

NOAA Office of Education

Ocean Education Grants for AZA Aquariums – Conference Call Notes

May 13, 2009, 3-4:30 pm EDT

Topics from the Agenda are bulleted and summarized below. Questions asked by attendees are listed under each relevant topic. Please refer to the resources listed below and the Federal Funding Opportunity when needed.

Resources

Funding Announcement: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/funding_opps.html

FAQ Site: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/fundingopportunities/aquarium_grant_program_faqs.html

Grants.gov Registration: http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp

NOAA Education Strategic Plan: http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/NOAA_Ed_Plan.pdf

NOAA Guidance on NEPA and “categorically excluded” actions (section starting with 6.03a.3):
http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216_6.pdf

Ocean Literacy Essential Principles:

<http://www.coexploration.org/oceanliteracy/documents/OceanLitChart.pdf>

Climate Literacy Essential Principles: <http://www.noaa.gov/climateliteracy.html>

Agenda and Questions

- **Introduction of Agenda:** Sarah Schoedinger, NOAA OED
 - Purpose of the call and end time; Q&A will occur at the end of each section of the agenda and then we’ll wrap up with Q&A until 4:30.
 - We will take notes and post them on the FAQ web site.

- **General Overview of FFO:** Sarah Schoedinger, NOAA OED
 - *Purpose:* See goal on p.2: The goal of this funding program is to support projects that engage the public in educational activities that increase ocean and/or climate literacy and the adoption of a stewardship ethic.
 - *Deadline:* June 9, 2009 (This is a hard deadline.)
 - *Number of applications* that can be submitted by each institution: 2, regardless of priority
 - *Number of awards* anticipated: 5-10
 - *Size of awards:* Difficult to anticipate.
 - We’ll be interested in making more than just a couple awards, so, we’ll probably have several among the smaller priority and a couple from the larger Priority

- *Timeline* for competition/making awards: Rushed due to the lateness of the FY09 budget. We'll hold review panels in late July and will be preparing applications for award packages in late July- mid-August. Even with this compressed timeline, it will be challenging to make the awards by the end of the fiscal year, but that is our goal.
- *Review process*: minimum requirements, expert panel review (external reviewers with expertise in topics covered in FFO and follow evaluation criteria provided in FFO), and then final selection based on rank order with possible exceptions (see. p. 21 on Selection Factors). Once selections are made, we'll be in touch about any additional information we need in order to prepare the award packages for the grants office.
- General Overview of FFO Q&A:
 1. Where should I go to get a copy of the FFO?
 - a. On OED website (see link above, in Resources section) if you want the version formatted to be easier to read; the same information is available through grants.gov but without the additional formatting.
 2. Is there a reason why there are two priorities, besides size of project?
 - a. Didn't want small projects compared with large ones.
 - b. Expecting to see collaboration especially (although not exclusively) among larger, more expensive projects.
 - c. Priority numbers does not indicate importance of one category over the other.
 3. How detailed are you expecting the proposals to be, considering the short deadline?
 - a. As complete as possible – this is not a pre-proposal. In other words, there will not be additional opportunities to provide more information before the proposals are sent out to the reviewers.
 - b. You want to provide the reviewers with the most information possible to get a well-informed review.
 - c. You will want to provide enough information to minimize the number of questions and/or concerns a reviewer may have.
 - d. We realize that you're not being given much time to work on this, but we are confined by the Congressional language and budget deadlines and at least you all are in the same boat in this regard.
 4. Where are the priorities listed?
 - a. The priorities are listed in the FFO.
 - b. It may be helpful to think of "priorities" as "competitions", rather than in terms of type of projects.
 5. Where is the \$1 million mentioned in the Congressional language that is not being used for this competition?
 - a. That money is being spent on Environmental Literacy Grant competitions that were conducted while we waited for our FY09 budget.. In other words, you are not missing any other grant opportunity!
- **Eligibility Review**: Sarah Schoedinger, NOAA OED

