

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: Fiscal Year 2012 Scallop Research Set-Aside

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-NEFSC-2012-2003101

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.454, Unallied Management Projects

Dates: Full proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov on or before 5 p.m. EST on Friday, October 7, 2011. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline. 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. Mark hard copy proposals "Attention-2012 Scallop Research Set-Aside Program."

Funding Opportunity Description: NMFS, in coordination with the New England Fishery Management Council (Council), is soliciting Atlantic Sea Scallop (scallop) research proposals to utilize scallop Total Allowable Catch (TAC) that has been set-aside by the Council to fund scallop research endeavors through the 2012 Atlantic Sea Scallop Research Set-Aside (RSA) Program (March 1, 2012-February 28, 2013). No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Rather, proceeds generated from the sale of RSA quota will be used to fund research activities and compensate vessels that participate in research activities and/or harvest set-aside quota.

Projects funded under the Scallop RSA Program must enhance the knowledge of the scallop fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which scallop management decisions are made. Priority will be given to scallop research proposals that investigate research priorities identified by the Council, which are detailed under the Program Priorities section of this announcement.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Scallop RSA Program was established through the Atlantic Sea Scallop Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to address scallop research priorities identified by the Council. NMFS, in coordination with the Council, is soliciting proposals for scallop research to be conducted under the 2012 Scallop RSA Program. Set-aside quota will be awarded to successful applicants.

B. Program Priorities

Projects funded under the Scallop RSA Program must enhance understanding of the scallop resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. NMFS and the Council will give priority to funding research proposals in the following areas:

2012 Scallop RSA Program Needs and Priorities

HIGHEST PRIORITIES (not listed in order of importance):

1. An intensive industry-based survey of each of the access areas (access areas in Georges Bank including Closed Area I, Closed Area II, and Nantucket Lightship, as well as Delmarva, Hudson Canyon, and Great South Channel, if approved). These surveys can then be used to estimate TACs under the rotational area management program if the data from these surveys are available by August of the prior fishing year.

2. Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce bycatch of all managed species including projects that determine seasonal bycatch rates of yellowtail flounder, and other key bycatch species.

3. Research to support the assessment of the loggerhead turtle population in the Mid-Atlantic (i.e., satellite tagging and investigation of seasonal movements, etc.) and identification of sources of sea turtle interactions and/or identification of ways to minimize interactions with sea turtles. Priority topics include development and monitoring of scallop dredge and trawl operations that would reduce or eliminate the threat or harm of sea turtle interactions. Other issues related to sea turtle research include, but are not limited to: gear modifications or fishing techniques that may be used to reduce or eliminate the threat of sea turtle interactions without unacceptable reduction in scallop retention, and using available and appropriate technology to quantify the extent that gear modifications reduce turtle mortalities, and turtle behavior.

MEDIUM PRIORITY (not listed in order of importance):

1. Other resource surveys to expand and/or enhance the NMFS annual dredge survey including open areas and determine NMFS survey dredge efficiency in those other resource areas. For this priority, NMFS and the Council are seeking resource information from areas outside of the range of the typical NMFS survey station locations and also information on the efficiency of the NMFS survey dredge.
2. Scallop biology, specifically studies aimed at understanding incidental gear mortality, discard mortality and seasonal growth.

OTHER PRIORITIES (not listed in order of importance):

1. Scallop biology, including studies aimed at understanding recruitment processes (reproduction, larval and early post-settlement stages), growth, and natural mortality (including predation and disease).
2. Identification and evaluation of methods to reduce habitat impacts, including, but not limited to: broader investigation of variability in dredging efficiency across habitats, times, areas, and gear designs; and research on habitat effects from scallop fishing, including the development of practicable methods to minimize or mitigate those impacts.
3. Habitat characterization research including, but not limited to: video and/or photo transects of the bottom within scallop access areas and within closed scallop areas and in comparable fished areas that are both subject and not subject to scallop fishing before and after scallop fishing commences; development of high-resolution sediment mapping of scallop fishing areas using Canadian sea scallop industry mapping efforts as an example process; identification of nursery and over-wintering habitats of species that are vulnerable to habitat alteration by scallop fishing; and other research that relates to habitats affected by scallop fishing, such as long-term or chronic effects of scallop fishing on marine resource productivity, other ecosystem effects, habitat recovery potential, and fine scale fishing effort in relation to fine scale habitat distribution. In particular, NMFS and the Council are seeking projects that directly support evaluation of present and candidate Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) closures and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC) to assess whether these areas are accomplishing their stated purposes and to assist better definition of the complex ecosystem processes that occur in these areas.
4. Improved information concerning scallop abundance and evaluation of the distribution, size composition, and density of scallops, including but not limited to: efforts to develop a cooperative industry-based resource survey; high resolution surveys that include distribution, biomass of exploitable size scallops; recruitment, mortality, and growth rate information; research that provides more detailed scallop life history information (especially on age and area specific natural mortality and growth) and to identify stock-recruitment

