



FLORIDA RESTORE ACT CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE PROGRAM

THIRD REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

JANUARY 2019

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY NUMBER: FLRACEP-2019-01

Prepared by the Florida Institute of Oceanography, Gulf Coast State Entity for Florida's RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program

Background

The Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Program (FLRACEP) is issuing its third request for proposals (RFP III). FLRACEP grants are awarded via a competitive, peer-reviewed process and subject to available funds. Please see the FLRACEP Rules and Policy Document available at www.fio.usf.edu/flracep for additional detail. A total of \$2 million is available for Center of Excellence (CoE) grants across three topical areas and addressing RESTORE Act eligible disciplines 1, 2 and 5:

1. Marine wildlife (sea birds, marine mammals, and sea turtles) grants – aimed at advancing research and technology to address critical uncertainties and support and inform resource management. (Two-three possible CoE awards)
2. Florida panhandle estuary system assessment – developing the scientific basis for strategic planning and project implementation in the Pensacola/Perdido, Choctawhatchee, and St. Andrews estuarine systems. (One possible CoE award)
3. West Florida unified mapping project – developing and applying a unified mapping framework for benthic habitats on the West Florida Shelf. (One possible CoE award)

Funding made available through this solicitation will depend on the quality of proposals received and the budgets proposed by successful applicants. FLRACEP reserves the right to select for negotiation all, some, one, or none of the proposals received in response to this solicitation.

Submission Procedure

Please review the FLRACEP Rules and Policies document for all programmatic requirements before submitting an application (available at fio.usf.edu/flracep). Pre-proposal LOIs (**due Feb 8, 2019**) and full proposals (**due Apr 8, 2019**) should be submitted electronically in Adobe PDF format to the FLRACEP program team at flracep@usf.edu.

Pre-Proposal Letter of Intent Requirements

All applications, regardless of RFP topic, are required to submit a pre-proposal Letter of Intent (LOI) not to exceed three pages single-sided using 12-point font. Each LOI must include a title page that will NOT count toward the 3-page limit. The title page should include the title of the proposal, a list of any co-PIs, the topic area to which the proposal is being submitted, and PI contact information: name, title, affiliation, mailing address, e-mail addresses, phone numbers, and web page (if any).

The 3-page limit for the rest of the LOI includes literature cited, photos, pictures, graphs, figures, and all supporting information except for the 2-page CV. The LOI should clearly articulate a problem statement, methods to address the issue, anticipated outcomes, project timeline, and a budget information (including any matching funds).

Applicants should submit a brief CV (2 pages or less) for the PI as an appendix to their LOI.

NOTE: Applicants must already have all necessary federal, state, and local government permits and must be able to provide a copy of these upon request.

LOIs containing items other than those described in these instructions, missing required information, or exceeding the page limitations will be returned without review.

Key Deadlines

- LOIs are due February 8, 2019 at 5pm eastern time
- LOI feedback will be sent by March 8, 2019 and consist of: Encouraged, Highly Encouraged, or Discouraged from submitting a full proposal
- Any applicant submitting a LOI may submit a full proposal, regardless of the feedback received
- Full proposals are due April 8, 2019 at 5pm eastern time

Eligible Entities

FLRACEP grants may only be awarded to a Florida-based (i.e. headquartered and primarily operating in Florida) non-governmental public or private institution of higher education (lead PI from same) or other not-for-profit institution. The Florida-based headquarters must primarily operate in Florida in the area of ocean and coastal research, support an established infrastructure capable of receiving and administering a federal grant, and have a history of successful grant management. NGOs with national headquarters elsewhere may utilize their Florida offices that meet these conditions.

Full Proposal Requirements

The body of the proposal **must not exceed ten pages**, single-sided using 10- or 12-point font, exclusive of cover page, bibliography, budget pages, curricula vitae, and supporting materials.

Cover Page (limit 1 page)

- **Title:** The full title of the proposal.
- **Principal Investigator (PI):** Please list only one (corresponding) principal investigator.

- **PI Contact Information:** Affiliation, address, phone, website, and e-mail for the principal investigator.
- **Financial Point of Contact (POC):** An individual within the institution responsible for contractual and fiscal matters.
- **Financial POC Information:** Address, phone, and e-mail.
- **Topic area the proposal is being submitted to:** Marine Wildlife Research, Florida Panhandle Estuary System Assessment, or West Florida Shelf Unified Mapping Project.

Proposal Body (limit 10 pages)

- **Abstract:** Provide an abstract summarizing the topic to be addressed, the methods to be used to address the threat/knowledge gap(s), possible outcomes of the work, procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the measures proposed, and the utility or application of the work to the topic area. Please limit the abstract to 300 words.
- **Introduction, Background, or Problem Statement:** Provide a brief review of the specific problem or question(s) this proposal is seeking to address and any past or related efforts by the research team or others. Indicate knowledge gaps, shortfalls of prior efforts, successes in other regions, etc. and describe how the applicant(s) will incorporate this information into the proposed work.
- **Goals and Objectives:** Provide clear statements of both the general or broad goal of the proposed project and the specific objectives that will be addressed within the scope of this proposal to make progress toward that goal. Provide a discussion of the importance or significance of the project, and how it relates to addressing the RFP topic area, proposal problem statement, and conservation/management/restoration/strategic planning considerations.
- **Methods:** Provide a detailed description of the methods, including procedures for evaluating the effectiveness of the measures proposed and a detailed timeline of activities. This applies to both original research as well as COEs that support collaborative work. Applications must include a schedule, timeline, and/or milestone chart in this section.
- **Data Management:** Provide a description of data management, storage, sharing, and dissemination plan.
- **Anticipated Outcomes:** Describe the short-term outcomes anticipated to occur within the scope of effort and time span of the proposed project (e.g. completion of a project strategy, publication of a science framework, regional workshops, one or more peer-reviewed journal articles, equipment prototype test and report) and how these support management, conservation, restoration, strategic planning, etc. in the topical area.
- **Application:** Describe the anticipated long-term utility of the project, its implications for future research, management, or conservation activities, and how evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures implemented will better inform such activities. Be as specific as possible as to the entity or agency expected to benefit from the outputs of this work.

Budget and Time Line

This section should provide a detailed narrative and follow the categories from the required FLRACEP annual budget sheet (available at fio.usf.edu/flracep), should be consistent with the needs and complexity of the proposal, and clearly link spending to different objectives or tasks from the proposal body. FLRACEP funds may not be used for the acquisition or construction of physical infrastructure (including, but not limited to ships, autonomous underwater vehicles, or laboratories), except where specifically pre-authorized by FLRACEP.

Budgets must include travel expenses for essential personnel to attend two 2-day FLRACEP All-Hands meetings to be held in the St. Petersburg, Florida area.

Curricula Vitae, Research Team Qualifications (limit 2 pages each CV)

Provide a curriculum vitae or short biography **of no more than two pages** for each of the key members of the proposal team (those individuals whose background and experience are essential to completion of the project), including their experience or expertise related to the subject proposal. Although there can be only one corresponding principal investigator, multiple co-investigators can be included in this portion of the proposal, if desired.

NOTE: All eligible applicants must already have all necessary federal, state, and local government permits and must be able to provide a copy of these upon request.

Proposals containing items other than those described in these instructions, missing required sections, or exceeding the page limitations will be returned without review.

Submission Procedure and Review Timelines

Please review the FLRACEP Rules and Policies document for all programmatic requirements before submitting an application. Pre-proposal LOIs and full proposals should be submitted electronically in Adobe PDF format to the FLRACEP program team at flracep@usf.edu.

Full proposals are due April 8, 2019 at 5pm eastern time

External science review of proposals April 22 – May 3, 2019

Program Management Team review and decision May 21 – May 22, 2019

Decision letters sent by June 3, 2019

Policy on Indirect Costs

Due to the limited funding available, FLRACEP limits indirect costs for all Centers of Excellence research grants and contracts to ten percent of the direct costs, and IDC may not be charged on either tuition or ship time.

Geographic Extent

As required by the RESTORE Act, field efforts must be located in the Gulf Coast Region (as defined at 31 C.F.R. §34.2), which includes oceans and coasts off coastal counties that border the Gulf of Mexico, from 25 nm inland from the coastline to the offshore boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Topic One – Marine Wildlife Research and Technology Grants

Florida's marine wildlife populations (limited to sea birds, marine mammals, and sea turtles for the purposes of this RFP) face a number of threats. Gaps in our understanding limit innovations in conservation and management for both coastal and oceanic wildlife. This RFP topic solicits proposals that fill key research gaps or otherwise address critical uncertainties for sea birds, marine mammals, or sea turtles found in Florida's Gulf waters, or test new and promising technology that can help answer important science or management questions.

Key research themes of interest include, but are not limited to: abundance, population structure, spatial-temporal distribution, seasonal movements, predator/prey dynamics, reproductive rates, factors affecting reproductive rates, and habitat use.

FLRACEP is soliciting proposals for Centers of Excellence to conduct research that fills critical information gaps for the state and region's marine wildlife populations. Centers of Excellence proposals for this topical area will be judged based on:

- The importance of the project in terms of addressing critical information gaps and/or how the project directly contributes to conservation and management of the species;
- The importance of the identified problem or information gap and the quality and viability of the research project proposed to address it;
- The technical and scientific merit of proposed methods;
- The proven track record of the PI and other essential program personnel to propose, execute, complete, and publish results of a research project within the allotted time and budget;
- Priority will be given to projects that provide clear goals and objectives tied to reducing uncertainty and have data management, sharing, and dissemination as part of their project plans;
- Priority will be given to high quality proposals that are unlikely to be funded elsewhere.

Timeline: 24-36 months

Available funding: \$1,000,000

Anticipated awards: 2-3

Topic Two – Florida Panhandle Estuary System Assessment

A critical first step in developing effective watershed-based restoration strategies for coastal systems is to develop a scientific understanding of the impacts and stressors affecting the natural resources of those systems. An equally important element is to engage local stakeholders in the development of this understanding, as they will need to be active participants in the subsequent key steps of setting numerical restoration targets and implementing the agreed-upon strategies (Gross and Hagy 2017).

Several existing programs on the west coast of Florida have developed watershed-based restoration strategies including Tampa Bay, Sarasota Bay, and Charlotte Harbor (through EPA's National Estuary Program). Several others have some elements of a watershed-based restoration strategy in place, including Rookery Bay and Apalachicola Bay (through NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve Program). In the Florida Panhandle, emerging programs in Pensacola/Perdido, Choctawhatchee, and St Andrews Bays are initiating watershed-wide management efforts based on the NEP model, and are in the beginning stages of the organizing process.

FLRACEP is soliciting proposals for a single Center of Excellence to support the emerging Panhandle estuaries' restoration process by assisting with the development of a consistent scientific approach for understanding of impacts and stressors in these three systems. Centers of Excellence proposals for this topical area will be judged based on:

- Collaboration with existing programs, and engagement with local, state, and federal stakeholders in all aspects of process/product design, development, and review;
- Ability to identify and implement scientifically rigorous methods to assess impacts and stressors for each of the three systems using existing data to examine, for example, impacts to water and sediment quality, water quantity, habitat quantities and quality, and living resources;
- Viability of the plan to achieve consensus on the results of an assessment of impacts and stressors in each of the three Panhandle estuarine systems;
- Ability to summarize results in scientific reports/publications and in formats appropriate for non-scientists both in and outside of the studied estuary – reports, guidance documentation, best practices, infographics, etc.

Timeline: 24-36 months

Available funding: \$500,000

Anticipated awards: 1

Topic Three – West Florida Shelf Unified Mapping Project

FLRACEP is soliciting proposals for a Center of Excellence to design and implement a process to bring together existing seafloor data from the West Florida Shelf (WFS) region to produce a single integrated map similar to what was done for the Florida Reef Tract Unified Map in the Florida Keys (<https://myfwc.com/research/gis/regional-projects/unified-reef-map/>). The Unified Reef Map combines existing Florida Keys benthic habitat data into a single, integrated map of benthic habitats and related mapping data (e.g. bathymetry). Essential elements of the Unified Reef Map include a defined geospatial framework, a Unified Classification (UC) system that links together different habitat classification schemes, and commitment from the State of Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) for long-term data housing, public availability, and upkeep. The Unified Reef Map is managed by FWRI and is updated with new mapping information on a regular basis and freely available to resource managers and stakeholders.

FLRACEP is seeking proposals for a Center of Excellence that will integrate various mapping efforts into a single, continuous benthic map for the West Florida Shelf. The WFS geographic area of interest covers the entire Gulf portion of Florida spanning from the shoreline out to 200 m water depth but is not expected to include inland bays and estuaries. At present, mapping in this region is conducted piecemeal using a wide range of sensors, mapping methods, and classification schemes.

The Florida Reef Tract example included project elements like a data integration framework, integrated classification schema, production of a unified map based on best available data, accuracy assessment of integrated results, and a long-term housing, dissemination and maintenance plan. Proposals should include a description of these types of elements, the steps and timeline for accomplishing them, and project outputs (e.g. common mapping standards, a unified WFS benthic map, a practitioners guide to mapping at the common standard requirements, etc.). Centers of Excellence proposals for this topical area will be judged based on:

- Quality of the proposed plan to develop and vet a unified mapping framework that considers minimum mapping unit, mapping scale, interpretation methodology and classification schema to accommodate the integration of existing and future mapping efforts;
- Applicant ability to vet and implement this framework in order to develop a unified map of habitats on the West Florida Shelf;
- Commitment from at least one Florida state agency mapping office to provide technical support and project oversight (a signed Letter of Support should accompany the full proposal).

