

NSF Intent to Issue Solicitation for Construction and Operation of Regional Class Research Vessels (RCRV)

In December 2010, NSF released an announcement of intent to issue a solicitation for construction and operation of RCRVs. The NSF announcement is available at:

http://www.nsf.gov/geo/oce/programs/rcrv_planned_solicitation.pdf

Community questions regarding the solicitation with NSF responses are posted below:

Question 1: Under either operating model may an organization be part of more than one proposal as either Lead or Supporting Institution with different partner combinations?

NSF Response: An organization may be the Lead Institution (LI) on only one proposal. An organization may be a Supporting Institution (SI) on multiple proposals.

Question 2: Are there any circumstances under which NSF might change the membership of teams (e.g., by panel recommendation), thus in effect choosing individual institutions and asking for a revised Project Execution Plan as a second stage?

NSF Response: No.

Question 3: If a member of a consortium established exclusively to compete for the RCRV operates an existing UNOLS vessel, would they be required to give that vessel up in order to collaborate in the effort?

NSF Response: The solicitation for the Construction and Operation of the RCRV's does not prohibit the formation of "regional consortiums" (i.e. East, West or Gulf) assuming there would be some potential benefit to the overall program. The designation of Lead and Supporting Institutions for project execution, as well as Operating Model 2, could be considered consortiums at the national level. However, a regional consortium cannot act as a Lead or Supporting Institution i.e. it cannot be the operator of a new RCRV; only an individual institution or organization can. In other words, a regional consortium must have an individual institution that operates the vessel on behalf of the consortium. Therefore, if a member of a regional consortium operates an existing UNOLS vessel(s) and they propose to be an operator of a new RCRV then they must remove a vessel from the academic research vessel fleet. NSF will do service life extensions of selected NSF-owned ships on a case by case basis to ensure adequate Fleet capability will be retained until the new RCRV's are in service, at which time all current NSF-owned Intermediate and Regional Class ships will be well beyond their expected service life and will be retired.

Question 4: Is it the underlying intent of NSF or the other funding agencies to reduce the number of operators in the academic research

vessel fleet as part of the RCRV project?

NSF Response: NSF and the other federal agencies intend to replace old, out-dated Intermediate and Regional Class ships that are beyond their service lives with new, more capable, and technologically-advanced Regional Class ships. This will result in fewer ships in the Fleet. The two operating models were described only to inform proposing organizations/institution that other options can be considered as the teams are formed and the proposals crafted - as opposed to mandating only the current model. The panel will consider all factors involved in fleet management including “operational efficiency”, “undue geographic concentration” and others as part of the review process. More details will follow in the full Solicitation.

Question 5: There is not a lot of readily available information on the UNOLS website about the preliminary design of the RCRV. Once the Solicitation for construction and operation comes out, proposers will be looking for as much information as possible. What information will be made available to the community on the existing Navy design package?

NSF Response: The entire Navy design deliverable package (drawings, sketches, reports, specifications, etc.) will be made available on a GEO/OCE website when the Solicitation is released.

Question 6: Will the forthcoming Solicitation for RCRV require Lead Institutions to identify specific Supporting Institutions as part of the proposal?

NSF Response: Yes.

Question 7: If yes, doesn't that restrict NSF's range of choices for operating institutions?

NSF Response: It was not considered advantageous for NSF to individually select operating institutions. All proposal formats were evaluated, and NSF believes the up-front team approach (LI and SI's) provides the most benefit for NSF, the science community, and individual institutions with regard to successful project execution and eventual operation of the RCRV's.

Question 8: Should proposals include two SI's? What happens if there are three partners (LI + SI + SI) who want to be operators, and only two ships are built?

NSF Response: Yes – the proposal should include two SI's. The role of the SI's would depend on the operating model proposed. The draft Project Execution Plan (PEP) could consider how the proposing institutions would handle a two-ship build if there was concern that three ships might not be funded.

Question 9: The NSF response (from 01/14/11) to the question about giving up a ship refers to NSF-owned vessels. Is the situation similar for non NSF-funded vessels, e.g., state or private?

NSF Response: NSF believes the answer to this question was already included in the original response. In way of further clarification, the current NSF-owned Intermediate and Regional Class vessels will eventually be retired as new vessels are

brought on line (OCRV and RCRV) regardless of what is included in the final RCRV award. NSF cannot require institutionally-owned vessels to be removed from service. This is an institutional decision based on available operational funding. However, in order for an institution to be considered as an LI or SI they must give up a vessel in the academic fleet if they currently operate one; either NSF-owned or institutionally-owned (See Note Below). Which vessels are proposed for removal from the fleet will be carefully considered by the Panel when making the recommendation to NSF.

Note: For the purposes of the RCRV Project, a “vessel in the academic fleet” is considered to be one of the current “Intermediate” through “Local” Class vessels. There is no expectation that a Global Class ship would be voluntarily turned in given the projected need for this class and the fact that almost all are Navy-owned. NSF considers vessels already agreed for turn-in as part of the OCRV project no longer eligible and therefore not a discriminator for participation in the RCRV project.

Question 10: Could a vessel’s retirement date be extended if the vessel is well-maintained and continues with excellent inspection records?

NSF Response: Yes. NSF works closely with FIC and the ship operators to determine the vessel condition and discusses recommended retirement dates based on ship inspection reports. However, the decision to keep the vessel in service depends on whether the vessel is NSF-owned or institutionally-owned as explained in earlier responses.

Question 11: Some vessels in the academic fleet fall in between the current classifications. How does this relate to trading in a vessel?

NSF Response: No relation – Institutions are only required to give up a vessel in the academic fleet (not class dependent) if they currently operate one (See Note Above) in order to act as LI or SI. As stated above, which vessels are proposed for removal from the fleet will be carefully considered by the Panel when making the recommendation to NSF. NSF prefers four (4) categories for vessel classification in the academic fleet (“Local”, “Regional”, “Ocean”, and “Global”) with placement in each category dependent on general capability rather than specific numbers like length, berthing capability, etc. This will help to eliminate the perception of vessels falling between classes in the future.

Question 12: Are there any Conflict of Interest restrictions regarding the participation of Glosten or any other naval architect on the respondent's team?

NSF Response: No. There are no perceived conflicts with other projects since shipyard selection will be competitive and is not part of the initial Phase I award. The only potential conflicts at this point in the project are with NSF’s selection of Panel members for eventual review of proposals. Please be advised that since the RCRV is a government-owned design, there is no requirement to use the naval architecture firm that participated in original the Navy contract.

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Question 13: Would NSF please provide a status update on the Regional Class Research Vessel as of May 31st?

NSF Response: NSF has undertaken a review of the internal MREFC process, which is used to approve major facilities such as the RCRV. OCE will provide more information to the community on the RCRV project as soon as it becomes available.