relationships; and intensive sampling on both sides of access boundaries for fishing year 2007 and in subsequent years to gauge the short-and long-terms effects of fishing on the resource.

5. Scallop and area management research, including but not limited to: evaluation of ways to control predation on scallops; research to actively manage spat collection and seeding of sea scallops; social and economic impacts and consequences of closing areas to enhance productivity and improve yield of sea scallops and other species; and estimation of factors affecting fishing power for each limited access vessel.

6. If a habitat research area is identified in a future action, allow RSA funds to be used for projects to enhance scallop production using rotational strategies. In the event that the habitat omnibus amendment were to establish habitat research areas, this priority encourages the use of RSA funds to seed these areas with scallops for the purpose of enhancing biomass and yield under the rotational management program.

7. Development of methodologies for the scallop fleet to collect and analyze catch data on a near real-time basis (i.e., meat weight, bycatch, etc. "Study fleet" concept).

8. Continue scallop dredge environmental impact studies (e.g., research that evaluates dredge impacts on habitat and other aspects of the environment).

C. Program Authority

Statutory authority for this program is provided under sections 303(b)(11), 402(e), and 404(c) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, 16 U.S.C. 1853(b)(11), 16 U.S.C. 1881a(e), and 16 U.S.C. 1881(c), respectively.

The Scallop RSA Program is established through the Scallop FMP (69 FR 35193, June 23, 2004) and implementing regulations at 50 CFR 648.56.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Amendment 15 to the FMP made several program adjustments that change how RSA quota is awarded and harvested. RSA TAC is now a set amount of 1.25 million pounds per scallop fishing year. All scallop RSA quota awards will be made in pounds of scallops, and will not be associated with a specific fishing area or days-at-sea allocation. RSA quota may now be harvested from any area that is open to the scallop fishery (i.e., open access areas and open areas). Applicants should be aware that yellowtail flounder bycatch in the scallop fishery may restrict the harvest of RSA quota in certain times and areas.

The RSA program was designed to correspond with the biennial framework quota specification cycle. Because Framework 22 established quota specifications for the 2011 and 2012 fishing years, and the 2011 RSA awards have already been made, this solicitation is for 2012 only. The next scallop RSA solicitation will be for the 2013 and 2014 fishing years.

To apply for set-aside quota, applicants must submit a budget that is based solely on monetary needs, which includes funds necessary to execute the research plan and funds necessary to compensate vessel owners harvesting set-aside quota.

Upon project selection, NMFS will negotiate with successful applicants on the specific RSA quota award. Priority will be given primarily to the higher technically ranked proposal, although additional factors such as individual project needs and cost effectiveness may be considered during negotiations. NMFS will establish a common scallop price estimate, based on the best and most recent data available, to determine the amount of set-aside necessary to cover research and compensation fishing expenses.

If the entire RSA quota is not awarded, NMFS could award unused RSA quota to compensate projects in the event of low scallop prices or to expand a project rather than having that RSA quota go unused. Therefore, if there is RSA quota available after all awards are made, a project that was awarded RSA quota would be permitted to apply for additional RSA quota to expand its research project or for compensation if the actual scallop price per pound is less than estimated in the FFO. Such applications will be considered on a case by case basis. In the unlikely event there is unused RSA quota, the specific guidelines, criteria, and details of the application process for the subsequent allocation will be included in the award letters to the successful applicants and posted on the NMFS website.

No Federal funds are provided for research under this notification. Funds generated from landings harvested and sold under the Scallop RSA Program shall be used to cover the cost of research activities, including vessel costs. For example, the funds may be used to pay for gear modifications, monitoring equipment, the salaries of research personnel, or vessel operation costs. The Federal Government is not liable for any costs incurred by the researcher or vessel owner should the sale of catch not fully reimburse the researcher or vessel owner for their expenses. Any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings, above the cost of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.B.

