



GULF STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION FY2019 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) Regional Oyster Aquaculture Research Consortia

The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Gulf Commission), in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is seeking proposals to form regionally focused research consortia that will address critical research needs surrounding oyster aquaculture. The Gulf Commission is making around \$840,000 available annually for the funding period of **August 1, 2019 to July 31, 2024** (dependent on appropriations) available to support ongoing research for off-bottom oyster production in coastal areas of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. The goal is to form a **Research Consortium** that will focus research on oyster genetics, disease, environmental interactions, regulatory challenges and, economic modeling. Additionally, regional partnerships are encouraged to classify and preserve natural genetic variation in oysters. Pre-proposals must be submitted as a single file by e-mail no later than **5:00 p.m. CST on Friday, March 15, 2019**. Please see the Proposal Guidelines section for proposal and submission instructions.

Congress recognizes that the oyster farming industry is composed of hundreds of small farmers who are unable to fund critical research in the fields of oyster disease, food safety, technology development, warming waters, and ocean acidification. To improve coordination and consistency, they have directed NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Office of Aquaculture to find ways to engage and partner with industry, academic institutions, and States to conduct collaborative research to address the challenges facing this growing industry.

The overall goal of NOAA's research initiatives is to provide science knowledge for the agency's regulatory and resource management decisions and foster innovative and sustainable approaches to the aquaculture industry. By partnering with the Gulf Commission, NOAA is able to target this research toward specific, regionally relevant topics that will produce meaningful improvements to the industry.

Background

The farming of oysters and other shellfish presents an opportunity for the seafood industry to diversify and expand production in this region. Traditional wild oyster harvest (utilizing cultch planting methods and naturally occurring reefs) has been limited in recent years for a variety of reasons, but even as wild harvest recovers, production of farmed oysters has the potential to complement wild harvest, diversify the region's seafood products, and help maintain local processing and working waterfront facilities.

Oyster farming, however, presents technical, regulatory, and market challenges. While cage culture of oysters has been underway in the Northwest and Northeast U.S. for years, such farming methods must be adapted to local physical and water quality conditions. Coastal and marine spatial analysis may be

required to locate oyster farms in areas that do not conflict with other marine uses and critical habitat areas. In addition, local, state, and federal permitting requirements and processes need to be developed or adapted to allow for expanded oyster production via cage culture and other emerging methods.

In many regions, efforts to coordinate commercial oyster farming activities with oyster restoration efforts have had some success. For example, state shellfish initiatives in Washington, California, Alaska, Connecticut, and Rhode Island have engaged shellfish farmers, environmental and oyster restoration groups, state and local agencies, foundations, and others to find ways to work together to more quickly get mollusks into coastal waters. These types of multi-disciplinary partnerships are highly encouraged.

The goal for the requested proposals is to form a **Research Consortium** to address at least one or more of the priorities listed below to advance the development and improvement of the U.S. oyster farming industry in this region.

- (1) Regional oyster farm planning, siting, and/or coordination which could include:
 - identifying or developing suitable locations for oyster farming,
 - developing new or improving existing siting tools,
 - coordination by state and/or local agencies to streamline permit processes for oyster culture and restoration efforts,
 - coordinating oyster farming activities with restoration efforts.

- (2) Identify production and technical challenges to oyster farming which may include:
 - designing, modifying, and testing methods to increase production in oyster farming,
 - development of gear modifications to reduce potential impacts from farming operations,
 - implementing genetic selection programs for local stocks to improve production performance,
 - address potential issues related to interstate transport of seed,
 - developing disease and pest mitigation methods,
 - developing disease or water quality resistant oyster stocks,
 - design and development of methods, technology, or techniques to reduce biofouling in oyster production.

For the first phase of this call, interested applicants should submit **pre-proposals** outlining the membership and organizational structure of their Consortium, research objectives, and proposed timeline. Upon review of the pre-proposals, the Review Committee reserves the right to perform “teaming” of multiple applicants into a single Consortium. For example, if a promising proposal is lacking a critical component that could be delivered by another applicant, the Review Committee can request that both applicants collaborate on a single full proposal. In this event, both applicants will be contacted by representatives of the Review Committee to describe the proposed “teaming” and to answer questions from the applicants. In addition, solo projects (not affiliated with any Consortium) may be submitted with the Review Committee reserving the right to team the project with an existing Consortium or fund it outright. Single applicant pre-proposals are not encouraged but will not be excluded from consideration.

For full proposals, applicants will be expected to secure commitments from their team members, create an administrative infrastructure for planning, coordinating, quality control, and reporting. This will be included in a draft strategic research plan for the Consortium being proposed. Consortia will need to

justify their proposed research plan based on impact to the industry. Consortia should include active participation from industry, academia, and government (state and/or federal) labs which may include resource management, environmental, public health, etc. **Final Awards** will be made to winning Consortium for approximately 5 years at a funding level around \$840,000, dependent on future appropriation levels. The number of Consortia that are funded will be dependent on the total scope of each individual project and more than one Consortium or project may be awarded.

Pre-Proposal Guidelines

Pre-proposals should clearly outline the project objectives, general methodologies, and research outputs, qualifications of the investigators who would perform the work, where the work would be performed, and a budget outline. It is critically important to clearly and explicitly articulate how the proposed work addresses the research priorities identified in this document. Pre-proposals should also indicate how the results of the proposed work will be communicated to interested parties and the public, and clearly define what success will look like at the end of the funding period. Pre-proposals should not exceed 5 pages in total length (12pt, single spaced).

Please follow the instructions for preparing proposals for Gulf Commission awards (Attachment A). Applicants should be willing to work closely with the Gulf Commission staff. In the event that the Review Panel wishes to encourage “teaming”, applicants will be expected to participate in discussions with the Review Panel and any other applicants also encouraged. These discussions will be facilitated by Gulf Commission and NOAA staff.

Full Proposal Guidelines

Full proposals are expected to provide a much greater level of detail about the organizational structure and management of the Consortium being proposed. Elaborating on what was included in the pre-proposals, the Review Committee expects to see complete and specific descriptions of the roles and tasks of each participating entity, research methods and objectives (including near and long term goals), anticipated impact of the work, and a clear plan for communicating results to stakeholders and the public. A complete and detailed budget should be provided, with the understanding that adjustments may be required in subsequent years depending on research results and progress. Upon completion of the pre-proposal review, successful Consortia will be contacted and provided with additional guidance and a full proposal will be requested.

Duration, Eligibility, and Funding

Funds for this project are provided by NOAA Award No. NA15NMF4720399. If the proposal is accepted for funding, the projects must comply with all federal government audit principles/procedures and the Department of Commerce's Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. The Gulf Commission will fund proposals on a competitive basis. Researchers at U.S. academic institutions, research laboratories, for-profit companies/firms, nonprofits, and state agencies are all eligible. Proposals from foreign entities are not eligible, however funding can be used to contract foreign expertise where needed. Proposals involving multiple investigators are encouraged and expected. The majority of the proposed work should be conducted in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico region. Any U.S. federal government agencies, including Regional Fishery Management Councils, are not eligible to receive salary funding through this solicitation, but may provide “in kind” contributions to a Consortium (facilities, expertise, tools, etc...). Proposed activities will be expected to be completed within in the funding period described in any of the successful proposals.

The Gulf Commission expects to make approximately **\$840,000** available for new awards under this RFP for Year 1 (as described below), subject to the availability of appropriated funds. The Gulf Commission may, at its discretion, issue one, multiple, or no awards. The Gulf Commission anticipates a 5-year program of funding for the Consortium, but all duration will be subject to the availability of appropriated funds. The Gulf Commission expects the start date for funding agreements to be August 1, 2019, or as negotiated.

The Gulf Commission will accept pre-proposal submissions including ideas that still require proof-of-concept R&D efforts as well as those for which some proof-of-concept demonstration already exists. Submissions requiring proof-of-concept R&D can propose a project with the goal of delivering on the program metric at the conclusion of the period of performance. These submissions must contain an appropriate cost and project duration plan that is described in sufficient technical detail to allow reviewers to meaningfully evaluate the proposed project. If awarded, such projects should expect a rigorous go/no-go milestone early in the project associated with the proof-of-concept demonstration. Alternatively, submissions requiring proof-of-concept R&D can propose a project with the project end deliverable being an extremely creative, but partial solution. However, the Applicants are required to provide a convincing vision how these partial solutions can enable the realization of the program metrics with further development.

Applicants proposing projects for which some initial proof-of-concept demonstration already exists should submit concrete data that supports the probability of success of the proposed project.

The Gulf Commission will accept only new submissions under this call. Applicants may not seek renewal or supplementation of their existing awards through this call.

The Gulf Commission plans to fully fund the submitted, negotiated budget at the time of award, subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

Reporting Requirements

Successful applicants will be required to submit quarterly status reports on all research activities, including activity summaries, research results (when appropriate), updated budgets, and any proposed changes, amendments or omissions (subject to negotiation with the Gulf Commission). At the conclusion of the performance period, a full and complete final report will be submitted to the Gulf Commission detailing all research activities, results and impacts.

Submittal Instructions

Investigators must submit by e-mail an electronic copy of the proposal. Electronic files must be a single file in Microsoft Word or Adobe PDF format and must be sent via e-mail to Steve VanderKooy (svanderkooy@gsmfc.org) for receipt **no later than 5:00 p.m. CST on Friday, March 15, 2019**. "Gulf Oyster Research Proposal" must be specified in the subject line. Proposals not received by the deadline will be returned without review. Proposals failing to comply with content and format requirements will not be accepted.

Proposal Evaluation

All proposals meeting the specified requirements will be evaluated through a technical review of independent experts. Proposals will be ranked based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Program Goals and Priorities - The project contributes to the overall goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success in the region, and will measurably improve the success and sustainability of the US oyster industry.

Technical Merit - The project is technically sound and feasible and there is a clear, logical, and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design, and implementation to ensure activities are technically-sound and feasible.

Budget Justification - Costs are allowable, reasonable, and budgeted in accordance with the Commission's project-specific cost categories (Appendix A) and are in compliance with *OMB Uniform Guidance* as applicable.

Decisions will be disseminated to P.I.s by June 1, 2019 and research is expected to begin no later than August 1, 2019.

For More Information

Contact: Steve VanderKooy
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Attachment A

Instructions for Preparing Proposals for Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Awards

Proposal should be a scientific or technical action plan of activities to be accomplished. Please use the following format when preparing your proposal but restrict your proposal to 5 pages in length:

1. **Applicant name:** Identify the name of the applicant organization.
2. **Title:** A short descriptive name of the proposal.
3. **RFP Priority:** Identify the priority or priorities that this proposal addresses and how the intended goals of the grant program will be met.
4. **Objective:** State concisely the purpose of the proposal in quantified terms where possible.
5. **Job Title:** A proposal subdivided into two or more jobs must identify each job separately.
6. **Job Objectives:** Provide an objective(s) for each job element, as appropriate.
7. **Job Procedures:** A detailed and concise set of procedures to answer who, what, how, when, and where. Proposals must clearly identify:
 - a. Applicants' activities and deliverables,
 - b. Activities and deliverables of other agencies involved in study, and
 - c. Statement of Authority/Confidentiality, if applicable.
8. **Location:** Describe the location of work.
9. **List of Key Personnel:** List all project personnel and their responsibilities. If personnel are working on the project but are not identified in the project-specific budget, they must be noted as working at no-cost to the project.
10. **Milestone Schedule:** Make a cross-referencing table summarizing, by job, activities that are to be attained each month, including reports.
11. **Project-Specific Budget:** Include a cost estimate breakdown for each cost category covered during the budget period identified. Detailed budget information is required for the following elements:
 - a. Personnel - For each employee, provide the time estimated to be charged to the project; the rate/year, month, day, or hour; and the resulting calculated cost assessed to the project.
 - b. Fringe Benefits - For each employee, identify all fringe-related costs and the rate applied. If the fringe rate is greater than 25%, a copy of the Fringe Rate Agreement must be included.

- c. Travel - Information must be provided on the purpose of travel, destination, daily cost charges, number of days, and number and identity of travelers. All out-of-state and foreign travel must be justified in the proposal.
- d. Equipment (items having a unit acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more) - Describe how equipment will be used on the project and why it is needed. Identify make and model numbers and unit cost. In addition, a lease versus purchase analysis is necessary for each piece of equipment. Computers and computer-related hardware are often less than \$5,000; due to long-term operational life-span, the need to purchase these items must be clearly explained.
- e. Supplies and Materials - List general categories of supplies and materials, including unit costs and quantities. The terms "miscellaneous" and "etc." are not allowed.
- f. Contractual/Consulting Services - List each contractor/consultant, describe specific duties to be performed, and how the cost for the service was derived. In addition, a statement as to whether or not the contract or consulting service was competitively selected is necessary. If the service was not competitively selected, a sole source justification is required.
- g. Other Costs - List and describe other costs that are not assignable to the other direct cost categories. Indicate how these costs were derived.
- h. Indirect Costs - If indirect costs are charged, identify the rate used in the calculations, and include **a copy of the current negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement with your proposal.**