



Refugio Beach Oil Spill – Large Whale Entanglement Response Support Program

2024 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Full Proposal Due Date: July 17, 2024 at 11:59 p.m.

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), is soliciting proposals to improve existing efforts to reduce mortality of whales from entanglement in fishing gear in Southern California. The activities will provide compensatory restoration for injury to cetaceans caused by the Refugio Beach Oil Spill (RBOS). Specifically, the aim of the activities is to augment an existing permitted and authorized program off the southern California coast by increasing the capacity of the entanglement response network in areas that need additional support to respond to reports of entangled cetaceans, to document and disentangle these animals, and to broadly support efforts to reduce the number of entanglements that could lead to serious injuries or mortalities.

NFWF and NOAA anticipate selecting only one proposal and encourage collaboration and partnerships. Award will be contingent upon available funding from the NOAA.

An estimated \$250,000 will be available through this solicitation for a Phase 1 project award, which is anticipated to last 1–2 years. A second phase may be awarded, via an award extension, for another 1-2 year increment according to negotiated award amounts. Award will be contingent upon available funding from the NOAA.

Background: On May 19, 2015, a pipeline owned and operated by Plains All American Pipeline ruptured near Refugio State Beach. Over 100,000 gallons of crude oil were spilled, much of which ran down a storm drain and into a ravine under the freeway, entering the ocean. The [Restoration Plan](#) outlined restoration projects intended to compensate the public for injuries to several habitats and other natural resources including marine mammals and specifically cetaceans.

As described in the Restoration Plan, the goal of this compensatory project is to improve existing efforts to reduce mortality of whales from entanglement in fishing gear. Entanglement in fishing gear is a source of mortality to whales and dolphins off the California coast, and a large number of entangled animals die if they remain entangled. As the number of whale entanglements has increased over the last 10 years, the Entanglement Program has struggled to keep pace with all the program needs that correspond to Program coordination. The project will augment an existing permitted and authorized program by enhancing response capabilities and training personnel to disentangle cetaceans in areas not currently covered off the southern California coast. This project should also work to support efforts by NOAA and other partners to find ways to reduce the number of entanglements that occur, and the types of serious injuries or mortalities that may occur as a result.

Minimum requirements:

Any personnel performing “responder” responsibilities will be required to be a current Level 4

responder (C.I. Letter holder) within the NOAA large whale entanglement response program to enable them to not only participate in events but to lead events, both on and off water, and to help train and mentor upcoming responders. It is essential that dedicated support be knowledgeable, experienced, and capable as a level 4 responder the position will be expected to communicate and coordinate closely with NOAA staff while simultaneously working and communicating with and leading the responders involved in the events.

Project Proposals: Project proposals should include detailed descriptions for the proposed Phase 1 activities, including a work plan, timeline and budget. Potential Phase 2 activities can be generally described in the Work Plan, but should not be included in the budget details section of EasyGrants.

- Work Plan – Description of activities with details on how they will be conducted.
- Describe goals, objectives, and desired outcomes.
- Project timeline outlining major activities, milestones, and reports
- Environmental compliance information, such as a list of federal, Tribal, state, and local permits required for projects under this award

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

- The priority geographic focus is Southern California, and – in particular for responding to entangled cetaceans – the coastlines off Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles and Orange Counties Applicants do not need to be primarily based in the Southern California area if they can provide assurance that they can effectively perform entanglement response and capacity building activities in Southern California.
- Project proposals may include additional activities outside of the priority geographic focus if they relate to the health and protection of individual cetaceans that may occur in southern California at some point during their life.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Project proposals should address as many of these program priorities as possible:

Directly Enhance Entanglement Response

Enhance entanglement responses that benefit cetaceans in Southern California. Types of direct response activities could include, but are not limited to:

- Participate in, and/or lead, entanglement responses in Southern California
- Participate in, and/or lead, entanglement responses beyond Southern California that benefit cetaceans in Southern California

Coordinate with federal, state and local resource agencies

This project will work closely with federal, state and local resource agencies to enhance coordination of the overall West Coast Marine Mammal Entanglement Response Program (Program), with a primary focus of benefitting cetaceans in Southern California. This coordination will help ensure that there is sufficient Program capacity for entanglement response in Southern California, including the Channel Islands area. As a secondary focus, project work may include similar activities to enhance capacity throughout the State of California (e.g., Monterey Bay and San Francisco) where whale entanglements are most commonly observed and reported.

Although project activities are expected to proceed independently, the recipient will work closely with federal, state and local resource agencies to ensure the project activities are consistent with the mandates and priorities of the Entanglement Response Program

Types of coordination activities could include, but are not limited to:

- Develop a Large Whale Entanglement Response Resource Handbook and Directory, which could include:
 - Compile existing materials on large whale disentanglement response, safety protocols, tools, telemetry, gear removal strategies, response areas, reporting, and response documentation.
 - Include instructions for data collection and data sharing.
 - Include intervention consultation instructions (include roles of different levels of responders, and thresholds for consultation with upper level responders and Level IV & V requirements).
 - Consult with Network partners, MMHSRP veterinarians and national coordinators, and relevant experts to identify appropriate “stand-down” thresholds and “no-go” rules.
- Improve collection of entanglement data, which could include:
 - Assist with NOAA Entanglement team case reviews and gear analysis to ensure complete/ thorough collection and documentation of information/ data from each entanglement case.
 - Assist with maintaining a large whale entanglement response database (ERD) as needed
 - Conduct relevant analysis of entanglement data to support Program and other stakeholder questions/needs.

