

# Fiscal Year 2022 NOAA Marine Debris Removal under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Notice of Funding Opportunity

## Grant Applicant Webinar Questions and Answers

The NOAA Marine Debris Program will award up to \$56 million to fund projects that remove marine debris to benefit marine and Great Lakes habitats and communities. This competition focuses on two priorities. The first priority will support partnerships for the development of large scale and high-value marine debris removal programs. The second priority of this competition focuses on implementation of proven marine debris interception technologies in coastal riverine, shoreline, estuarine, and urban environments where trash, plastics, and other persistent, reaccumulating macro-debris can be captured and removed. You can view the notice of funding opportunity [here](#). Please note applications are due October 14th at 11:59 P.M. ET.

A recorded webinar providing further guidance for applicants on competition priorities and the application process is available on the NOAA Marine Debris Program website. This document provides an overview of the questions received following the webinar (not included in the webinar recording for privacy purposes). If you have any additional questions not addressed in this document please reach out to the NOAA Marine Debris Program grants team ([grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov](mailto:grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov)).

***Please note: If your project doesn't align with the NOAA Marine Debris Program FY22 NOAA Marine Debris Removal under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act notice of funding opportunity, please review the [NOAA Sea Grant open funding opportunities for marine debris](#) to see if their competitions would be a better fit.***

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## General Project Questions

**Question: Are marine debris research projects eligible for funding under this competition?**

**Answer:** No. Projects focused on research or testing of new devices/removal methods are not a priority for this competition, and any projects focused on research more than removal are not eligible for funding. However, assessment or monitoring activities in the context of a removal project are eligible and encouraged. We encourage you to view the [NOAA Sea Grant open funding opportunities](#) for marine debris to see if your research project would better align with these priorities.

**Question: Are marine debris education programs eligible for funding under this competition?**

**Answer:** This competition is focused on removal efforts as described in the priorities of the notice of funding opportunity. Where appropriate, partnerships or projects funded under this opportunity may encourage community involvement in addition to removal efforts. This could include direct involvement in project activities, involvement in marine debris prevention, education, outreach activities that are related to funded work, and hands-on training. Federal funding may support such activities, however, the primary goal of these funds is to demonstrate meaningful marine debris removal outcomes.

**Question: How much detail should be provided about a complementary element (e.g., prevention, monitoring, research etc.) that is not a core objective of this funding opportunity?**

**Answer:** The focus of your proposal should be related to the priorities in the notice of funding opportunity. Prevention and monitoring components are encouraged and a detailed account of how they would be incorporated will likely make your proposal more competitive. However, the proposed work should be focused on marine debris removal, and the other components should ensure a lasting impact and avoid reaccumulation of the type of debris removed.

**Question: Are there requirements for the disposal of reclaimed plastic marine debris? Is this to be covered by the funding?**

**Answer:** There are no required methods for the disposal of reclaimed plastic marine debris under this competition, but removals should be conducted with a focus on alternative disposal methods when possible, and guidance is provided in the [notice of funding opportunity](#). Applicants are responsible for determining the disposal method and approaches will vary project by project, depending on the community and available

options in the proposed area. Applicants that have an estimated cost of proposed disposal efforts can include those costs in their budget request.

**Question: What are NOAA trust resources? What does it mean to connect to NOAA trust resources?**

**Answer:** NOAA trust resources generally refer to marine habitats and resources in which NOAA has a stewardship interest. This includes resources associated with National Marine Sanctuaries, Marine Monuments, National Estuarine Research Reserves, and areas under state coastal management programs, including Areas of Concern within the Great Lakes. NOAA trust resources also include commercial and recreational fishery resources (marine and Great Lakes fish and shellfish); coastal habitats; diadromous fish species; endangered and threatened marine species; marine mammals and marine turtles; marshes, mangroves, seagrass beds, coral reefs, other coastal habitats; Essential Fish Habitat (EFH); and Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPCs). For the purposes of this competition, NOAA trust resources may also include foreign, transient, or transboundary marine species.

Demonstrating a connection to NOAA trust resources means the proposed project will benefit NOAA trust resources. The project proposal should make a clear connection to how the proposed work will impact NOAA trust resources.