B. Project/Award Period

Proposals may be submitted for research activities that encompass all or part of the 2012 scallop fishing years (March 1, 2012, through February 28, 2013). Scallop RSA compensation fishing may begin in areas that are open to the scallop fishery once the grant

has been awarded. Amendment 15 to the FMP extended the compensation fishing period by 3-months beyond the end of the fishing year. Therefore, compensation fishing for projects selected under the 2012 Scallop RSA Program must be completed by June 1, 2013.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement by NOAA in the management of the project. Examples of substantial involvement may include but are not limited to, proposals for collaboration between NOAA scientists and a recipient scientist. Funding for contractual arrangements for services or products for delivery to NOAA is not available under this notice.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

1. Eligible applicants include, but are not limited to, institutions of higher education, hospitals, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state, local, and Native American tribal governments. Federal agencies and institutions are not eligible to receive Federal assistance under this notice. Additionally, employees of any Federal agency or Regional Fishery Management (RFM) Council are ineligible to submit an application under this program. However, RFM Council members who are not Federal employees may submit an application.

2. DOC/NOAA supports cultural and gender diversity and encourages women and minority individuals and groups to submit applications to the RSA program. In addition, 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. DOC/NOAA encourages proposals involving any of the above institutions.

3. DOC/NOAA encourages applications from members of the fishing community and applications that involve fishing community cooperation and participation.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

None Required

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

1. Research proposals submitted under the 2012 Scallop RSA Program must be received

within the application submission period to be eligible for consideration.

2. Proposals for different and distinct projects must be submitted separately in accordance with the format requirements in Section IV.B. Multiple stand-alone projects in the same proposal will not be accepted.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application information is available at <http://www.grants.gov>. Electronic copies of the Standard Forms for submission of research proposals may be found on the Internet in a PDF (Portable Document Format) version at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov/ago/grants/forms.cfm>. Delays may be experienced when registering with Grants.gov near the end of a solicitation period. Therefore, NOAA strongly recommends that you do not wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through Grants.gov. Applicants without Internet access may contact Eric Eidswick, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, by phone 508-495-2009, fax 508-495-2004, or email eric.eidswick@noaa.gov. To apply for this NOAA Federal funding opportunity, please go to <http://www.grants.gov>, and use the following funding opportunity #: NMFS-NEFSC-2012-2003101.

B. Content and Form of Application

Should a recipient wish to include a coversheet with his/her proposal, the coversheet should summarize key information already contained within the proposal which includes the program name, date, applicant name, project title, project duration, principal investigator(s), program priorities addressed, pounds requested, and funds requested broken down by research, compensation, and total value.

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

1. Applications

a. Applications submitted to the 2012 Scallop RSA Program 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,

(Certification Regarding Lobbying), and if applicable, Standard Form SF-LLL (Disclosure of Lobbying Activities). These forms are available at <http://www.grants.gov>. These forms should be submitted through the Grants Online website. Applicants submitting hard copy must include one signed original and two signed unbound copies of the application (including supporting information).

b. The Standard Form SF424 must include the estimated monetary value of the entire project, including costs of compensation fishing and research project costs. This value must be recorded under item 18. Estimated Funding (e) "Other" on the SF424.

c. The Standard Form SF424A must report the total value under "Non-Federal."

d. 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 the priority that most closely reflects the objectives of the proposal first. Each application must address only one research investigation. If an application does not fulfill a priority category, it must be clearly stated in the application. Applicants should not assume prior knowledge on the part of NMFS as to the relative merits of the project described in the application.

2. Required Elements

Proposals should be limited to 10 pages, excluding item "e" below. The format may vary, but must include:

a. A narrative project description to include project goals and objectives. Funding objectives should be simple and understandable; as specific and quantitative as possible; clear as to the "what and when," but avoiding the "how and why;" and attainable within the time, funding, and resources available. Proposals should be accomplishment oriented and identify specific performance measures, describing how investigators foresee research results being used in the management and/or science arena to enhance the understanding of the scallop resource or contributing to the body of information on which management decisions are made (see Section I.B.). The main body of the narrative should be a clear statement of the work to be undertaken and include: (1) Project design and management, including who is responsible, expected products, and participants other than applicant; (2) project duration (starting on the first day of the month and ending on the last day of the month); (3) names and affiliations of the principal investigator(s) (PI); (4) contribution and relevance of the proposed work; and (5) a summary of the existing state of knowledge related to the project;

