

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
2022 Request for Proposals (RFP)
Regional Pilot Projects in Support of Sustainable Aquaculture

Funding Opportunity Description

Summary

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC), in cooperation with and funding from, the NOAA Fisheries Office of Aquaculture, will be issuing approximately **\$600,000** in grants to fund **marine aquaculture pilot projects** focusing on sustainable aquatic farming techniques and regional business practices to grow U.S. domestic seafood.

Background

It is estimated that 70 to 85% of seafood consumed in the U.S. is imported and that more than half of seafood imports are produced through overseas aquaculture. Globally, the U.S. ranks only 17th in aquaculture production despite possessing the largest exclusive economic zone in the world.

To address the major lost opportunity for job creation in coastal communities and to encourage the development of a domestic seafood supply, the three interstate Marine Fisheries Commissions, with Congressional funding provided to NOAA, are seeking proposals to conduct regional pilot programs for partnerships between the seafood industry and community partners. The goal of these pilot projects will be to develop, validate, and deploy economically and environmentally sustainable aquatic farming techniques and regional business practices to grow U.S. domestic seafood production. To maximize the impact of these pilot grants, applicants are encouraged to consider less commercially developed technologies, such as those targeting shellfish, seaweed, and other relative newcomers to the domestic aquaculture industry.

Scope of Work

The geographic scope of the proposed projects is the U.S. East Coast states from Maine to Florida. The primary focus of the proposed projects must be for marine, estuarine, and diadromous species.

Examples of the types of pilot projects being sought through the RFP follow:

- Research and development related to the production and distribution of shellfish seed stock.
- Finfish, shellfish (other than oyster*), and seaweed farming systems, especially for those species new to aquaculture in the region or that use novel production systems.
- Studies or development of tools to identify or assess locations suitable for commercial aquaculture (e.g., spatial planning, benthic surveys)
- Resolution of issues (e.g., enforcement, water quality, public trust concerns or impacts) related to open water finfish farming in state waters.
- Business incubators
- Regional market and economic impact studies

*Note: Proposals for oyster projects were already requested in a separate RFP (2019 Regional Oyster Aquaculture Research Consortia)

ASMFC plans to issue approximately \$600,000 in grants to qualified projects. Individual proposals should not exceed \$200,000 or be less than \$75,000. It is anticipated that approximately 3-5 projects will be funded. This announcement does not obligate the ASMFC to fund the entire amount.

Eligible Applicants

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.

Proposals involving multiple investigators are welcome. U.S. federal government agencies, including Regional Fishery Management Councils, are not eligible to receive funding through this solicitation. Federal staff may be collaborators on proposed projects, as long as they are not compensated for their contribution to the project.

Application and Submission Information

Content and Form of Application

Proposal format must be in a format with at least **12-point font, single spaced with 1 inch page margins. Submissions should be brief** as this will assist reviewers and program staff in dealing effectively with proposals. Tables and visual materials, including charts, graphs, maps, photographs and other pictorial presentations are included in the **4-page limit**. Data management plans and/or access agreements, as well as budgets and justifications, project summary, and previous/ current and pending support sections do not count towards the page limit. Appendices may include information such as resumes and/or letters of endorsement.

Additional informational material will be disregarded.

Proposals must include the following information in the format outlined below.

1. Project summary (1-page limit):

- a. Organization title
- b. Principal Investigator(s)
- c. Address, telephone number, and email address of Principal Investigator(s)
- d. Project title
- e. Project objectives for the project period
- f. Summary of work to be performed within the project period
- g. Budget Information:
 - Total funds requested from ASMFC
 - Cost sharing to be provided to the project, if any (not required). Specify whether contributions are cash or in kind
 - Total project cost

- 2. Project description (3-page limit):** Describe each project completely and accurately. The main body of the proposal should clearly state the proposed work and should include: specific objectives and performance measures for the period of the proposed work and the expected significance; relation to longer-term goals of the project; an assessment of any required permits and/or authorizations to conduct the study, including the status of any permits in-hand or planned; and information for any grant proposals submitted within the last 18 months in relation to funding the proposed work or components planned, anticipated, or

underway. **Project timelines should not exceed 12-months in duration, with a completion date on or before June 30, 2023.**

3. **Project Budget:** The proposal must include a detailed narrative for each category providing an explanation and/or process for how the funds will be used. Describe and justify the budget for each organization or agency requesting funding in the proposal using the mandatory budget categories listed below.
- **Personnel (including Fringe Benefits):** Include the salary detail for all employees assigned to the project. Explain the duties for each individual identified by name and position. State the time commitments such as hours and percent of time for each position. List the total charges for each person. Provide details on all fringe benefits in correlation to the employee's hourly wage and the number of hours to be worked in association with the proposed project. Identify what types of fringe benefits are being covered. Describe the total charges for each person listed along with an explanation of how the charges were calculated.
 - **Travel:** Costs include lodging, airfare, per diem, ground transportation and other directly-related expenses incurred while traveling for the purpose of the proposed project. Include each traveler's name, dates of travel, purpose of travel, destination, and itemized costs to include lodging, airfare, per diem, ground transportation, etc. Identify why the requested travel is directly relevant to the successful completion of the project. If there are any actual trip details that remain unknown, please explain the basis for the proposed travel charges.
 - **Contractual:** Include all expenditures associated with contractually-related activities that are directly associated with the proposed project. List each contract as a separate item. Describe the applicability to the project for each contract to be acquired.
 - **Supplies:** Include a description of all equipment that individually costs under \$5,000 and miscellaneous supplies and materials that are required for the purpose of the proposed project. Itemize supplies by type of material or nature of expense. Identify how the proposed supplies are necessary for the successful completion of the project.
 - **Equipment:** Include items that individually cost more than \$5,000. For any items of equipment whose costs exceed \$5,000, a description of the item and associated costs is required. List each item of equipment being requested. For each item of equipment, please identify the number of units, cost per unit, and total cost specified. Explain why each item of equipment is necessary for the successful completion of the project.
 - **Indirect Costs:** Costs incurred by the investigating organization as a result of administering the proposed project but not directly associated with project implementation. Indirect costs generally include rental space, utilities, postage, data processing, training, safety management, affirmative action programs, administrative support, and supervisory oversight. **NOTE:** All proposals must include a copy of the approved negotiated indirect cost rate document or similar verifying your indirect rate as

part of your proposal package. The intent is for institutions undertaking research to apply funds to expenses directly related to the project, and have the ability to complete the project with low indirect cost rates. The Commission has the option to limit award recipient indirect cost recovery at 16%, consistent with the indirect rate applied to the agreement between NOAA and the Commission. Applicants may request a copy of the Commission's indirect policy if needed for application materials.

Instructions, Conditions and Notices to Proposers

1. Questions regarding the RFP should be submitted to:

Pat Campfield and Lindsey Aubart
Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission
1050 N Highland Street
Suite 200 A-N
Arlington, VA 22201
Email: Aquaculture@asmfc.org
Phone: 703-842-0740

2. Submission, Modification, Revision, and Withdrawal of Proposals
 - a. The deadline for proposals is **midnight EST, February 1, 2022:**
Proposals should be submitted to Lindsey Aubart at Aquaculture@asmfc.org
 - b. ASMFC reserves the right to consult with and to consider information from its own sources, including information from state and federal agencies regarding the proposer's prior performance or the status of outstanding investigations or warrants involving the proposer.
 - c. Late proposals
 - i. Any proposal, modification, or revision received after midnight EST on February 1, 2022 is "late" and will not be considered.
 - d. If an emergency or unanticipated event interrupts normal ASMFC processes so that proposals cannot be received by midnight EST on February 1, 2022, and urgent ASMFC requirements preclude amendment of the solicitation, the time specified for receipt of proposals will be deemed to be extended to the same time of day specified in the solicitation on the first work day on which normal ASMFC processes resume.
 - e. Proposals may be withdrawn by written notice received at any time before award. Withdrawals are effective upon receipt of notice by the Aquaculture Coordinator.
 - f. Proposers shall submit proposals in response to this solicitation in English and in U.S. dollars.
 - g. Proposers may submit modifications to their proposals at any time before the solicitation closing date and time, and may submit modifications in response to an amendment, or to correct a mistake at any time before award.
 - h. Proposers may submit revised proposals only if requested or allowed by ASMFC.
 - i. Proposer shall submit the name, address, and telephone number of the person(s) with the authority to bind the firm, as well as to answer questions or provide clarification concerning the firm's proposal.
 - j. ASMFC is not liable for any costs incurred by vendors/contractors in developing or submitting their response to this RFP.

Proposal Evaluation

1. All proposals received in accordance with the RFP instructions will be evaluated to determine if they are complete and meet the specified requirements.
2. All proposals which meet the above criterion will be reviewed, analyzed, evaluated, and scored in accordance with the criteria described below. If needed, additional information may be requested from one or more proposers.
3. During the evaluation period, ASMFC may request additional information in order to fairly evaluate a proposal offer. If such information is required, the proposer will be notified in writing (or by email) and will be permitted a reasonable period of time to respond.
4. By use of numerical and narrative scoring techniques, proposals will be evaluated by the Proposal Review Committee against the factors specified below. The relative weights of the criteria – based on a 100 point scale – are shown in parentheses. The evaluation criteria are:
 - a. Qualifications, experience, references, and ability to address research program priorities (30 points);
 - b. Work Plan/Technical Approach (40 points);
 - c. Cost/Project Budget (30 points)

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when financial interests or other opportunities for tangible personal or professional benefit could influence or appear to influence the professional judgment of a member of the Proposal Review Committee. Improper influence could be used to not only advance one's own research program, but also to unfairly promote a family member's, colleague's or former student's program. Thus, care must be exercised to avoid a conflict of interest during the proposal review process and the discussion of past, current, or proposed research. A conflict of interest also exists when circumstances simply have the appearance of compromising the professional judgement of a member of the Proposal Review Committee. It is the policy of ASMFC that conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest shall be avoided wherever possible and disclosed and minimized in situations where interests cannot be reasonably separated. Whenever a conflict of interest arises during discussions of the Proposal Review Committee, the member in question shall disclose the possible conflict and excuse themselves from the discussion.

Grant Award

1. All qualified proposals will be evaluated and awards will be made to those proposed projects whose combination of cost and technical offers are deemed to best address the research themes of the RFP. Final awards to selected projects are expected to begin on July 1, 2022.
2. ASMFC reserves the right to make a project award at a cost less than what was proposed.

3. ASMFC reserves the right to reject any and all proposals and make no award under the RFP if such action is in the best interest of the ASMFC.
4. ASMFC shall award in the technical rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on one or more of the following factors:
 - a. Availability of funding.
 - b. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - i. Geographically,
 - ii. By type of institution,
 - iii. By type of partners,
 - iv. By research priority,
 - v. By project types.
 - c. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies.
 - d. Program priorities and policy factors.
 - e. Applicant's prior award performance.
 - f. Partnerships with/participation of targeted groups.
 - g. Adequacy of information necessary to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before funding is approved.