIN) will be needed on the application form.

D. Submission Dates and Times

Applications must be postmarked, provided to a delivery service, or received by www.Grants.gov by 11:59 PM Eastern time on March 2, 2017. The time the application was provided to a delivery service must be documented with a receipt. No facsimile or electronic mail applications will be accepted. See Section III.C for more information regarding application requirements, including a limit on transit time.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted under the FFO are subject to the provisions of Executive Order 12372, "Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs." Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 19 on Form SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC). To find out about and comply with a State's process under Executive Order 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOC's are listed on the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants_spoec.

F. Funding Restrictions

Pre-award costs are generally unallowable in this program, however, pre-award costs

may be considered and discussed during pre-award negotiations between the applicant and NOAA representatives. Incurring pre-award costs before the NOAA GMD provides an award document (generally via NOAA Grants Online on Form CD-450) is at the applicant's own risk. The earliest date for receipt of awards for this funding opportunity is anticipated to be July 1, 2017.

The budget may include indirect (facilities & administrative [F&A]) costs if the applicant has an established indirect cost rate with the federal government. As defined at 2 C.F.R. 200.56, indirect (F&A) costs are incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one cost objective, and not readily assignable to the cost objectives specifically benefitted, without effort disproportionate to the results achieved (e.g. lights, rent, water, and insurance). A copy of the current, approved negotiated indirect (F&A) cost agreement with the federal government should be included with the application. In accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.414(f), an applicant that has never received a negotiated indirect cost rate, may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10% of modified total direct costs (MTDC), describe all costs as direct costs in the budget narrative, or establish a new rate through the Department of Commerce by contacting Lamar Revis, Grants Officer at the NOAA Grants Management Division, at lamar.revis@noaa.gov. Applicants may elect to propose all or part of indirect costs as cost sharing.

G. Other Submission Requirements

Applicants should submit applications electronically through www.Grants.gov. Users of Grants.gov will be able to use an online Workspace, or download a copy of the application package, complete it offline, and then submit the application via the Grants.gov site. If an applicant has problems downloading the application forms or using the Workspace, contact Grants.gov Customer Support at 1-800-518-4726 or support@Grants.gov. We highly recommend that applicants do not wait until the application deadline to begin the application process through Grants.gov, as registration with SAM and DUNS are required, as described in Section IV.C.

After electronic submission of the application, applicants will receive an automatic acknowledgment from Grants.gov that contains a Grants.gov tracking number. Applications submitted through Grants.gov will be accompanied by THREE (3) automated responses (the first confirms receipt; the second confirms that the submission is acceptable and timely; and the third validates that the application has been forwarded to NOAA for further processing). If ALL notifications are not received, applicants should follow up with both the Grants.gov help desk and the NOAA Restoration Center to confirm NOAA receipt of the complete submission.

PLEASE NOTE: It may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. Applicants should allow themselves sufficient time to submit their application to Grants.gov in advance of the deadline to ensure applications have been submitted successfully, as waivers of the submission deadline will not be granted. Late applications will not be accepted.

If an applicant is unable to use the preferred submission method (Grants.gov) or is unsure about the success of their submission to Grants.gov, a signed hard copy application must be postmarked, or provided to a delivery service and documented with a receipt, by the deadline under "Submission Dates and Times" in Section IV.D and sent to: NOAA Restoration Center, NOAA Fisheries, 1315 East West Highway, Rm. 14853, Silver Spring, MD 20910. ATTN: GulfCorps Grants. Mandatory requirements regarding signatures, the maximum transit time, and the format of hard copy applications are described in Section III.C.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Reviewers will assign scores to applications ranging from 0 to 100 points based on the following five standard NOAA evaluation criteria and respective weights specified below. Applications that best address these criteria will be most competitive.

1. Importance and Applicability (18 points): This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to the priorities presented in this solicitation. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:
 - (a) Applicability– To what extent is the proposed work relevant to the objectives and priorities provided in the solicitation, as described in Section I.A and I.B, across the Gulf coast? (6 points)
 - (b) Sustainability - How great is the potential of the proposed program to be sustainable and provide lasting benefits to coastal habitats and communities beyond the life of this award? (8 points)
 - (c) Leveraging Resources – To what extent does the application leverage existing resources or generate and leverage partnerships, thereby generating efficiencies in implementation of the GulfCorp? Are these efficiencies and partnerships meaningful to the success of the program? (4 points)

2. Technical/Scientific Merit (28 points): This criterion assesses whether the program approach is technically sound, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear goals and objectives. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the extent to which the applicant has described a realistic and thorough implementation plan that includes:

- (a) Tangible Results/Measurable Goals- To what extent does the proposed program generate results that meet the objectives provided in Section I.A.? To what extent will the proposed program be able to report progress towards broad goals and measure near-term implementation success? Are metrics and targets proposed that measure restoration and GulfCorps participation benefits? (7 points)
- (b) Recruiting – To what extent does the application provide a sound process for recruiting GulfCorps participants across each Gulf state? To what extent does the application provide recruitment strategies that can be responsive to the objectives of this program? (4 points)
- (c) Training - To what extent does the application provide a sound approach to training that is relevant to the types of restoration activities provided in this solicitation? To what extent does the applicant discuss experience in providing training for these types of activities, or is competent and experienced in developing partnerships with other entities that can provide focused training? (4 points)
- (d) Restoration Labor – To what extent does the application provide a sound approach to provide labor to multiple restoration projects, at times concurrently across the Gulf coast states, and demonstrate competency in habitat restoration? (5 points)
- (e) Feasibility of program management and implementation- To what extent does the application provide a specific approach to developing and managing the GulfCorps that is feasible, realistic, and technically sound? To what extent does the application describe a feasible personnel management structure that can provide adequate coverage across the Gulf coast states? To what extent does the application describe the proposed actions, key milestones throughout the course of the program, and a realistic time frame to reach those milestones within the proposed award period? (7 points)
- (f) Public Access to Data- Does the application include a Data Management Plan including descriptions of the types of environmental data and information 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? (1 point)

3. Overall Qualifications of Applicant (24 points): This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to support the proposed award. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following (as demonstrated by attached resumes, past project experience, and accomplishments of the key technical and financial staff):

- (a) Restoration and Conservation Background- Does the applicant have the capacity and knowledge to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work, as indicated by the qualifications and evidenced by past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in

implementing and effectively managing and overseeing projects that restore marine and coastal habitats? (10 points)

(b) Conservation Corps Management Capacity- Does the applicant describe the necessary experience, facilities, equipment, partnership engagement, and management capabilities available to successfully fulfill the responsibilities associated with establishing and maintaining the GulfCorps for the life of the award? Is there experience in such activities as indicated by the qualifications and evidenced by past experience of the project leaders and/or partners in implementing conservation corps-type programs? (10 points)

(c) Fiscal Responsibility for Grants – Does the applicant describe 1) the administrative resources and capabilities available to the applicant, or that will be secured, to support and successfully accomplish grant management responsibilities; 2) the applicant's history, with NOAA or other grantor agencies, in demonstrating project accountability and tracking; and 3) the applicant's capability to efficiently manage multiple projects simultaneously including the financial and administrative management of sub-awards to partners, as applicable? (4 points)

4. Project Costs (20 points): This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the program's needs and time-frame. For this competition, applications will be evaluated on the following:

(a) Cost-benefit Comparison- Has the applicant demonstrated that a significant impact and benefit will be generated at a reasonable cost, based on the applicant's stated objectives and time frame? (6 points)

(b) Budget Detail- Has the applicant demonstrated a realistic understanding of project costs by providing a budget (broken down by SF-424A object classes) that provides sufficient detail and credible cost estimates and justifications for both federal and non-federal shares? If funds are requested for multiple partners, the application should include a budget for each partner/sub-recipient to place the funding request in context. (6 points)

(c) Funding Priorities- Does the proposed budget direct the majority of federal funds, including funds for salaries, to implement GulfCorps employment, compared to the percentage used for general program support including administration? (5 points)

(d) Matching Funds- To what extent will the applicant leverage the federal investment through matching contributions? NOAA desires leveraging of resources to further encourage coordination among potential partners and promote post-award sustainability (any applicant proposing at least 1:1 confirmed non-federal match will receive the full 3 points for this criterion). (3 points)

5. Outreach and Education (10 points): This criterion assesses whether the recipient can deliver a focused and effective training and community outreach strategy for the GulfCorps. For this competition, applications will be evaluated based on the following:

- (a) Community Outreach- Does the proposed program include a sound strategy for engaging coastal communities to participate in the program? To what degree does the program include marketing or other outreach mechanisms to expand awareness of the GulfCorps and draw in a network of partners? (5 points)
- (b) GulfCorps Participant Education- Does the applicant include a sound approach for educating GulfCorps participants in conservation and coastal habitat restoration? Does the applicant have an approach or demonstrate a network of partners or educational opportunities that can serve as a springboard for continuing career growth in conservation and restoration after the participants' term in the GulfCorps? (5 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

Applications will undergo an initial administrative screening to determine if they are eligible and complete. NOAA, at its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues that may be easily rectified or cured. Applications are screened to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Section IV. D. Submission Dates and Times); the applicant is eligible to apply; and it includes a project summary, project description, budget, and supporting documentation as outlined in Section IV.B. Content and Form of Application. NOAA is not required to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause the application to be rejected or receive a poor evaluation. However, if deficiencies are identified by NOAA or the applicant, the applicant may correct any deficiencies in their application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it. Eligible applications will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process to determine how well they meet the program priorities and evaluation criteria of this solicitation and the mission and goals of NOAA.