Train and develop volunteer response capacity

Efforts to train and develop volunteer response capacity throughout the West Coast have been limited. In addition, the relatively low number of high-level trained responders on the West Coast make it difficult to generate effective responses that may include detailed documentation of entanglement events, as well as disentanglement efforts. Types of training and volunteer development activities could include, but are not limited to:

- New responder identification and development
- Maintain Co-investigator and resource contact lists.
- Review levels of experience and make recommendations for level advancement.
- Develop responder training presentations, videos, and handouts
- Coordinate training opportunities for ICS orientation for scaling complex responses.
- Track trainings via Better Impact

Build capacity and infrastructure

Proposals should outline how these activities will contribute to the development of the overall capacity and infrastructure of the Program. Types of capacity and infrastructure building activities could include, but are not limited to:

- Evaluate and Improve Adequate Program Tools and Supplies
 - Create and maintain network tools list (tools types and locations)
 - Identify needed new tools and supplies
 - Purchase and manage the distribution of new tools and replacements
- Support Entanglement Mitigation Development

- Participate in State Working Groups and other initiatives to implement management measures to reduce the risk and impacts of entanglements.
- Support (or initiate) research projects designed to identify/develop promising entanglement mitigation ideas.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, we ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project. Project metrics should be described in the project narrative.

- Number of entanglement events participated
- Number of trainings led in Southern California
- Number of individuals trained in Southern California
- Number of entanglement response

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

Eligible applicants include *non-profit 501(c) organizations, state government agencies, local governments, municipal governments, for-profit organizations, Tribal governments and organizations, educational institutions, international organizations.*

Ineligible applicants include *U.S. federal government agencies, and unincorporated individuals.*

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- **Certain Equipment:** Federal funds and matching contributions may not be used to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems (including entering into or renewing a contract) that uses telecommunications equipment or services produced by Huawei Technologies Company or ZTE Corporation (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) as a substantial or essential component, or as critical technology of any system. Refer to Public Law 115-232, section 889 for additional information. Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases. NFWF acknowledges, however, that some projects may only be completed using NFWF funds to procure equipment. If this applies to your project, please contact the program staff listed in this RFP to discuss options.
- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

Matching funds are not required.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Program Goals and Priorities – Project contributes to the Program’s overall habitat and species conservation goals, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities.

Technical Merit – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth 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.

Community Engagement and Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages collaboratively with diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project, integration into local programs and policies, and community acceptance of proposed restoration actions. Non-traditional partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project. Describe the community characteristics of the project area, identify any communities impacted, describe outreach and community engagement activities and how those will be monitored and measured. Use demographic data to support descriptions and submit letters of support from community partners and/or collaborators demonstrating their commitment to the project and engagement in project activities as proposed.

Cost-Effectiveness – Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation may include, but is not limited to, an assessment of either or both direct and indirect costs in the proposed budget. The federal government has determined that a *de minimis* 10 percent indirect rate is an acceptable minimum for organizations without a NICRA, as such NFWF reserves the right to scrutinize **ALL** proposals with indirect rates above 10 percent for cost-effectiveness.

Transferability – Project has potential and plan to transfer lessons learned to other communities and/or to be integrated into government programs and policies.

Conservation Plan and Context – The project advances an existing conservation plan or strategy.

Monitoring – Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Past Success – Applicant has a proven record of accomplishment of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.

Partnership – An appropriate partnership exists to implement the project and the project is supported by a strong local partnership that leverages additional funds and will sustain it after the life of the grant. Identify proposed partners, if known (including potential or contemplated sub awards to third party sub recipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementing the project, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in the completion of the project.)

OTHER

Budget – Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF’s [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. As the funds supporting this RFP are anticipated to have a federal nexus, funded projects must be in compliance with [OMB Uniform Guidance](#) as applicable.

Matching Contributions – Match is encouraged but not required. Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised and spent for the Project during the Period of Performance.

Procurement – If the applicant chooses to specifically identify proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF’s express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and regulations.

Publicity and Acknowledgement of Support – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF’s financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project. Award recipients will also be required to acknowledge NOAA and the Refugio Trustee Council and Council logo in press releases, publications and other public communications.

Receiving Award Funds – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Projects may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

Compliance Requirements – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. As may be applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.

Permits – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements. Where projects involve work in the waters of the United States, NFWF strongly encourages applicants to conduct a permit pre-application meeting with the Army Corps of Engineers prior to submitting their proposal. In some cases, if a permit pre-application meeting has not been completed, NFWF may require successful applicants to complete such a meeting prior to grant award.

Data Sharing - Successful applicants will be required to satisfy NOAA data sharing requirements, including making environmental data collected or created under this award publicly visible and accessible in a timely manner.

Reporting – Successful applicants will be required to submit semi-annual progress reports based on reporting templates that will be provided.

Project Safety – Successful applicants will be required have a written safety plan for management of the project, which should specifically address safety of project personnel, associates, visitors, and volunteers; and should address SCUBA-related activities, in particular.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change.

Full Proposal Due Date: July 17th, 2024 at 11:59pm

Review Period: July 18th - August 23rd

Awards Announced: late September/early October

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Easygrants system.

1. Go to easygrants.nfwf.org to register in our Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.
2. Once on your homepage, click the “Apply for Funding” button and select this RFP’s “Funding Opportunity” from the list of options.
3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A *Tip Sheet* is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be downloaded [here](#).

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page.

For more information or questions about this RFP, please contact:

Hannah Lam

hannah.lam@nfwf.org

202-888-1662

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday-Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.