- From the report of the enacted FY09 appropriation: “Competitive education grants.-The bill provides \$8,500,000 for competitive education grants, of which \$7,500,000 is for a new ocean education grant program. Eligible recipients of the ocean education grants must be non-profit 501(c)(3) aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums with informal education partnerships regarding the ocean. The grants require a 50 percent non-Federal cost share and can be used for capital improvements, exhibit space and educational program development projects originating within the aquarium.”
- Who is eligible?
 - *Lead or submitting institution* MUST be a 501(c)(3) non-profit AND an AZA-accredited aquarium or the 501(c)(3) institution MUST have a legally sanctioned affiliation with an AZA-accredited aquarium.
 - And, the institution that will be leading the implementation of the activities should be the institution with AZA accreditation.
 - If neither of these situations defines your type of institution, then you may be only a partner on a project.
- Eligibility Review Q&A:
 6. What if you are applying for AZA accreditation but don't have it yet?
 - a. Must have accreditation at the time that your application is submitted.
 7. I am not the Aquarium partner, but I am interested. How do I go about creating that partnership?
 - a. We suggest you work with the aquarium of interest to be listed as a sub-awardee.
 8. How is “legally sanctioned” defined and how do we prove it? What documentation do we need to submit?
 - a. We are not asking for additional documentation because your authorizing official, when they sign the application, is saying you are applying in good faith and meet all requirements.
 - b. Would be helpful to briefly explain within the application the relationship between your organization and the AZA aquarium that holds the accreditation. The reason for this language is that some aquariums hold the AZA accreditation but they are owned or operated by a parent non-profit organization (e.g., NY Aquarium, NC Aquariums).
- **Ways to Apply:** Carrie McDougall, NOAA OED
 - *Single Institution Applications*
 - Only 1 application is submitted per project
 - There is 1 *lead institution per project* and the lead must meet the eligibility requirements explained above and in the FFO.
 - Project partners are handled as sub-awardees (if they are receiving any funds) and may be non-AZA members and/or non-US institutions
 - *Multiple-lead “collaborative” applications*
 - There is *no single lead*; each collaborative partner submits an application to NOAA and therefore must be eligible to apply.

- The total request for overall project cannot exceed the budget max of that priority.
 - The same project description and supporting documentation is submitted with each application with exception of the budget forms and details, which are specific to the submitting institution.
 - Non-AZA members and non-US institutions may still be partners on collaborative applications but cannot be lead/submitting institutions (only sub-awards).
- Ways to Apply Q&A:
 9. Is it possible to partner with a marine institute in another country?
 - a. Yes, they could be a partner but not a lead institution.
 10. If we apply collaboratively for \$1 million, the total budget for all of the AZA aquariums (submitting collaborative applications) should equal \$1 million?
 - a. Yes.
 11. Project descriptions should be similar in collaborative applications, but there may be different activities at each aquarium?
 - a. The project description should be identical for each collaborative application and the activities of all the institutions involved in the project should be described. You don't want the reviewers having to piece together a narrative from 5 separate proposals so provide one holistic copy that describes your project, milestones, references cited etc.
 - b. The only difference among collaborative applications should be the standard forms and budget information.
 12. Does everybody who is listed in the grant as a partner need to submit a letter of commitment, i.e. local fishermen?
 - a. You don't have to have letters, but the reviewers will look for letters of commitment from people/institutions that will be major players in the project.
 - b. Having the letters will help your review.
 13. What are the requirements for the progress reports?
 - a. Semi-annually (twice a year).
- **Types of projects:** Carrie McDougall, NOAA OED
 - What types of projects are of *interest*:
 - Emphasis on education projects (see p. 3-5 of FFO from our web site). The majority of the activities funded should involve direct participation by visitors/staff (target audiences) with measurable outcomes and an assessment of such outcomes.
 - Emphasis on utilization of best practices from the appropriate field (see the recent Bell *et al.* report).
 - Partnerships are strongly encouraged (among Aquariums, with NOAA entities, and others)
 - What types of projects are of *less interest*:
 - Projects that may trigger an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement. Refer to NAO 216-6 section on categorical exclusions (see Resources list). Anything categorically excluded does NOT require an EA or EIS.

- Planning grants for exhibits really don't fit this FFO.
 - If the majority of the Federal request will support the development of an exhibit with minimal expenditures going toward staff development and/or educational programming related to the exhibit, then it is not likely to review well.
- Types of projects Q&A:
 14. Is it okay to submit an application for a project if a relevant environmental assessment has already been done?
 - a. We need to discuss specifics one-on-one with you to make a determination. Let's talk before you submit a proposal.
 15. If the institution currently has NOAA funding for a different project, should we include information on that project in this proposal and can it be used for match?
 - a. If the other NOAA funding supports activities that will directly relate to the proposed project, you can (and should) describe them. However, you cannot apply those funds toward the 50% matching requirement since the match cannot be from a federal source.
 16. If funding is for an exhibit used primarily for education programming, is that acceptable?
 - a. We need to talk one-on-one about that because in some cases it may be fine and others not.
 17. Could you elaborate on exhibits – what kinds of exhibit projects are acceptable?
 - a. Details can be found on the bottom of page 3 in FFO. We're not opposed to exhibits, we just don't want the entire funding request to be about exhibits.
 18. If the education project is designed to promote conservation of energy and other natural resources, can applicant request funding to purchase technology (e.g. solar panels)?
 - a. Yes, as long as installation does not adversely affect the environment (NEPA).
 19. Can this be an education research project?
 - a. This is not a solicitation for educational research projects *per se*, but educational research could be *part* of a larger project. Put yourself in the place of the reviewers to determine if you think the proposal will do well in light of the goals, objectives and evaluation criteria in the published in the FFO.
 - **Evaluation:** Carrie McDougall, NOAA OED
 - Projects should be based on existing front-end evaluation/needs assessment and you should talk about that in your project descriptions. Plans for formative and summative project evaluations should be part of the project and budget.
 - Evaluations should be designed and conducted by professional evaluators or internal staff members without a conflict of interest related the project. If your project involves development or modification of digital media, we recommend you also include evaluation of the media interface(s).

- Evaluation Q&A:
 20. You mentioned that projects should be based on existing front-end evaluations and needs assessment, but what if you haven't had a professional external evaluator prior to this application?
 - a. The front-end evaluation is a rationale for your project. It says why your project is needed and what is the basis for determining this. This is not necessarily a product of the project evaluator.
 21. We often used logic models as an important part of developing our evaluation plans. Is it acceptable to include these in the evaluation section of the proposal?
 - a. Logic models are excellent way to address this component and should be included if they already exist.

- **Budget overview:** Carrie McDougall, NOAA OED
 - Hard requirement: *All projects must include matching funds of 50% of the total request from NOAA.* The source of the matching funds cannot be federal, but can be in-kind resources. You must have match "in hand" by end of July 2009. See p. 9 of FFO (PDF from OED site).
 - *For collaborative applications,* the budget minimum and maximum apply to the whole federal request for the project, not just the submitting institution's portion. Our title page template is intended to help you show the total request of your project.

- Budget overview Q&A:
 22. Can match include activities that took place before the award starts?
 - a. As long as the match relates to the project in the application.
 23. Can funds that were used to build a structure that will be relevant to the project be used as a match?
 - a. Yes if you can show the relevance of using it, not just construction costs.
 - b. Refer to FFO to determine that what you are claiming as matching funds is allowed.
 24. Can you speak to watershed issues and impact on coasts? Is that an appropriate focus area?
 - a. Refer to the Ocean Literacy Principles. Watersheds and the water cycle are key components to NOAA's portfolio. Use the Ocean Literacy and Climate Literacy Principles to show how this is relevant to ocean resources.
 25. Are there equipment restrictions?
 - a. You must be able to justify that it directly supports and is a critical component of the proposed project. See budget guidelines provided for additional guidance.
 26. Can you use funding for personnel?
 - a. Yes, it is allowed as long as it is clear that the cost is not duplicative of the indirect costs (IDC).
 27. Can you ask for an IDC rate if you do not officially have an IDC rate agreement?
 - a. No. If don't have an agreement in hand or are currently in negotiations for one from a Federal agency, you must bill all costs as line items under direct costs. For instance you would list out the pro-rated cost of rent, utilities, salaries and fringe of

administrative staff, etc.

- **Logistics for preparing your application:** Carrie McDougall, NOAA OED
 - *Templates:* see http://www.oesd.noaa.gov/funding_templates.html
 - We have created a variety of templates to aid you in preparing your application. We strongly suggest you use them.
 - *Grants.gov registration & submission:* Possible submission issues due to system problems.
 - Preparation of a “*paper*” application and submission via expedited shipping service (not US Postal Service) by the deadline as a back-up to Grants.gov.