Eligible applications will be evaluated by three or more merit reviewers as part of a panel review process based on the Evaluation Criteria listed above. The panel will be comprised of federal employees and may convene in person or by teleconference, video conference, or other electronic means to discuss applications. Prior to the panel discussion, each member of the panel will independently assign a numerical score for each proposal based on the evaluation criteria above. An interim ranking will be established based on these scores and presented to the panel for discussion. The panel will reach consensus on the applications to be recommended for funding. The panel will rate all proposals as highly responsive, moderately responsive, or not responsive to the evaluation criteria. The panel may also receive comments on one or more proposals to consider during their deliberations. Comments may be sought from merit reviewers both internal and external to NOAA, at the discretion of the competition manager. This rating will be presented to the Selecting Official (SO) for funding consideration and will be the primary consideration of the SO in deciding

which applications will be recommended to the NOAA GMD, pending the application of selection factors below.

C. Selection Factors

The SO anticipates recommending applications for funding in rank order unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following selection factors:

- (1) Availability of funding;
- (2) Balance/distribution of funds: a) by geographic area, b) by type of institutions, c) by type of partners, d) by research areas; or 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 set out in Sections I.A. and I.B.;
- (5) An applicant's prior award performance;
- (6) Partnerships and/or participation of targeted groups; and
- (7) Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the NOAA GMD.

Hence, awards may not necessarily be made to the highest-scored applications. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their application was not among those recommended for funding. Unsuccessful applications submitted in hard copy will be kept on file in accordance with NOAA records requirements and then destroyed.

NOAA may select all, some, or none of the applications, or part of any application, ask applicants to work together or combine projects, defer applications to the future, or reallocate funds to different funding categories, to the extent authorized. Applicants may be asked to modify objectives, work plans or budgets, and provide supplemental information required by the agency prior to the award. The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the activities of each project will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office, and NOAA program staff.

For any Federal award over \$150,000, prior to making the award NOAA is required to review and consider any information about the applicant that is in the designated integrity and performance system accessible through SAM (currently FAPIIS) (see 41 U.S.C. 2313). An applicant, at its option, may review information in the designated integrity and performance systems accessible through SAM and comment on any information about itself that a Federal awarding agency previously entered. NOAA will consider any comments by

the applicant, in addition to the other information in the designated integrity and performance system, in making a judgment about the applicant's integrity, business ethics, and record of performance under Federal awards when completing the review of risk posed by applicants as described in 2 C.F.R. 200.205 Federal awarding agency review of risk posed by applicants.

In accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.205, the NOAA Grants Officer will review financial and grants administration aspects of a proposed award, including conducting an assessment of the risk posed by the applicant. In addition to reviewing repositories of government-wide eligibility, qualifications or financial integrity information, the risk assessment conducted by NOAA may consider items such as: the financial stability of an applicant; quality of the applicant's management systems; an applicant's history of performance; previous audit reports and audit findings concerning the applicant; and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-federal entities. Applicants should be in compliance with the terms of any existing NOAA grants or cooperative agreements and otherwise eligible to receive federal awards, or make arrangements satisfactory to the Grants Officer, to be considered for funding under this competition. This includes timely submission of all performance progress and financial reports and resolution of any concerns raised by the agency. Upon review of these factors, if appropriate, specific award conditions that respond to the degree of risk may be applied by the NOAA Grants Officer pursuant to 2 C.F.R. 200.207. In addition, NOAA reserves the right to reject an application in its entirety where information is uncovered that raises a significant risk with respect to the responsibility or suitability of an applicant. The final approval of selected applications and issuance of awards will be by the NOAA Grants Officer. The award decision of the Grants Officer is final and there is no right of appeal.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

NOAA will attempt to notify highly-ranked applicants by June 30, 2017. The earliest anticipated start date for awards will be July 1, 2017. Applicants that initiate award activities in anticipation of federal funding do so at their own risk, and are advised not to begin award-related work until a notice of award is received electronically from the NOAA GMD in Grants Online, NOAA's online financial assistance management system.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

The exact amount of funds to be awarded, the final scope of activities including monitoring, the award duration, and specific NOAA cooperative involvement with the

activities of each NOAA GulfCorps Program cooperative agreement will be determined in pre-award negotiations among the applicant, the NOAA GMD, and NOAA staff that will administer these awards. The official notice of award is the Standard Form CD-450, Financial Assistance Award, issued by the NOAA Grants Officer electronically through NOAA's Grants Online system. The authorizing document, the CD-450 award cover page, is provided to the appropriate business office of the recipient organization. It is available at <http://go.usa.gov/SNMR>. The Internet Explorer browser should be used with Grants Online.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

1. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390), are applicable to this solicitation. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXC7A>.

2. Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements at 2 C.F.R. 200, implemented by the Department of Commerce at 2 C.F.R. 1327.101, apply to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/cXCJQ>.

3. The Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions will apply to awards in this program. A current version of this document is available at <http://go.usa.gov/hKbj>. In addition, award documents provided by NOAA may contain special award conditions, including those limiting the use of funds for compliance activities such as outstanding environmental compliance requirements, which will be applied on a case-by-case basis, and requirements for submitting progress reports. These award conditions are subject to change prior to award but examples are provided at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html>.

4. NEPA Requirements- NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts for individual awards as required by NEPA. This program is funded under the RESTORE Act and is covered by the Council's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Categorical Exclusion for training, technical assistance, and other related activities. Corps participant labor will be used on projects funded through Deepwater Horizon oil spill settlements, and other funded federal or state projects where applicable environmental compliance and permitting is already completed, as described in Section I.A. Consequently, any additional environmental impacts that will result from this effort will be assessed by NOAA, and additional information from the applicant is not required.

5. NOAA's Data Sharing Policy- Environmental data and information collected or created under NOAA grants or cooperative agreements must be made discoverable by and accessible to the general public, in a timely fashion (typically within two years), free of charge or at no

more than the cost of reproduction, unless an exemption is granted by the NOAA Program. Data should be available in at least one machine-readable format, preferably a widely-used or open-standard format, and should also be accompanied by machine-readable documentation (metadata), preferably based on widely used or international standards. NOAA may, at its own discretion, make publicly visible the Data Management Plan from funded proposals, or use information from the Data Management Plan to produce a formal metadata record and include that metadata in a Catalog to indicate the pending availability of new data. Proposal submitters are hereby advised that the final pre-publication manuscripts of scholarly articles produced entirely or primarily with NOAA funding will be required to be submitted to the NOAA Institutional Repository after acceptance, and no later than upon publication. Such manuscripts shall be made publicly available by NOAA one year after publication by the journal. More information about the Data Sharing Policy is available on NOAA's Environmental Data Management Committee website at: www.nosc.noaa.gov/EDMC/PD.DSP.php

6. Certifications Regarding Tax Liability and Felony Criminal Convictions- When applicable under appropriations law, NOAA will provide certain applicants a form to be completed by the applicant's authorized representative making a certification regarding Federally-assessed unpaid or delinquent tax liability or recent felony criminal convictions under any Federal law.

7. Limitation of Liability- Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of Federal appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not yet have been appropriated for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs fail to receive funding or are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Recipients and sub-recipients are subject to all Federal laws and agency policies, regulations and procedures applicable to Federal financial assistance awards.

C. Reporting

Award recipients will be required to submit financial and performance (technical) reports in accordance with 2 C.F.R. 200.327-329 and the Department of Commerce Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. Progress reports shall use the NOAA Restoration Center's progress report narrative format and form approved by OMB under control number 0648 0472. This form will be provided to awardees by the NOAA Federal Program Officer. In addition, award recipients proposing multiple site locations may be

required to complete individual reports for each site, or provide a project/site list including status and expenditures.

Narrative progress reports shall be due on the same fiscal year schedule as financial reports (Oct. 30 and April 30) covering April 1-September 30 and October 1-March 31, respectively. A comprehensive final report covering all activities during the award period is required and must be received by NOAA within 90 days after the end date of this award.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6106 Note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at www.FSRS.gov on all subawards of \$25,000 and over.

VII. Agency Contacts

Supplemental Guidance regarding application writing, a checklist to submit a complete application, and FAQs about this FFO can be found at <http://www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/applicantresources.html> and www.habitat.noaa.gov/funding/gulfcorps.html, respectively.

For further information contact Melanie Gange at (301) 427-8664, Melanie.Gange@noaa.gov, or Cheryl Brodnax at Cheryl.Brodnax@noaa.gov. Prospective applicants are strongly encouraged to contact NOAA Restoration Center staff before submitting an application to discuss their NOAA GulfCorps Program ideas with respect to the objectives described in this FFO. NOAA will make every effort to respond to prospective applicants on a first come, first served basis. These discussions will not include review of draft proposals or site visits during the application period.

VIII. Other Information

Funds awarded cannot necessarily pay for all the costs that the recipient might incur in the course of carrying out an award. Generally, costs that are allowable include salaries, equipment and supplies, as long as these are "necessary and reasonable" specifically for the purpose of the award. Allowable costs are determined by reference to the OMB Uniform Guidance at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, codified by the Department of Commerce at 1327.101. All cost reimbursement sub-awards (e.g. subgrants, subcontracts) are subject to those federal cost principles applicable to the particular type of organization concerned.

Applications submitted in response to this FFO may be subject to requests for release under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) (5 U.S.C. § 552). In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information which is exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Department of Commerce regulations implementing FOIA are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA.