

Ocean Odyssey Grants:

Ocean Exploration Awards for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility

Are you an ocean education professional working to chart the course for a more diverse future ocean workforce by providing STEM education and/or early career development opportunities for youth from communities historically marginalized from ocean science and exploration industries?

Funding Opportunity Overview

The [National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#), in cooperation with [NOAA Ocean Exploration](#), is excited to offer Ocean Odyssey Grants to educators and education programs leading science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and workforce development initiatives that advance diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility within ocean science and/or exploration career pathways. The overarching goal is to support a future ocean workforce that is more representative of US demographics by funding projects that minimize barriers to entry and retention of diverse learners from communities historically marginalized from ocean science and exploration industries.

Available Funding and Eligibility

Awards between \$5,000 - \$10,000

The Foundation anticipates funding between 12-15 projects

The objective of the Ocean Exploration Awards for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility (DEIJA) is to further DEIJA initiatives that increase inclusion in and/or access to STEM education and workforce development opportunities for diverse youth in middle school, high school, undergraduate, and/or community college to learn about ocean science and/or exploration.

Funded projects should directly or indirectly result in:



Deepening student understanding of the Ocean and Great Lakes



Increasing student awareness of ocean careers



Advancing STEM skills applicable to ocean science

Funding is available for schools, districts, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, for profit institutions, local, and state entities from the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States. U.S. Native American Tribes, Alaska Native communities, Native Hawaiian communities, and U.S. Territories and Freely Associated States are encouraged to apply. There is no match requirement. Project work must be conducted within the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States.

Implementation Period

December 01, 2024 – July 31, 2025

Application Packages Due:

Monday, September 30, 2024
11:59 PM Eastern Daylight Time

Background

STEM occupations are growing rapidly. The [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(2022\)](#) anticipates that the STEM workforce will experience an almost 11% growth in occupations between 2021 and 2031, which is more than double the projection for non-STEM fields. In response to this growth, significant investments have been made to recruit and support learners in the STEM workforce development pipeline. Yet, despite numerous STEM education initiatives across the United States, diversity in STEM occupations remains low. Demographic assessments of the STEM workforce indicate widespread racial, ethnic, and gender gaps in most job sectors. These trends hold true for the ocean science workforce as well, including within NOAA ([NOAA Science Advisory Board, 2023](#)). As described by the [Office of Science and Technology Policy \(OSTP\) and Office of Personnel Management \(OPM\) \(2016\)](#), it is imperative to increase diversity within the STEM workforce to advance science and innovation, keep up with rapidly growing STEM career fields, and live up to the civil service foundation of the Federal workforce by providing opportunities for the diverse population served by the same. To increase inclusivity and build diversity in ocean sciences, it is critical to invest in STEM education initiatives that intentionally engage with student groups lacking representation in the industry by addressing barriers impeding recruitment and retention of diverse learners.

NOAA Ocean Exploration and the Foundation have a long history of working collaboratively to support ocean education. Since 2003 they have leveraged the public-private partnership to enhance America's environmental literacy through the development of educational materials and educator professional development offerings that bring exciting deep-sea phenomena into the classroom to increase students' understanding of our ocean planet.

In 2021, NOAA Ocean Exploration and the Foundation established the Ocean Odyssey Grants (*previously called Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Ocean Exploration Education Grants*) to expand the reach of ocean education by investing in ocean workforce development initiatives that are equitable, inclusive, and accessible to all. Funded projects engage and support diverse learners from communities that have been marginalized from ocean science and exploration career pathways by creating or advancing opportunities to learn about ocean science and exploration concepts and careers, build STEM identity, and develop and refine marketable STEM skills.

Overview of Funding Opportunity

The Foundation and NOAA Ocean Exploration invite educators and education program implementers advancing DEIJA in ocean education and career pathways by providing STEM education and/or workforce development opportunities for diverse youth (middle school, high school, and college students) historically and consistently marginalized from the field to apply for the 2024 - 2025 Ocean Odyssey Grants. This funding opportunity is extended to formal and non-formal educators working with youth from middle school to college-aged, to strategically support multiple stages of the ocean science and exploration workforce development pipeline. Awards will range between \$5,000 and \$10,000 per project. Match is not required. Interested parties may learn more about eligibility, project specifications for each objective, and application requirements in the following sections.

