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SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund

Request for Proposals | March 2021

Small Award

SOAR Shellfish Growers Resiliency Fund

Small RFP Guidelines

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I. Small 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 interest in the large award program, please click [here](#).

Key Parameters of the Small Award Program

Eligibility: Shellfish growers and closely aligned organizations 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 \$20,000 USD, all applicable taxes included.

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

- Farmer engagement in shellfish restoration, marine conservation, or broader environmental outcomes
- Efficient farming operations
- Product marketing to increase demand
- New products and species
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the shellfish aquaculture industry

Award Period: All project activities must be completed within 1 year of award issuance.

Application Process: A streamlined, expedited application process is offered for the small award program consisting of an application form and budget worksheet available for download.

Deadlines: The small award program will begin accepting applications following announcement of the RFP on **March 29, 2021**. Applications will be reviewed on rolling basis; the first application deadline will be 9:00 am Eastern Time on **Monday, May 17, 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 applications (see section IV).

Reporting Requirements: Upon completion of the project, the awardee shall provide TNC a final report, including a financial report. 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 small award program. If you are interested in the large award program, which offers awards up to \$100,000 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 small award will be eligible to receive up to \$20,000 USD, all applicable taxes included.

Project Timeline

For the small-scale award, all projects must be completed within a 12-month period, i.e., by August 2022. Please see section V below for reporting requirements.

Application Requirements

Small-scale awards will follow a streamlined application process. Applicants will be required to fill out an application form and a budget worksheet.

All templates will be available to download on the [SOAR website](#). The application must be completed in Microsoft Word or PDF. The budget worksheet must be completed in Microsoft Excel.

All applications, 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 "Small RFP".

Deadline

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

Small-scale awards will be reviewed on a rolling basis until all funds have been allocated for the first RFP round. The deadline for the first round is **May 17, 2021**. All applications must be submitted by no later than **9:00 am Eastern Time**.

After the first round of reviews and awards, the application process will re-open for additional applications. The SOAR website will indicate when the application process is reopened and the new deadline for round-two.

Application Review Process

All applications 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.

Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis by designated experts from The Nature Conservancy, with the advice of The Pew Charitable Trusts and external experts as needed. A soft deadline has been established for small-scale awards. The first round of applications must be submitted by **May 17, 2021**. After the first round of awardees have been announced on the SOAR website, the application process will re-open for additional applications unable to meet the first deadline and if there are remaining funds.

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 application status. Applications will be declined or fully awarded. The small-scale awards will be announced by no later than June 2021, for the first round of RFPs.

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

Shellfish growers and organizations that directly support the shellfish industry are encouraged to apply to the small-scale award. Eligible organizations for the small 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

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 application. If the project touches on more than one priority, please indicate this in the application.

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 small award program will prioritize shellfish growers and/or organizations that were unable to participate in the SOAR oyster purchase program.

Funding Priorities

- **Farmer engagement in shellfish restoration, marine conservation, or environmental outcomes:** Projects that increase farmer engagement in shellfish restoration, marine conservation, or enhance environmental outcomes of farming. Examples include:
 - Projects that advance efforts 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 (excluding oyster purchases for restoration sites).
 - Projects that are intended to increase the environmental benefits of shellfish farms (ecosystem service provision) or reduce environmental impacts of farms.
 - Projects that engage shellfish farmers in efforts to conserve, manage, and protect marine resources.

- **Efficient farming operations:** Projects intended to improve efficiency and cost savings in farming operations and/or provide increased or enhanced industry support services. Examples include:
 - Projects that create new or support existing farmer cooperatives that enable shared farming resources, storage, transport, and marketing.
 - Projects by one or more farms that support testing of new farm designs, gear, or other farming technology, which enhance productivity and reduce costs.
 - Projects that create supply chain improvements for one or more farms, such as wet and dry storage.
 - Projects that increase quality, consistency, or access to farming inputs, such as hatchery production of shellfish seed.

- **Product marketing to increase demand:** Projects that improve market opportunities for farmed shellfish. Examples include:
 - Projects by one or more farmers that develop E-Commerce platforms or other direct to consumer outlets for shellfish (e.g. Community Supported Aquaculture programs).

- **New products and species.** Examples include:
 - Projects by one or more farmers that develop and/or market new, value added, or shelf-stable products.
 - Projects that purchase farming supplies and enable farmers to test new native/non-introduced species (e.g., seaweed, Olympia oysters, new clam species).
- **Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the shellfish aquaculture industry.** Examples include:
 - Projects that support a diverse workforce and create opportunities for people of diverse and/or underrepresented backgrounds (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, disability).

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 applications for the small awards. All applications 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 (25 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 1-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.
- **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.

- **Applicant is a shellfish grower that did not receive SOAR purchase program funding (5 points):** This criterion assesses whether the Applicant has already participated and received funds from SOAR's purchase program. The Fund would like to prioritize applicants who have not received funding from SOAR yet.
- **General quality/completeness of application (5 points):** This criterion assesses the quality of the application, which should be filled out completely. The responses should provide clear and detailed explanations within the word count for each prompt.

Match Funding

Applications 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

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.

the following: certificate of insurance, conflict of interest form², and W-9. The agreement may contain the elements listed below regarding reporting requirements and payment. Award recipients will be expected to complete a survey to assess the effectiveness of the resiliency program.

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.

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.