b. A detailed budget, including a description of the funds needed to execute the research plan and compensate vessels that harvest set-aside quota. The budget must include a breakdown of research costs including labor, vessel contracts, equipment, supplies, and overhead, as applicable. The proposal must state how the proceeds from the sale of compensation fishing activities, including those derived from incidental catch, will be

divided between the vessel and applicant. Proposals must provide a description of the safeguards that will be used to ensure that the TAC set-aside will not be exceeded;

c. A list of any Federal regulations that the applicant needs to have waived and a brief justification for such a waiver;

d. Each proposal must identify the activities for the vessel(s) participating in the project, including research and compensation fishing activities. All vessel(s) selected by the applicant to participate in the study should be listed in the proposal, if possible;

e. Supporting documents, including resumes, letters of intent for vessels to participate in research activities, and any relevant contracts; and

f. As part of this application process, questions from The Environmental Compliance Questionnaire for NOAA Federal Financial Assistance Applicants, OMB Approval Number 0648-0538, must be answered and submitted with the application. These questions include: A1-A3, A2, A11, A12, B1, C1, D1-D3, E1, E4, F1-F3, F10-F13, H1-H24, H26, H27-H31. This form is located at <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov>. Failure to complete all of the indicated questions with current and relevant information will result in the application being considered incomplete.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Full proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov on or before 5 p.m. EST on October 7, 2011. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline.

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. Mark hard copy proposals "Attention- 2012 Scallop Research Set Aside Program."

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applicants will need to determine if their State participates in the intergovernmental review process. This information can be found at the following website: www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html. This information will assist applicants in providing either a Yes or No response to Item 16 of the Application Form, SF-424, entitled "Application for Federal Assistance."

E. Funding Restrictions

1. The DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 Fed. Reg. 7696), are applicable to this solicitation.

2. The research project period may encompass all or part of the 2012 fishing year. Proposals to fund research started on or after the project period, but before final approval of the project for TAC set-aside awards, are eligible for consideration.

3. Any portion of the 2012 fishing year TAC awarded to compensate for research costs and participation must be caught or used for compensation by June 1, 2013.

4. The Federal Government shall not be liable for any costs incurred in the conduct of the project. Any additional funds generated through the sale of set aside scallops above the costs of the research activities, shall be retained by the vessel owner as compensation for the use of his/her vessel.

F. 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--2012 Scallop Research Set-Aside Program."

2. NOAA employees (whether full-time, part-time, or intermittent) are not permitted to assist in the preparation of an application, except that staff may provide information on program goals, funding priorities, application procedures, and completion of application forms. Because this is a competitive program, NMFS and NOAA employees will not provide assistance in conceptualizing, developing, or structuring proposals, or write letters of support for an application. However, the Council or NMFS contact person may provide assistance to researchers who are seeking vessels to participate in the collection of set-aside species or directly in research projects. NMFS, in consultation with the Council, may decide to hold a meeting with the public to discuss general topics concerning past RSA program accomplishments and ways to enhance communications on funding priorities and associated potential study methods. Such meetings will be publicized by NMFS through a Federal Register notice, and through the public mailing list maintained by the Council office.

3. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA Federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. The TAC set-asides were considered under the Environmental Assessment for Framework 22. Applications that propose research and/or compensation fishing that is not within the scope of the NEPA analysis contained in the Framework 22 Environmental Assessment may require the applicant to provide additional information that will serve as the basis for any further analyses.

4. Permits and Approvals

a. Vessels participating in the Scallop RSA Program must obtain the appropriate vessel documentation consistent with experimental fishing regulations at 50 C.F.R. § 600.745, 50 C.F.R. § 648.12, and 50 C.F.R. § 648.56. Vessels conducting certain types of research activities that require relief from fishery regulations may be required to obtain an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) or other permit. In order to assist NMFS in determining whether or not the proposed research would require a permit, researchers should briefly address the following questions:

i. Location and Time of Year - specific time of year and areas where fishing will occur (e.g., coordinates, 10-minute squares, closed areas; include map if possible);

ii. Gear Type, Including Mesh Size or gear modification (trawl; pot; gillnet; dredge; acoustic gear, including frequency and amplitude);

iii. Fishing Effort (number of vessels, number of tows, length of tows, number of pots, duration of tended gear, sampling frequency, etc.);

iv. Catch - estimated species composition and amount (directed catch and bycatch);

c. If an exemption from Federal regulations is proposed, a list of the specific regulations to be exempted and a brief justification for each regulation to be exempted must be included. Should an applicant submit a request for an EFP to NMFS, the completed application should be received by NMFS at least 60 days before the requested start date of the proposed research. NMFS may not exempt a vessel from any requirement imposed by any state. Therefore, applicants are urged to discuss with state fisheries agencies any proposed landings in their state(s), and must obtain any additional permits that may be required by such state(s).

d. Successful applicants must obtain compensation fishing permits from NMFS prior to initiating compensation fishing. NMFS will issue letters of authorization to federally permitted scallop vessels identified by the Project Coordinator, which authorize such vessels to take compensation fishing trips.

e. Projects may not have more than 50 vessels authorized to conduct compensation fishing at any given time, unless sufficient rationale can demonstrate that more than 50 vessels are needed. In addition, principal investigators and project coordinators should be aware that it may take NMFS up to 4 weeks to process requests to revise the list of vessels that are authorized to conduct compensation fishing.

f. Amendment 15 established a list of scallop management measures from which vessels that are conducting research funded by the scallop RSA program could be exempted via a letter of authorization. These management measures include: Crew restrictions; seasonal closures in access areas; and the requirement to return to port if fishing in more than one area. The review and issuance of these permits would not entail additional environmental review or comment beyond that of which was performed for Amendment 15. These authorizations would apply only to dedicated research activities, and would not be available to vessels harvesting scallops for sale.

6. Successful applicants will be required to submit project results in electronic form in accordance with data collection protocols of the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) and/or other data base formats as may be required by NMFS.

To apply for this NOAA Federal funding opportunity, please go to <http://www.grants.gov>, and use the following funding opportunity #NMFS-NEFSC-2011-2003101. Applicants without Internet access may contact Eric Eidswick, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, 166 Water Street, Woods Hole, MA 02543, by phone 508-495-2009, fax 508-495-2004, or email eric.eidswick@noaa.gov.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

The review panel convened by NMFS to evaluate proposals submitted in response to this RFP (see the Review and Selection Process section of this document), will evaluate proposals by assigning scores up to the maximum indicated for each of the following

criteria:

1. Importance and/or relevance and applicability of the proposed project: This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. Proposals should provide a clear definition of the problem, need, issue, or hypothesis to be addressed. Proposals should describe their relevance to RSA program priorities and detail how the data gathered from the research will be used to enhance the understanding of the fishery resource or contribute to the body of information on which management decisions are made. If not directly related to priorities listed in the solicitation, provide justification why the proposed project should be considered. (25 points)

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. Special emphasis will be given to proposals that foster and improve cooperative interactions with NMFS. Proposals should provide a clear definition of the approach to be used, including descriptions of field work, theoretical studies, and laboratory analysis to support the proposed research in the area and time proposed. The time frame for utilizing research TAC and conducting the proposed research should be clearly specified. Activities that take place over a wider versus narrower geographical range, where appropriate, are preferred. (25 points)

3. This criterion assesses whether the applicant, and team members, possess the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. This includes demonstration of support, cooperation and/or collaboration with the fishing industry, and qualifications/experience of project participants. Where appropriate, combined proposals involving multiple principal investigators are preferred versus separate stand-alone proposals on related projects. For proposals involving multiple vessels, special attention will be given to specification of safeguards to ensure that the authorized TAC set-aside will not be exceeded. (15 points)

4. Project costs: This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. Cost-effectiveness of the project will be considered. (25 points)

5. Outreach and education: This criterion assesses whether the project involves a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This includes identification of anticipated benefits, potential users, likelihood of success, and methods of disseminating results. Where appropriate, data generated from the research must be formatted in a manner consistent with NMFS and ACCSP databases. A copy of this format is available from NMFS. (10 points)

B. Review and Selection Process

NMFS will solicit written technical evaluations from up to three or more appropriate private and public sector experts to determine the technical merit of the proposal and to provide a rank score of the project based on the criteria described in the Evaluation Criteria section of this document. Following completion of the technical evaluation, NMFS will convene a review panel, including Council members and technical experts, to review and individually critique the scored proposals to enhance NOAA's understanding of the proposals. Initial successful applicants may be required, in consultation with NMFS, to further refine/modify the study methodology as a condition of project approval. No consensus recommendations will be made by the review panel.