Objectives:

The objective of the Ocean Exploration Awards for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice, and Accessibility (DEIJA) is to further DEIJA initiatives that increase inclusion in and/or access to STEM education and workforce development opportunities for diverse youth in middle school, high school, undergraduate, and/or community college to learn about ocean science and/or exploration.

Proposed projects should result one or more of the following outcomes:

- I. Deepening student understanding of the ocean,
- II. Increasing student awareness of ocean careers, and/or
- III. Developing or advancing STEM skills applicable to ocean science and exploration.

Projects may include activities that support students directly, or indirectly by way of building capacity for teachers to incorporate ocean science and exploration into their classroom. Potential projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Purchasing supplies and materials needed to implement ocean exploration learning (e.g. [NOAA Ocean Exploration lessons and related education materials](#)) and/or that help advance student STEM skills relevant to ocean science and exploration (e.g. *remotely operated vehicle build supplies*) into the classroom.
- Supporting immersive student experiences that increase student exposure to ocean science institutions, careers, and professionals; ocean ecosystems or ocean technology; and/or develop skills (e.g. *a field trip to spend time on a research vessel, visit a marine research or ocean engineering facility, or collect ocean data.*)
- Hosting a workshop or conference for local students that provides opportunities to practice and improve STEM skills related to ocean science or engage with industry professionals (e.g.: an ROV building workshop, a career fair featuring local ocean exploration jobs, etc.)
- Internship stipends for high school or college-aged students to get industry experience
- Registration or program fees for students from a marginalized community to attend a camp, training, and/or conference that prepares them for the future ocean exploration workforce
- Supporting teacher professional development featuring curriculum and/or instructional techniques to bring ocean science into the classroom (e.g. registration costs, teacher travel expenses, substitute teacher expenses, guest speaker honoraria or additional expenses to host a professional development for multiple teachers at a school/district, etc.)



Ocean Odyssey Grants have supported numerous ocean exploration educational opportunities in the classroom and in the field for diverse middle school, high school, and college age students. Grant funds have been used to cover travel costs and vessel time for English Language Students to participate in research projects conducted at their local marine science University campus (Oregon State University/ Oregon Sea Grant, 2023, photos 1 & 2). Funds have also purchased supplies for students far from the coast to gain experience designing, building, and testing remotely operated vehicles and using them to study local ecosystems (Butler County High School (KY), 2022 & 2024, Photos 3-5).

Priority:

Preference will be given to:

- Projects that engage diverse learners from communities historically and persistently marginalized from ocean science and exploration industries, including underserved and underrepresented populations;
- Projects that reduce or minimize a barrier that has negatively impacted recruitment or retention of diverse learners to ocean science and/or exploration careers;
 - Proposals that specifically target middle school, high school, or university age students, where most students exit STEM career pathways, will be prioritized.
- Projects that utilize NOAA resources – data, educational resources, videos, lessons, etc.;
- Projects that focus on open ocean science and/or ocean exploration concepts, technologies, and careers (*as opposed to coastal and near-shore foci*);
- Proposals that expand ocean science and exploration learning opportunities by using grant funds to create new opportunities, add ocean exploration content to existing curricula/programs, and/or bring existing ocean exploration education to new, targeted audiences.
- Projects led by schools, districts, and/or informal education organizations that have not previously received grant funding from NOAA, the Foundation, or other federal education funding sources;
- Proposals that can demonstrate impact during the performance period and include an evaluation plan to assess the impact
 - Measurable learning or skill development-related outcomes preferred over number of participants reached;
- Projects that include plans to persist beyond the funding period.

Eligibility

Schools, districts, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, for profit institutions, local, and state entities conducting educational activities in the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States are eligible to apply. Applicants who have not previously received funding from the Foundation are strongly encouraged to apply. Applications from federal agencies, employees of federal agencies, and/or individuals will not be considered. Only applicants from the United States, territories, and Freely Associated States are eligible to apply.

Competitive awards will not only incorporate, but prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and accessibility when writing their proposals and performing their work. To demonstrate this, proposals should include project activities that directly engage students or teachers of students from communities historically marginalized from ocean science and/or exploration industries and help minimize historic and/or persistent barriers to entry and/or retention in the field. In addition, priority will be given to proposals that include budget requests that directly support student and/or educator activities, as opposed to proposals with organization personnel, fringe, or indirect costs.

Applicants applying for funds to support existing programs must demonstrate how funds will be used to expand, grow, or and/build capacity for ocean exploration education within their program by either adding new content to the existing program and/or offering existing ocean exploration education programming to new, targeted audiences. Previous Ocean Odyssey (DEIA Ocean Exploration Education) Grantees are eligible to apply, but preference will be given to new grantees. Previous grantees may be included as project partners in which they are not the primary organization or principal investigator with no impact on preference.

How to Apply

Application packages should be submitted by **11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on September 30, 2024**. Please submit your application package to the Foundation through C-STAAR – the Foundation’s Collaborative System for Tracking Activities, Awards, and Reporting

https://marinesanctuary.smartsimple.com/s_Login.jsp?lang=1&prole=0.

You will need to register your school or organization and set up your profile before applying.

Please direct all questions to support@marinesanctuary.org with the email subject line: **RFP QUESTION Ocean Exploration Award Application: [Name of Organization]**.

Application packages shall include:

- Completed Proposal
 - Download the [Ocean Exploration Award Application Template here](#)
 - **Supplemental Application Materials: (Part 3 on Application)**
 - 1) **Select the Supplemental Application Materials Form Link.**
 - 2) **Download the form for your entity type, [School Overview](#) or [Organization Overview](#)**
 - 3) **Submit Supplemental Application Materials Form with your application**
- Letter(s) of support from school, district, or informal education organization leadership (*if different than project lead*)
- Letters of commitment from all essential external project partners named in the proposal
- Financial System Risk Review
 - Download the form [here](#)
- Most recent financial audit. *Public Schools and Universities are exempt. Contact the Foundation for alternative proof of finance options if a recent audit is not available.*
- If your organization receives more than \$750,000 in direct or flow-through federal funding, please also provide the Foundation with the most recent version of your OMB Circular A-133 audit and/or Uniform Administration Guidance audit annually.

COMPLETE THIS FORM TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ON THE FREE 2024-2025 OCEAN ODYSSEY GRANT WEBINAR.



Grant funds have supported a variety of immersive education experiences for students to develop STEM skills, engage with ocean science and exploration experts, and connect traditional and modern ocean exploration tools and methods. *Images courtesy of Yannick Peterhans (WIES/USC), National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and the Nā Wa'a Mauō Marine Stewardship Program.*

Evaluation Criteria

The technical review and evaluation process will be graded by the following point system:

Evaluation Criteria	Value	Scoring for this criterion will be assessed on how well proposals:
Does the proposal address historic and/or persistent barriers in the STEM education and workforce pipeline preventing diverse learners from marginalized communities from entering and/or persisting in ocean science and/or exploration careers?	30 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify a marginalized community this project will support ● Identify historic and/or persistent barriers that negatively impact the recruitment or persistence of this community in ocean science and/or exploration career pipelines ● Explains how the project will support the ocean science and/or exploration workforce development pipeline by minimizing the barrier(s) ● Demonstrate the applicant or project partners experience and capacity to engage and support this community
Does the proposal advance ocean workforce development opportunities for diverse learners from marginalized communities?	30 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explain how project activities supports one or more of the following ocean workforce development objectives for students: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deepening students' understanding of ocean science, ○ Increasing students' awareness of ocean careers, ○ Developing STEM skills applicable to ocean science and exploration ● Identify and describe how NOAA Ocean Exploration or other NOAA ocean educational resources (data, lessons, etc.) will be used in project activities.
Is the proposal feasible in the period of performance timeframe?	15 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrate a thorough level of planning that will allow the applicant to begin the project promptly upon notification of funding and complete the project within the period of performance timeline. Considerations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Detailed event/program plans: dates, venues, and recruitment strategies are mapped out, ○ Letters of support from all project partners, and ○ Contingency plans for weather dependent programming.
Is the budget realistic and have a meaningful use of funding?	10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide a detailed list of specific items, tools, materials, etc. and associated costs for each expense category. ● Explain how each item in the budget table support project activities. ● Prioritize budgeted items that directly support STEM learning and/or workforce development opportunities for diverse learners (<i>program staff salary, fringe, and in-direct budget requests are small fractions of the total budget</i>).
Does the proposal include plans to measure student (or educator) impact and outputs?	10 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify outcomes that are tangible, quantifiable, and related to project activities (<i>e.g., increased student understanding of ocean science concepts, improved STEM skills, and/or increased awareness of ocean careers</i>). ● Identify outcomes that are realistic to expect as a result of project activities and duration. ● Provide explanation where necessary to justify numbers provided. ● Thoroughly describe the evaluation tool and methods being used to measure project outcomes.
Does this proposed project lend itself to long term sustainability?	5 points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Demonstrate the ability for the project activities and/or project outcomes to continue beyond the funding period.
Additional considerations:	<p>Preference will be given to projects that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Incorporate active learning opportunities (<i>hands-on, inquiry-based, immersive, etc.</i>). ● Balance depth and breadth of student opportunities – do the projects engage select students over multiple time points or reach large student groups in one-time activities. ● Focus on open ocean and/or exploration science concepts, technologies, or careers, as opposed to coastal or near-shore environments. Specifically focused on/in United States and Territories. 	

Grant Logistics

Timeline	2024 Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	2025 Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Request for Proposals open Complete application packages must be submitted by 11:59pm EDT September 30, 2024													
Technical review of proposals Proposals will be reviewed and scored between Aug 27 – Oct 11, 2024.													
Notification, Agreements, and Release of Funds All grantees will be notified of award status on or before Oct 18, 2024. Funds will be released once grant agreements are signed and returned to the Foundation.													
Period of Performance All projects must be completed between December 2024 and July 2025.													
Progress Check-in In lieu of a progress report, the grant manager will schedule one-on-one check-ins with all grantees.													
Final Report Final reports are due to the Foundation by August 01, 2025.													

Additional Information

For questions and additional information, please email cplayer@marinesanctuary.org with the subject line : **Ocean Exploration Award Application Questions**.

About us

[The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#), founded in 2000 by America’s most influential ocean conservation leaders, works with communities and NOAA to conserve and expand these special places for a healthy ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes. Sanctuaries and monuments are our essential network of protected waters, owned by every American and championed by us. Connected by currents, they sustain miraculous species, coastal communities, and our shared heritage. The Foundation is a leading voice for U.S. protected waters, and our work extends from the ocean floor to the classroom to Capitol Hill. The Foundation supports a growing portfolio of Community Outreach and Education programs aimed at providing students, educators, and lifelong learners with opportunities to explore and discover connections to the natural world, no matter where they live.

[NOAA Ocean Exploration](#) is dedicated to exploring the unknown ocean, unlocking its potential through scientific discovery, technological advancements, and data delivery. By working closely with partners across public, private, and academic sectors, we are filling gaps in our basic understanding of the marine environment. This allows us, collectively, to protect ocean health, sustainably manage our marine resources, accelerate our national economy, better understand our changing environment, and enhance appreciation of the importance of the ocean in our everyday lives.

With priority placed on exploration of deep waters and the waters of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone, NOAA Ocean Exploration applies the latest tools and technologies to explore previously unknown areas of the ocean, making discoveries of scientific, economic, and cultural value. By making collected data publicly available in increasingly innovative and accessible ways, we provide a unique and centralized national resource of critical ocean information. And, through live exploration video, online resources, training and educational opportunities, and public events, we share the excitement of ocean exploration with people around the world and inspire and engage the next generation of ocean scientists, engineers, and leaders.

The Ocean Odyssey Grants - Ocean Exploration Awards for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Justice and Accessibility are offered in cooperation with the Foundation under federal award NA24OARX011C0001-T1-01.

Definitions:

- **Accessibility** means the design, construction, development, and maintenance of facilities, information and communication technology, programs, and services so that all people, including people with disabilities, can fully and independently use them.
- **Diversity** is a collection of individual attributes that together help organizations achieve objectives.
- **Equitable** means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.
- **Freely Associated States** include the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau. Inclusion is a culture that connects each person to the larger organizing structure.
- **Marginalization** is a social process by which individuals or groups are (intentionally or unintentionally) distanced from access to power and resources and constructed as insignificant, peripheral, or less valuable/privileged to a community or “mainstream” society. This term describes a social process, so as not to imply a lack of agency.
- **Marginalized groups** or people are those excluded from mainstream social, economic, cultural, or political life. As a result of exclusionary practices, marginalized groups are **underrepresented** in these spheres.
- **Underserved audiences:** Populations who receive inadequate or inequitable services, who experience quality-of-life disparities, and who by design have little power or influence over outside decisions that impact their daily quality of life (*e.g. schools qualifying for or organizations working with student populations supported by Title 1 funds*).
- **Underrepresented audiences** are defined as populations that identify as one or more of the following racial or ethnic minority groups (Blacks or African Americans; Hispanics or Latinos; American Indians or Alaska Natives, and Native Pacific Islanders) based on their representation in STEM education or employment being smaller than their representation in the U.S. population. *For the purposes of these grants, we expand this definition to include women, who are underrepresented in ocean sciences and NOAA careers, as well as, populations with limited access to ocean exploration resources due to geographic barriers, such as rural, inland communities.*

Useful Resources

Foundational Resources

- [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Projections for STEM Occupations](#)
- [DEIA at NOAA: Promising Developments and Critical Needs](#)
- [NOAA Blue Economy Strategic Plan \(2021 – 2025\)](#)
- [Diversifying the Ocean Sciences: Thoughts on the Challenge Ahead](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guidelines \(American Psychological Association\)](#)

Ocean Exploration Education Resources

- [NOAA Ocean Exploration Education Resources](#)
- [Deep Ocean Education Project Website](#)
- [Ocean Literacy- Overview and Guide](#)

About the Foundation and NOAA Ocean Exploration

- [National Marine Sanctuary Strategic Plan \(2022 - 2024\)](#)
- [NOAA Ocean Exploration Strategic Plan \(2023 – 2027\)](#)
- [Diversity and Inclusion at NOAA](#) (and [NOAA Ocean Exploration](#))

Terms and Conditions:

This is a Request for Proposals only. Issuance of this RFP does not in any way obligate the Foundation to make an award or pay for costs incurred by potential offerors in the preparation and submission of an offer.

In addition:

- (a) The Foundation may cancel RFP and not award;
- (b) The Foundation may reject any or all responses received;
- (c) Issuance of RFP does not constitute award commitment by The Foundation;
- (d) The Foundation reserves the right to disqualify any offer based on offeror failure to follow RFP instructions;
- (e) The Foundation will not compensate offerors for a response to RFP;
- (f) The Foundation reserves the right to issue an award based on an initial evaluation of offers without further discussion;
- (g) The Foundation may negotiate with short-listed offerors for their best and final offer;
- (h) The Foundation reserves the right to order additional quantities or units with the selected offer or;
- (i) The Foundation may reissue the solicitation or issue formal amendments revising the original RFP specifications and evaluation criteria before or after receipt of proposals;
- (j) The Foundation may modify the specifications without issuing a formal notice to all offerors when the revisions are immaterial to the scope of the RFP;
- (k) The Foundation may choose to award only part of the activities in the RFP or issue multiple awards based on multiple RFP activities; and
- (l) The Foundation reserves the right to waive minor proposal deficiencies that can be corrected prior to award determination to promote competition.