- **Logistics Q&A:**
 28. Should we still submit a paper application if we received a Grants.gov confirmation?
 - a. If received both Grants.gov confirmation emails, that is probably okay. But, considering the nature of the system, you may want to still send a hard copy.
 29. If we submit 2 applications, can we mail them in the same package?
 - a. Yes, just make sure it is clear. Make sure it isn’t sent by US Mail (USPS). Send by expedited mail and sent by 5pm Eastern Time on the deadline.
 30. Will a hard copy suffice whether it is our fault or Grants.gov’s fault that the electronic submission did not go through?
 - a. Yes, it’s fine either way. The hard copy will count.
 31. Which method do you prefer?
 - a. We prefer Grants.gov because it goes directly into our internal grants management system and there is less chance for error processing of the application.
 32. I have some tips for working with Grants.gov:
 - a. Whenever there is a submission failure when system is overloaded and you get a message saying you used the wrong user name and password, do not change your password. Grants.gov recommends changing password, but don’t do it if you think the problem is overload, not an incorrect password.
 - b. There is an alternate system that works better than Grants.gov. It is called Backstop, and it is set-up as an ftp site that goes directly to the agency.
 - i. *Response from OED: This system will not be available for use for this competition. Getting the approval to use an alternate system for receiving applications would take a long time (possibly never) to obtain.*

- **Other Q&A:**
 33. On page 15, you ask about current and pending support of PI’s and Co-PI’s. How much detail do you want?
 - a. Need to be sure people are not being obligated over 100% of their time or if there is a potential for over-commitment. Include pending also since they may be awarded by the time our selection is made.
 34. Will reviewers look at the applications within both priorities?

- a. We are running separate review panels, so there will be different reviewers for each priority.
35. The FFO has some language on underrepresented communities. Is this specific to civic engagement or any submission?
- a. It's relevant for any submission, but we wanted to call special attention to including those communities in civic engagement projects.
36. We have heard that you will probably get this funding again, but are not sure. Therefore, will the \$7.5 M be obligated over 1-3 year period?
- a. We plan to fully fund as many awards as possible so we don't have a large mortgage in future fiscal years. But we have to see the results of these competitions. We are only talking about obligating our funds by making awards before the end of the fiscal year. You do not need to worry about trying to spend the funding before then because that would be impossible.
37. On the bottom of p. 3, you state that the development of permanent and travel exhibits should play a supporting role. Do you have specific guidance regarding what this means?
- a. No specific percentage breakdown; it depends on the project. Mostly we want to avoid getting requests for huge sums of funding on planning an exhibit or filming a TV special, etc.
38. Can we include travel costs in the proposal, e.g. for ocean science teachers to other ocean environments (including teachers in foreign countries)?
- a. If it is justified by the requirements of the project. The travel must be necessary for the execution of the project.
 - b. There is no restriction on foreign travel per se. As with domestic travel, it should be necessary for the execution of the project and reviewers should be able to see that based on your explanation.
39. Can you expand on the meaning of civic engagement?
- a. Like science centers and museums, aquariums are in a wonderful position to engage their local communities in a dialogue on global change issues. Civic engagement projects do that and also build capacity in the local community to address those issues. We don't want to assume there is one way to do these types of projects, so we've left it vague on purpose. You might want to look at the reference in the FFO for "Americans and Climate Change: Closing the Gap Between Science and Action..." for ideas. Many of the ideas in this report are relevant to global environmental change issues regardless of whether your project is explicitly focused on climate change.
40. How does this relate to advocacy work?
- a. We don't fund things that reach a specific conclusion on how people should act although we do want to encourage stewardship of resources. We want people not only to gain better scientific understanding of certain phenomena but also to have the skills and ability to apply that knowledge in decision making and hopefully taking action.
41. Can you explain what you mean by education games?

- a. Any game that you might play in the aquarium or on the aquarium website that has education goals as the primary objective. Generally this refers to traditional gaming, but we are not closed off to other creative ideas.
42. If 501(c)(3) tax exempt status is pending, but we are affiliated with an institution that has 501(c)(3) status, can we apply?
- a. If you don't have the status by June 9, you are not eligible. Make sure the applicant with the appropriate status submits.

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