C. Selection Factors

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. A program officer may first make recommendations to the Selecting Official to applying the selection factors below. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Availability of funds.
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. geographically,
 - b. by type of institutions,
 - c. by type of patterns,
 - d. by research areas, and
 - 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 to conduct a NEPA analysis and determination.

Key program policy factors to be considered by the Selecting Official are: (1) The time of year the research activities are to be conducted; (2) the ability of the proposal to meet the experimental fishery requirements discussed under the Permits and Approvals section of this document; (3) redundancy of research projects; and (4) logistical concerns. Therefore, the highest scoring projects may not necessarily be selected for an award. All sea scallop research must be conducted in accordance with provisions approved by NOAA. Based on the final funding recommendations of the Selecting Official, RSA quota awards will be made based primarily on the higher technically ranked proposal, although additional factors such as individual project needs and cost effectiveness may be considered.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Review of proposals will occur during the 3 months following the date given in this announcement that the proposals are due to NMFS. Initiation of approved RSA project activities should begin during the spring of 2012 for most projects. March 1, 2012, should be used as the proposed start date on proposals, unless otherwise directed by the Program Officer.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that their applications have been recommended for selection to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin project operations. Official notification of selection, signed by the NOAA Grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows a project to begin. Notifications will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the Principal Investigator of the project. Successful and unsuccessful applicants may be notified either electronically or in writing.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Administrative and national policy requirements for all DOC awards are contained in the DOC Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 Fed. Reg. 7696). You may obtain a copy of these notices by contacting the agency contact(s) under the Council and Agency Contact(s) section of this document, or by going to the website: www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html. Applicants whose proposed projects may have an environmental impact should furnish sufficient information to assist proposal reviewers in assessing the potential environmental consequences of supporting the project. National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by NEPA, for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA

Federal assistance opportunities, including special fishing privileges. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA website: www.nepa.noaa.gov/ including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under the description of 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). Applicants may be requested to assist NOAA in drafting an Environmental Assessment if NOAA determines such an assessment is required.

Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying and implementing feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts associated with their proposed research activity. The failure to do so shall be grounds for the denial of an application.

C. Reporting

1. 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. A final Financial Status Reports (SF-425) is required to be submitted to the Grants Officer no later than 90 days after the award expiration.

a. The SF425 must report \$0.00 on every line item and the comment section should read: This is an RSA grant award which has no federal dollars associated with it. The final accounting information has been submitted with the final report.

2. Performance or progress reports are required to 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 no later than 90 days after the award expiration. The format of the final report may vary, but the report must contain:

a. A brief summary of the completion report (200-word or less abstract);

- b. A description of the issue/problem that was addressed;
 - c. A detailed description of methods of data collection and analyses;
 - d. 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;
 - e. A list of entities, firms, or organizations that actually performed the work, and a description of how the work was accomplished;
 - f. A detailed accounting of the following items is required: fish caught, fish landed, fish sold, and, if applicable, the disbursement of any additional funds generated through the sale of set-aside landings above the costs of the research activities; and
 - g. Data from research projects must be submitted in electronic format with appropriate documentation to NMFS, as requested.
3. All RSA quota that is landed, including fish landed for research purposes, must be reported to NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) per the Interactive Voice Response system instructions provided by NMFS. Non-compliance with this reporting requirement could be cause for not awarding future NOAA projects.

VII. Agency Contacts

Information may be obtained from Deirdre Boelke, New England Fishery Management Council, phone (978) 465-0492, fax (978) 465-3116, or e-mail dboelke@nefmc.org, from Eric Eidswick, NMFS, Northeast Fisheries Science Center, phone 508-495-2009, fax 508-495-2004, or email erik.eidswick@noaa.gov, or from Ryan Silva, NMFS, Northeast Regional Office, phone (978) 281-9326, fax (978) 281-9135, email ryan.silva@noaa.gov.

VIII. Other Information

Limitation of Liability

In no event shall NOAA or DOC be responsible for proposal preparation costs if these programs are cancelled because of other agency priorities. Publication of this announcement

does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to provide special fishing privileges.

Freedom of Information Act

DOC regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, "Public Information," which sets forth rules for DOC to make requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the Act. Applications submitted in response to this Federal Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under FOIA. 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, the applicant should identify and bracket such information or data, marking it as "Privileged, Confidential, Commercial, or Financial Information- Limited Use." Based on these markings, the confidentiality of the contents of those pages will be maintained to the extent permitted by law.