

Minutes

26th Meeting of the NOAA Ocean Exploration Advisory Board

September 17, 2024

Participants:

- **OEAB Members in Attendance:**

- Dr. Vicki Ferrini, Chair, Columbia University, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory
- Dr. Peter Girguis, Harvard University
- Dr. Kevin Hand, NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory
- Eric King, Schmidt Ocean Institute
- Dr. Frank Muller-Karger, University of South Florida
- Dr. Ellen Prager, Earth2Ocean Inc.
- Ramsay Taum, Pacific Islands Leadership Institute, Hawaii Pacific University
- David Millar, Fugro USA Inc.
- Justin Manley, Just Innovation Inc.

- **OEAB Members Absent:**

- Dr. Lesley K. Iaukea, Indigenous Knowledge & Earth and Environmental Convergent Science Program
- Dr. Mark Moline, University of Delaware

- **NOAA Ocean Exploration Staff in Attendance:**

- David Turner, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), NOAA Ocean Exploration
- Joanne Flanders, Alternate DFO, NOAA Ocean Exploration
- Kristen Crossett, Outreach and Education Division Chief
- Dr. Adrienne Copeland, Competitive Grant Program Manager
- Liz Hoadley, Education Team Lead
- Dr. Mashkoor Malik, Science and Technology Division Chief

1. Call to Order and Opening Remarks (1:00 PM - 1:05 PM)

- Dr. Vicki Ferrini provided brief opening remarks, welcoming the members and thanking them for their participation.

2. Approval of Meeting #24 Minutes (1:05 PM - 1:10 PM)

- The draft minutes from Meeting #24, held on Feb. 29 2024, were distributed in advance. Members were given the opportunity to provide feedback, and several comments had been adjudicated prior to the meeting.

3. NOAA Ocean Exploration Competitive Grant Programs: Process Overview (1:10 PM - 1:40 PM)

Presenter: Adrienne Copeland, NOAA Ocean Exploration Competitive Grant Program Manager

- Adrienne Copeland presented an overview of the NOAA Ocean Exploration Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) process. Joining remotely from the Schmidt Ocean Institute's Research Vessel *Falkor (too)* off the coast of Chile, she detailed the five-phase grant process:
 - **Phase I:** Annual publication of the NOFO in spring, which outlines key exploration themes and priority regions based on NOAA's internal and external priorities.
 - **Phase II:** Submission of two-page pre-proposals by applicants in summer time, which are assessed based on relevance, scientific merit, qualifications, cost-sharing, and partnerships.
 - **Phase III:** Full proposals, submitted in October, undergo administrative and compliance reviews.
 - **Phase IV:** External review by expert panelists, who assess proposals based on established criteria listed in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.
 - **Phase V:** Final award selection and negotiations, followed by compliance reviews. Selection is generally based on rank order, but exceptions are occasionally made due to budget constraints or duplicative projects.
- **Key Metrics and Program Impact:**

Copeland reported that NOAA Ocean Exploration funded 4-10 projects annually over the past five years, with a consistent funding range of \$3-5 million. In FY23, the program received 170 new applicants, which is an increase from previous years.

 - Funded projects include: ocean exploration, maritime heritage, and technology development.
- **Ongoing Improvements:**

Copeland also discussed recent improvements to the NOFO process, including the creation of a searchable database of NOAA-funded projects dating back to 2002. Each project has a data landing page to ensure transparency and facilitate access to publicly available data.

 - Compliance with data submission is now strictly enforced, with funds withheld from non-compliant projects until they meet data sharing requirements.
- **FY19-23 Award Highlights:**

Copeland highlighted several notable projects funded between FY19-23, including autonomous vehicle research on paleolandscapes, underwater cultural heritage and coral reef studies in Guam, deep-sea hydrothermal exploration in the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, and AI-based shipwreck detection in the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary. She noted that despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, NOAA Ocean Exploration has maintained its mission through strategic adjustments.

4. Education Program Update (1:40 PM - 1:55 PM)

Presenter: Liz Hoadley, Education Team Lead

- **Liz Hoadley** provided an overview of the transition in the NOAA Ocean Exploration Education Program from a Broad Area Announcement (BAA) Award model to a more structured, competitive grant process. NOAA Ocean Exploration has a long history of working through partnerships with external organizations, such as the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, to execute education programs.
- **New Education Program Structure:**

The new five-year competitive grant award will provide greater consistency and allow NOAA Ocean Exploration to achieve longer-term goals in education. This award focused on three main areas:

 1. Connecting NOAA Ocean Exploration resources to expanded delivery of virtual and hybrid professional development for educators, increasing the availability of ocean exploration content to diverse and geographically dispersed audiences.
 2. Investing in STEM education programming for historically underrepresented youth, specifically targeting middle school, high school, and community college students, with a goal to increase awareness of ocean science and exploration careers.
 3. Reducing barriers faced by students from marginalized communities to help build a future ocean workforce that reflects U.S. demographics.
- **Funding Details:**

The Education NOFO will provide between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 per year to support selected projects. NOAA Ocean Exploration anticipates funding activities that range from professional development for teachers to hands-on educational projects targeting diverse youth populations.
- **Ocean Odyssey Grants:**

The Ocean Odyssey Grants were developed during the pandemic to help educators bring ocean science into their classrooms, even in virtual or hybrid settings. These grants, which range from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per project, support classroom resources, field trips, and other educational activities. To date, the grants have reached 4,764 K-12 students, 207 college students, and 1,028 educators across multiple ocean-related themes. The 2024-2025 RFP is currently open, and the program expects to fund 12-15 projects this year.

5. Closing Remarks and Public Comment Period (1:55 PM - 2:00 PM)

Speaker: Dr. Vicki Ferrini, Chair

- Dr. Vicki Ferrini provided closing remarks, summarizing the key takeaways from the presentations and discussions. She thanked the NOAA Ocean Exploration

team for their work on the competitive grant program and the Board members for their input during the meeting.

Public Comment Period:

- The floor was opened for public comments, but no public comments were received during the session.

Adjournment (2:00 PM):

- David Turner officially adjourned the meeting, thanking everyone for their participation and engagement.