Timeline: 24-36 months

Available funding: \$500,000

Anticipated awards: 1

Appendix: Florida RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence RFP III Application Conditions

Principle investigators submitting proposals in response to this RFP (FLRACEP-2019-01) agree to the following conditions:

- 1) By applying in response to this RFP, each lead PI, institutional partner, and co-PI agrees to be bound by all terms and conditions of the FLRACEP Rules and Policies; applicable terms and conditions are not negotiable, but may be updated as needed.
- 2) All proposals will be treated as new efforts; each proposal must be a stand-alone document without need to review or consider linked materials.
- 3) As required by the RESTORE Act, field efforts must be located in the Gulf Coast Region (as defined at 31 C.F.R. §34.2), which includes oceans and coasts off coastal counties that border the Gulf of Mexico, from 25 nm inland from the coastline to the offshore boundary of the Exclusive Economic Zone. For this RFP, emphasis will be placed on fieldwork in waters off Florida from Monroe County (Gulf-side only in the Florida Keys including Florida Bay) north to Escambia County.
- 4) Grants must be hosted by a Florida-based (i.e. headquartered and primarily operating in Florida) non-governmental public or private institution of higher education (lead PI from same) or other not-for-profit institution. The Florida-based headquarters must primarily operate, or have a regional office in Florida, in the area of ocean and coastal research, have an established infrastructure capable of receiving and administering a CoE grant for up to 15 years, and have a history of successful grant management.
- 5) Other partnering entities (including non-profit or for-profit entities, government agencies, and public or private companies) from in or outside Florida are encouraged. Personnel from any of the partnering institutions should be reimbursed appropriately for their time commitment to the research program based on the salary structures at their home institutions/organizations. The tasks that they lead will be open in nature and may include work by undergraduate or graduate students, and postdoctoral research associates as appropriate.
- 6) All research staff conducting activities financed, directly or indirectly, wholly or in part, by the FLRACEP are subject to, and must comply with, the terms of the FLRACEP Rules and Policies. All activities must be carried out under professional standards of responsible conduct in research [e.g., as defined by the best practices outlined and described in the U.S. National Academy of Sciences "On Being a Scientist: A Guide to Responsible Conduct in Research. Third Edition" (2009), National Academies Press].
- 7) An individual may only be the lead Principal Investigator (PI) on one CoE grant proposal, but may participate in others in any other capacity. It is the responsibility of the submitters to confirm that each member of the entire team is within the eligibility guidelines.
- 8) Each PI, co-PI and anyone being paid salary from a CoE grant will be required to submit a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement form; available on the FLRACEP website.
- 9) For grants that involve fieldwork and sampling, lead PI is responsible for submitting an Environmental Checklist form; available on the FLRACEP website.
- 10) Cost sharing or matching is not required for CoE grants.

- 11) Consistency and uniformity standards for allowable costs, and audit standards requirements for non-profit organizations expending federal awards, including their grant recipients, are defined in the federal Uniform Grant Guidance (2 CFR 200).
- 12) Protocols for monitoring, sampling, observations, measurements collection and processing, and related record-keeping must be consistent with requirements of the Natural Resource Damage Assessment under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 as described in the Guidance Document for Natural Resource Damage Assessment Under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990- Appendices G and H (NOAA, 1996). PI's are responsible for compliance with local, state or federal requirements related to their research program, including ensuring they have any permits required to conduct their research; if applicable, copies must be provided to FLRACEP.
- 13) Intellectual property funded by a FLRACEP grant will reside with the responsible investigator's home entity. FIO, in consultation with PIs, may at any time use photos, data, results, and appropriate documentation to highlight and publicly share FLRACEP accomplishments and outcomes. Whenever possible, work conducted under FLRACEP grants is expected to result in publications in peer-reviewed (refereed) journals, or equivalent media. Publications and datasets that contribute to the published work must be assigned a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) to facilitate public access.
- 14) All data and derived data products and metadata must be made publicly available within one year of data acquisition, before publication that relies on the data, or before the end of the grant, whichever is soonest. FLRACEP will utilize the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative Information and Data Collaborative (GRIIDC) to archive metadata records. Metadata records submitted to GRIIDC must be accompanied by the related datasets, regardless of if they are also permanently archived elsewhere. These requirements are intended to promote reproducibility, integration with other oil spill response and restoration programs, and advancement of knowledge and utility to engineers, researchers, and managers.
- 15) CoE grant recipients will be required: to submit quarterly progress reports with financial statements (in order to justify cost-reimbursable quarterly payments), in specified format as defined in grant sub-agreement terms and conditions; and to participate in FLRACEP all-hands meetings (2 days in the fall in St. Petersburg, FL, area; costs to be included in proposal budget). The FLRACEP program office will coordinate with grantees to fulfill reporting requirements, and will maintain records for all grants, publications, presentations, reports, and activities of each grant.