## Priority 1

**Question: If a state program already exists to remove derelict vessels, are these funds available to further bolster these established efforts?**

**Answer:** Yes, if funds will be used to expand and/or increase the impact of existing programs for the removal of large marine debris, such as abandoned and derelict vessels in this case, then they are allowable. However, funding existing day-to-day activities would not meet the competition priorities. It is suggested to follow up with the NOAA Marine Debris Program grants team ([grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov](mailto:grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov)) if you have specific questions about expanding an existing program.

**Question: Are projects that remove both large marine debris and smaller debris eligible for funding?**

**Answer:** The most competitive proposals will be those that focus on the removal of large marine debris. However, proposals with appropriate targeted removal of large

marine debris that also incorporate the collection of smaller macrodebris would be eligible for this competition.

**Question: Can multiple large debris items (e.g., abandoned and derelict vessels) be included for removal under one single proposal?**

**Answer:** Yes. Projects proposing the removal of multiple large marine debris items will be more competitive than projects proposing the removal of a single large debris item.

**Question: Do all large marine debris targets under Priority 1(b) need to be identified in the proposal? Can the project include a plan to identify additional targets during the project period?**

**Answer:** For Priority 1(b), projects with large debris targets that are already identified will be more competitive than projects that do not have detailed description of items and locations for proposed removals. However, projects including a clear description of why additional large marine debris targets will be located during the project period, in addition to methods for how they will be identified and selected, would still be eligible.

**Question: If I have a vessel collecting both large debris and microplastics, can that be considered for a Priority 1 project?**

**Answer:** The ideal scenario for Priority 1 is to remove large debris over a large geographic area, typically larger than a footprint of a single vessel in a given area. It could be eligible, but the priority will be large-scale, high-impact projects. The proposal would need to demonstrate that they meet that priority to be competitive.

**Question: Can a proposal combine elements of Priorities 1(a) and 1(b)?**

**Answer:** Yes, projects that both set up a funding competition to remove marine debris in a given area and directly remove marine debris are eligible.

**Question: For Priority 1 proposals, can part of the work involve identifying targets for removal over a large area (e.g., compiling data from various sources, mapping, data management, etc.)?**

**Answer:** Generally, yes, but competitive projects will focus on removal efforts. Monitoring, data collection, or other efforts can support removal efforts, but proposals without associated removal activities won't be a priority for this competition. For Priority 1(a), proposing to set up a funding opportunity over a defined large area would be a priority for this competition. For Priority 1(b), large scale removals over a large geographic area would be a priority for this competition.

**Question: Can partnerships be formed with organizations outside of the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States?**

**Answer:** Generally, yes partnerships can be formed with organizations outside of the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States. However funding should be limited to eligible applicants listed in the notice of funding opportunity. To be sure your non-United States partnership and proposed work is aligned with the competition priorities, applicants are encouraged to reach out to the NOAA Marine Debris Program grants team ([grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov](mailto:grants.marinedebris@noaa.gov)).

**Question: Can multiple large marine debris items be included as targets in the same proposal (e.g., derelict fishing gear and abandoned and derelict vessels)?**

**Answer:** Yes, multiple large marine debris items may be targeted in the same proposal. As long as there is a cohesive reason and it makes sense to do so.

## Priority 2

**Question: What is the smallest size you are considering for macroplastics?**

**Answer:** This competition is focused on the implementation of interception devices that are targeted for trash, rather than interception devices specialized to collect microplastics or microfibers. The NOAA Marine Debris Program uses the international definition of microplastics, which is considered 5 millimeters or smaller in size. Anything larger than 5 millimeters would be considered an eligible macroplastic project for this competition.

**Question: Is the training, maintenance, and data collection associated with existing interception devices eligible for this competition?**

**Answer:** No, the goal of this priority is to build and increase capacity for marine debris removal, rather than fund ongoing efforts that may already be in place. Monitoring or assessment components should support proposed new removal efforts.

## Other

**Question: Is a letter of intent required for this competition?**

**Answer:** There is no letter of intent requirement for this competition. The [NOAA Sea Grant competitions](#) do require a letter of intent, but neither Priority 1 or Priority 2 for the NOAA Marine Debris Program competition have a letter of intent component. A description of the full proposal application requirements may be found in the [notice of funding opportunity](#) and application guidance documents can be found on the [NOAA Marine Debris Program website](#).

