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SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund

Request for Proposals | March 2021

Large Award

SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund

Large RFP Guidelines

Table of Contents

- Table of Contents 1
- I. Large Award Program Summary 2
 - Key Parameters of the Large Award Program 2
- II. Program Overview 3
- III. Funding, Timeline, and Process 4
 - Funding Availability 4
 - Project Timeline 4
 - Application Requirements 4
 - Deadline 5
 - Proposal Review Process 5
 - Award and Notification 5
- IV. Resiliency Fund Eligibility 6
 - Eligible Applicants 6
 - Eligible Project Types 6
 - Funding Priorities 6
 - Evaluation Criteria 8
 - Match Funding 9
- V. Reporting and Payment Information 9
 - Award Information 9
 - Reporting Requirements 10
 - Final Report 10
 - Payment & Other Considerations 10
- VI. Contact Information 10

I. Large Award Program Summary

The SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund (Fund) aims to pave the way for a more resilient and sustainable U.S. shellfish industry that benefits the ocean and the communities that rely upon it. The Fund will extend funding to shellfish growers and other aligned organizations to further collaborative marine conservation efforts and increase economic opportunities for shellfish farming in the United States.

The program is divided into two funding tracks: a small-scale award directed mainly toward growers and closely allied organizations and a large-scale award. If you are interested in the small award program, please click [here](#).

Key Parameters of the Large Award Program

Eligibility: Shellfish growers, academic organizations, non-profit organizations, supply chain companies, and industry associations that support shellfish aquaculture in the United States are eligible to apply (see section IV).

Type of Award and Maximum Size: Depending on the activities proposed in each project, and the legal nature of the Applicant, the selected projects will be awarded either via a contract for services or a grant agreement. TNC reserves the right to select the adequate type of agreement, however Applicants should assess these different alternatives in their proposed budgets.

The maximum award size will be \$100,000 USD, all applicable taxes included.

Priorities: The large award program seeks projects that advance the following priorities. See additional details in section IV:

- Advancing payments for ecosystem services
- Long-term markets for restoration
- Product marketing to increase demand
- New products and species
- Supporting infrastructure and services
- Regulation of shellfish aquaculture

Award Period: All project activities must be completed within 2 years of award issuance.

Application Process: A full proposal is required for the large award program, including a cover letter, application, budget worksheet and narrative, letter of support, and additional information as needed.

Deadlines: The large award program will begin accepting proposals following announcement of the RFP on **March 29, 2021**. The proposal deadline will be 9:00 am Eastern Time on **Monday, June 14, 2021**.

A session for questions regarding the RFP will be hosted online on April 28, 2021.

Review Process: Pre-established evaluation criteria will be utilized in the review of proposals (see section IV).

Reporting Requirements: Upon completion of the project, the awardee shall provide TNC a final report, including a financial report. Awardees must also submit an interim report at the project's half-way point. See section V for additional details.

II. Program Overview

In October of 2020, The Nature Conservancy and The Pew Charitable Trusts, in coordination with shellfish industry, federal, and state partners, launched the Supporting Oyster Aquaculture and Restoration (SOAR) program with the goal of supporting oyster farmers affected by economic slowdowns associated with COVID-19 and rebuilding wild oyster reefs.

Through the establishment of the \$1 million Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund, SOAR is now focused on addressing the long-term need to build resilience into the shellfish farming industry by supporting innovations that promote environmental co-benefits.

The Fund is built upon a recognition that ensuring the resilience of the U.S. shellfish aquaculture industry is in the interest of conservation. Responsibly managed shellfish farms can provide vital ecosystem services that benefit ocean health, and shellfish growers can be critical partners in conservation.

The Fund will extend funding to shellfish growers and other aligned organizations to further collaborative marine conservation efforts and increase economic opportunities for shellfish farming in the United States.

The program is divided into two funding tracks. The first track is a small-scale award and the second track is a large-scale award. The small and large award programs have different eligibility requirements, application and reporting requirements, priorities, and deadlines. This document outlines the application, eligibility requirements and timelines for the Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund large award program. If you are interested in the small award program, which offers awards up to \$20,000 in size, please click [here](#).

To date, SOAR has focused on the immediate need to provide economic relief to oyster farmers by making available \$2 million for an oyster purchase program to rebuild 27 acres of imperiled native shellfish reefs across 20 restoration sites in seven states.

While the shellfish purchase program was intended to address immediate threats to the shellfish industry posed by COVID-19 in a limited area, it is also important to address the underlying structural issues which have contributed to the acute challenges faced by growers nationally. The industry has traditionally depended on single revenue streams and market outlets, with limited access to financing, a lack of

pooled or shared resources and limited up/downstream infrastructure. We recognize shellfish growers are critical partners whose businesses can help to ensure a healthy ocean due to the ecosystems services that farms provide and the industry's strong engagement in conservation.

III. Funding, Timeline, and Process

Funding Availability

Applicants applying for the large award will be eligible to receive up to \$100,000 USD, all applicable taxes included.

Project Timeline

For the large-scale award, all projects must be completed within a two-year period, i.e., by August 2023. Applicants must also submit an interim report at the project's half-way point, August 2022. Please see section V below for reporting requirements.

Application Requirements

Applicants applying for the large award will be required to submit a full proposal, including a:

- Cover letter (1-page maximum)
- Application with the following sections:
 - Project summary: brief "abstract" about the project
 - Full project description
 - Explanation of how the project links to priority(ies)
 - Key project milestones, outcomes, and performance indicators
 - Description of technical/scientific methods (as appropriate)
 - Description of how the project supports diversity, equity, and inclusion in the shellfish aquaculture industry (if applicable)
 - Assessment of the scale of impact on the shellfish industry that can be achieved through the project
 - Explanation of why the project is innovative
 - Plan for sharing outcomes with the shellfish industry
 - Name of shellfish grower(s) collaborating on the project

Applications should be 12-pt font and single spaced with 1" margins (8 pages maximum, not including budget worksheet, supporting information, and letter(s) of support).

- Budget worksheet and narrative, detailing project costs.
- Any additional information that would be useful in evaluation of the proposal
- Letter(s) of support: The letter of support should be from a shellfish grower stating that the project will be directly applicable to the industry. Multiple

letters of support are encouraged, but at least 1 must come from a grower. Letters of support or recommendation written by TNC or Pew staff will not be considered.

The cover letter, application, additional materials, and letter(s) of support must be completed in Microsoft Word or PDF. The budget worksheet must be completed in Microsoft Excel, which will be available to download on the [SOAR website](#).

All proposals, including supporting materials, must be submitted in one email to soar@tnc.org. In the subject line, please include the name of the project and “Large RFP”.

Deadline

All proposals, including supporting materials, should be sent to soar@tnc.org. To access templates and resources, visit the [SOAR website](#).

Full proposals must be submitted by no later than **9:00 am Eastern Time on June 14, 2021**.

Proposal Review Process

All proposals will be reviewed and graded against the Evaluation Criteria detailed in section IV.

TNC will host a 90-minute online session to submit questions and receive answers from applicants on April 28, 2021. It is Applicant’s duty to inquire about and clarify any RFP questions that the Applicant does not fully understand or believes may be interpreted in more than one way. TNC, however, is not required to answer all questions that are not pertinent to the RFP or are considered to be TNC’s proprietary information.

The proposal review and selection process will not begin until after the application deadline. Reviews will be conducted by experts designated by The Nature Conservancy with the advice of The Pew Charitable Trusts. Proposals under consideration will receive input from the Resiliency Fund Steering Committee, which is comprised of representatives from nonprofit conservation organizations, academia, regional aquaculture associations, federal and state agencies, and shellfish growers.

Procurement and awarding activities, such as the review process, will be conducted in a nondiscriminatory manner with fair treatment given to all applicants. TNC reserves the right to reject any and all applications for any reason whatsoever, to waive technicalities, and to pursue the development of proposals in a manner that is in the best interest of the organization mission.

Award and Notification

All applicants will be notified via email about their proposal status. Proposals will be

declined or fully awarded. The large-scale awards will be announced by no later than July 2021.

IV. Resiliency Fund Eligibility

The Fund is open to applicants in the United States. This program seeks to provide funding equitably among the following geographies: West Coast (including Hawaii and Alaska), East Coast, and the Gulf of Mexico.

Eligible Applicants

Initiatives that will benefit broad swaths of the shellfish aquaculture industry are encouraged to apply to the large-scale award. Under this award category, recipients are required to work in partnership with shellfish farmers. Eligible organizations for the large award program include, but are not limited to:

- **Shellfish growers:** e.g., oysters, clams, geoducks, mussels, scallops, abalones
- **Shellfish aquaculture industry associations**
- **Supply chain companies supporting aquaculture:** e.g., seafood processors and dealers, hatcheries, gear providers, technology providers
- **Academic organizations,** including labs/extension offices associated with universities
- **Non-profit organizations engaged directly in the support of shellfish aquaculture**
- **State agencies**

Eligible Project Types

Proposed projects must identify and advance at least one of the priorities listed below. All applicants must determine which priority(ies) best represent their project and describe that connection clearly in the proposal. If the project touches on more than one priority, please indicate this in the proposal.

All applicants must be able to show how their projects can result in a more resilient shellfish industry. Projects that demonstrate linkages to shellfish restoration or broader marine conservation outcomes will be prioritized. The large award program will prioritize shellfish growers and/or organizations that were unable to participate in the SOAR oyster purchase program.

Funding Priorities

- **Advancing payments for ecosystem services:** Projects that make significant and measurable progress towards farmers receiving payment for ecosystem services. Examples include:
 - Projects that support existing efforts to develop nutrient trading markets (e.g., in New England, Chesapeake Bay).

- Projects that support the application of nutrient trading programs to other geographies.
 - Projects that develop the science, regulatory and reporting systems, and technologies necessary for reliable accounting of ecosystem services and advance these projects.
 - Projects that have potential to enhance ecosystem service provision of shellfish aquaculture farming operations.
- **Long-term markets for restoration:** Projects that enable creation of long-term markets for restoration. Examples include:
 - Projects that enable linkage of shellfish growers to restoration to promote a new and stable “restoration market” for farmed shellfish and/or shell that represents an added market opportunity.
 - **Product marketing to increase demand:** Projects that improve product marketing for significant segments of the shellfish industry. Examples include:
 - Projects that provide tools or create platforms to enable additional farmers to develop E-Commerce or other direct to consumer outlets.
 - Collaborative efforts that enable farmers to develop new domestic (e.g. mid-west) or international markets for farming products.
 - **New products and species.** Examples include:
 - Projects that address key technical, operational, or policy bottlenecks that support farmers farming of new native/non-introduced species (e.g., seaweed, Olympia oysters, new clam species).
 - Industry and academic collaborations that develop and market new, value added, or shelf-stable products that could be accessed or utilized by significant portions of the shellfish industry.
 - **Supporting infrastructure and services:** Projects that develop strategic supporting infrastructure and services that benefit a significant portion of the shellfish industry. Examples include:
 - Projects that support efforts to enable multiple farmers to develop appropriate processing facilities for creating frozen or shelf-stable products (e.g., chowders) from live shellfish. Given the loss of domestic seafood processing, the extensive current reliance of the U.S. seafood sector on foreign processing is a significant risk.
 - Establishment of cold, dry storage facilities benefiting a substantial number of farmers for overwinter holding of seed and larger shellfish to avoid winter die-off and diminish potential for glut that could collapse prices. Wet storage facilities are also needed (particularly within Gulf states) to improve shelf life and assure food safety.

- Industry, NGO, and academic collaborations that lead to the expansion of hatcheries in critical geographies that enable increased production of shellfish for aquaculture and restoration purposes.
- **Regulation of shellfish aquaculture:** Projects that improve public understanding and support sound regulation of shellfish aquaculture. Examples include:
 - Regional or local workshops/meetings that actively engage stakeholders to address key environmental, social, or regulatory issues related to the shellfish aquaculture industry.

Evaluation Criteria

Please see the Resiliency Fund Evaluation Criteria below for a detailed breakdown of the scoring. The following criteria will be used to evaluate proposals for the large awards. All proposals will be assigned scores ranging from 0 to 100 points. The projects selected for funding will be based on the highest ranking scores and a balance across geographies and priorities.