**Question: Will funding be given at the proposal award date or as projects achieve progress milestones?**

**Answer:** Applicants do not have to produce or complete milestones and demonstrate results before getting payments. For awards in this competition, the work plan and proposed approach is reviewed and then funds are awarded upfront to be used throughout the period of performance. There are some guidelines on how much can be spent in advance of work being done, which will be discussed with awardees prior to their start date.

We expect awards for this competition to have the full budget available at the start date of the project. There may be some scenarios where the applicant may prefer for funding to be awarded incrementally (the budget for year one awarded in year one and the budget for year two awarded in year two). However, we only expect to provide incremental funding if it makes sense for a specific applicant.

**Question: Will National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses be required as part of the proposal, or does the program have an exemption?**

**Answer:** Yes, environmental compliance analyses are required, but with a limited burden expected on the applicant. As the lead federal agency providing funds to support removal of marine debris, the NOAA Marine Debris Program will ensure that all environmental compliance requirements are met before awardees begin grant activities. During the course of our environmental compliance analysis, the applicant will be responsible for providing project details to help NOAA Marine Debris Program staff complete our NEPA analysis and full environmental review.

**Question: Can the proposed work take place over multiple years?**

**Answer:** Yes, all proposals should propose project activities over a 2-4 year period. This is the timeframe projects can typically implement the work plan and close out with realized results.

**Question: Why is cost-sharing evaluated if it is not required in the proposal?**

**Answer:** Cost-sharing is an important aspect of our grant programs and a way to encourage the involvement of different groups in meaningful ways in a federal grant. It's an agency-wide priority for the various Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding opportunities to prioritize projects that can meaningfully bring in additional resources and additional leverage to the federal funding being awarded. This is why it is important that every effort should be taken to obtain cost-sharing opportunities and why it is included in the evaluation criteria. The goal of the funding from this competition is for projects to be greater than the sum of their parts and having buy-in from industry, community, etc., in order to ensure stronger and longer-lasting impacts from project outcomes.

**Question: If a partner provides leveraged funds, do we need to show in the budget?**

**Answer:**

Yes, all leveraged funds must be included in the budget materials. The type of leveraged funds will determine where it should be included.

*Formal* cost-share or match is considered any non-federal cost-sharing, match, or in-kind contributions.

- "Cost share" or "match" is defined by 2 C.F.R. 200.1 as "the portion of project costs not paid by federal funds (unless otherwise authorized by federal statute)."
- These formal contributions must be clearly described in both the official budget narrative and the budget tables.
- Please note that funded applications will be legally bound to provide the full amount of non-federal match funds proposed in the budget.

*Informal* match contributions are leveraged funds that don't qualify as non-federal cost-sharing or match but demonstrate meaningful contributions to the award.

- This would include any federal contributions or if the project is part of a larger-related effort.
- These should be clearly described at the end of the budget narrative, but should not be included in official budget tables.

**Question: Is this opportunity a one-time application or is it recurring?**

**Answer:** Currently, this competition is planned as a one-time application for fiscal years 2022 and 2023. However, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides funding to NOAA for marine debris assessment, prevention, mitigation, and removal through 2026. The NOAA Marine Debris Program will continue to assess with various partners and regional stakeholders where the biggest needs are and future funding opportunities will take into account and reflect those conversations.

**Question: What are some tips to help avoid common mistakes applicants often make on their applications?**

**Answer:**

1. Please ensure all the budget information matches throughout your proposal. Often the materials in the budget narrative and justification don't match budget requests on federal forms due to last minute changes not being reflected everywhere the budget is described.
2. Please be sure your budget justification provides enough detail. For example, when describing costs for office supplies, information on what items are being purchased and how the funding request amount was determined should be provided.
3. Federal forms should be signed by the authorized representative on the grants.gov account. If changes need to be made after the initial submission to the federal forms, they will need to be resigned using DocuSign or Adobe Sign to ensure a documented authenticated signature.
4. Please be sure all documentation and forms are completed entirely. It is common for certain fields to be left blank that are important for reviewing and processing the award.