- **Alignment with priorities (20 points):** This criterion assesses how closely the proposed project aligns with the given priorities listed above. The project should fall clearly under one or more priorities and be able to demonstrate impact.
- **Outcomes are attainable within time period (15 points):** This criterion assesses whether the outcomes and deliverables in the application are realistic and can be accomplished within the 2-year time period.
- **Cost effectiveness of budget (15 points):** This criterion assesses the breakdown of the proposed budget and if the funds have been carefully allocated. The criteria will look to see if the Applicant has used critical thinking to take all costs into consideration.
- **Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (10 points):** This criterion assesses if the project demonstrates engagement with a broader audience or workforce that have been traditionally underrepresented in aquaculture (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability).
- **Clear plan for sharing outcomes/lessons learned with industry and farmers (10 points):** This criterion assesses how the project may have a larger impact on the aquaculture industry and how lessons learned will be shared with farmers and/or the industry upon completion of the project.
- **Innovative ideas/concepts (10 points):** This criterion assesses if the proposed project provides a unique and innovative solution to a problem or challenge in aquaculture.
- **Potential for scale of impact on shellfish industry (10 points):** This criterion assesses if the proposed outcomes of the project will have a large-scale benefit on the shellfish industry throughout the 2-year scope of the project and beyond.
- **Clear linkage to shellfish restoration, environmental sustainability of farming operations, or marine conservation (5 points):** This criterion assesses if the

proposed project has a benefit to shellfish restoration efforts, can improve the environmental sustainability of shellfish farming, or increases farmer engagement in marine conservation efforts.

- **General quality/completeness of application (5 points):** This criterion assesses the quality of the application, which should be filled out completely with clear and detailed explanations. It also assesses whether or not all of the required materials were submitted.

Match Funding

Proposals with match funding¹ are encouraged and accounted for in the application process when reviewing the cost effectiveness of the budget. All applications with match funding should indicate if the match is applied for, pledged or in-hand. Accompanying documentation is requested but not required.

SOAR funds are private philanthropic funds and therefore eligible to be used as match toward various public grants. Use of SOAR funds as match toward a larger grant is encouraged.

V. Reporting and Payment Information

Applicants that are selected to participate in the Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund program must abide by the information provided below.

Award Information

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) serves as the management entity for the SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund. Successful applicants will sign an agreement with TNC.

Depending on the activities proposed in each project, and the legal nature of the Applicant, the selected projects will be awarded either via a contract for services or a grant agreement. TNC reserves the right to select the adequate type of agreement, however Applicants should assess these different alternatives in their proposed budgets.

As part of the process, TNC may request copies of documents to ensure that Awardee meets the required eligibility criteria. These documents include but are not limited to the following: certificate of insurance, conflict of interest form,² and W-9. The agreement may contain the elements listed below regarding reporting requirements

¹ Match funds: Resources contributed to the project but are not included in the budget request. This may include “cash matching” funds. It may also include estimate “in-kind” match, such as the cost of uncompensated employee time dedicated to the project, or an appropriate share of uncompensated equipment and/or supplies utilized in the project.

² It is the policy of TNC to identify actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in any situation in which TNC has a significant business interest. To assist TNC in complying with this policy, we request that all applicants complete our Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form. This relates to people who will be working, directly or indirectly, to respond to this RFP, as well as may be doing the resultant work if the Applicant receives the award.

and payment. Award recipients will be expected to complete a survey to assess the effectiveness of the resiliency program.

Reporting Requirements

For the large-scale awards, the awardee shall provide a two-page programmatic and financial progress report after the first year or, if less than a 2-year timeline, at the approximate halfway point, beginning from the agreement execution date. The progress report shall describe the status on the deliverables outlined in the description of services in the agreement. It should also indicate any major challenges, corrective actions taken, and key highlights.

Final Report

Upon completion of the project, the awardee shall provide TNC a final report that:

- Summarizes the project and how the project was completed.
- Breaks down the deliverables that were completed from the description of services.
- Explains and provides supporting data to demonstrate how the project has benefitted/will benefit the shellfish industry/conservation.
- Describes any obstacles encountered, and how these obstacles were overcome.
- Contains a financial report detailing how the funds were spent and that all matching commitments have been fulfilled.
- Includes photographs, videos, and other supporting materials.

Payment & Other Considerations

TNC will provide the awardee an advance payment of 20% upon the signing of the contract. Requests for additional upfront funding will be handled on a case-by-case basis, up to a maximum of 80%. Final payment will be issued upon satisfactory completion of the Final Report.

Costs incurred prior to the effective date of a written agreement are not reimbursable.

Applicants shall not use TNC's name, logos, images or any data or results arising from the anticipated agreement without TNC's prior written consent.

THIS IS NOT AN ORDER. TNC incurs no obligation or liability whatsoever by reason of issuance of this RFP or action by anyone relative thereto.

VI. Contact Information

For questions about the SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund and the request for proposals, please contact Christina Popolizio at c.d.popolizio@tnc.org.