

**Clarifications on National Science Foundation
Division of Ocean Sciences (OCE) Facilities Costs and Coordination
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**Division of Ocean Sciences
Integrative Programs Section**

Many federally-funded research projects use vessels other than those operated as part of the US Academic Research Fleet (ARF), defined as those participating in the University National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS). The growing availability of non-UNOLS research vessels necessitates a clarification of existing NSF Policy with regard to the use of these vessels for research funded by the National Science Foundation and the extent to which other NSF-funded facilities are able to support these research projects.

The guiding documents are:

1. NSF Cooperative Agreement Financial & Administrative Terms and Conditions (CA-FATC):
http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/cafatc/cafatc_212.pdf
2. Research Terms & Conditions (RTC)
http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/rtc/nsf_212.pdf
3. NSF Agency Specific Requirements to the Research Terms & Conditions
http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/policydocs/rtc/nsf_110.pdf
4. University-National Oceanographic Laboratory System (UNOLS) Research Vessel Safety Standards (RVSS):
http://www.unols.org/publications/manuals/saf_stand/2009RVSS_web2012updates.pdf
5. NSF Division of Ocean Sciences Sample and Data Policy (nsf11060):
<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/2011/nsf11060/nsf11060.pdf>

Safety of Personnel

The safety of all parties involved in NSF-funded field work is of paramount importance. However, as stated in CA-FATC, Article 44 and in RTC, Article 29:

*“NSF cannot assume any liability for accidents, illnesses or claims arising out of **any work supported by an award** or for unauthorized use of patented or copyrighted materials. The grantee institution is advised to take such steps as may be deemed necessary **to insure or protect itself, its employees and its property.**”*

Vessel-operator institutions are required by their individual Cooperative Agreements with NSF to adhere to the Research Vessel Safety Standards (RVSS). There exists within the RVSS a provision for the use of non-UNOLS vessels, Chapter 18, Edition 9, 2009, which states in part:

“When a UNOLS institution charters a non-UNOLS vessel for marine research that is not operated by that institution, the guidelines of this chapter must be followed. The Principal Investigator, institution’s contracting office and the institution’s marine office all have a responsibility to ensure that only vessels that are safe and suitable for a project are chartered. Institutions should establish procedures, utilizing the expertise of marine operations staff, to ensure that all applicable USCG documentation, inspections and licenses to which the vessel is subject are complete and current. Particular attention should be paid to the safety, material condition, and crew competency of vessels chartered for oceanographic research.”

Chapter 18 of the RVSS outlines the appropriate steps required to ensure minimum safety standards are documented for non-UNOLS vessels. This guidance also includes a checklist (Appendix D) for minimum vessel safety specifications.

Non-operating institutions are not bound by these terms and conditions since no Cooperative Agreement for vessel operations exists. **However, NSF strongly encourages all awardees to follow these guidelines when chartering vessels for oceanographic research to protect themselves, their property and most importantly, their employees and other personnel.**

If sufficient or knowledgeable marine operations staff are not available within an institution, NSF encourages the use of contracted resources (similar to the NSF Ship Inspection Program) to ensure a vessel is in compliance with the RVSS.

Program Costs and Scheduling

There are considerations beyond the vessel charter rates that can result in additional costs to OCE facilities programs in support of funded science. It is essential to describe fully, and as early in the proposal process as practical, the full extent of logistical support required to conduct a given field project. It is impossible to anticipate funding needs for ancillary resources (equipment and personnel) required by a field program unless the relevant NSF Programs and facility operators are aware of, and involved in, ensuring equipment/personnel availability and scheduling. Even in cases where ship time is provided at “no cost” to NSF, or when the charter costs of non-UNOLS vessels are budgeted in science proposals, it is imperative to identify any and all additional facility and personnel support requirements since these costs are borne by a variety of programs within OCE.

UNOLS provides a mechanism to coordinate and schedule oceanographic work through its Ship Time Request (STR) system. This system allows the user to enter the name of any proposed vessel whether in the Academic Fleet or not. Investigators wishing to use any of the pooled assets (vans, cables, & winches), technical support, or ancillary facilities supported by NSF (ROV, AUV, etc.) must use the STR system to convey their proposed requirements to the various NSF Program(s) as well as the facility operators.

Failure to properly coordinate and communicate requirements through the UNOLS STR system may result in the denial of permission to use NSF-supported resources.

NSF-funded facilities may only be used in support of oceanographic research. First priority for use of these facilities will be federally-funded research projects. Where questions exist, written justification for use of facility assets should be provided to the appropriate NSF Program Officer responsible for oversight of the facility. As a minimum, the UNOLS STR itself, or the information normally provided in the UNOLS STR system, should be provided:

1. Funding agency
2. Award number
3. Vessel name
4. Principal Investigator
5. Dates of cruise
6. Operating area
7. Equipment requested
8. Other relevant considerations

The Program Officer will use this information, along with his/her assessment of the potential risks to other federally-funded programs, to make a determination on whether or not the request for additional facilities support is appropriate.

Data

The NSF/OCE Data and Sample Policy defines expectations for awardees with regard to data produced in whole or in part through funding from the Division of Ocean Sciences. These expectations build on the requirements of the CA-FATC, and provide additional guidance as to how investigators can provide robust data management plans. Investigators are reminded that these expectations also apply to oceanographic work conducted from non-UNOLS vessels. For example, the policy states that:

“PIs are required to submit, at no more than incremental cost and within a reasonable time frame (but ***no later than two (2) years after the data are collected***), the primary data, samples, physical collections and other supporting materials created or gathered in the course of work under NSF/OCE grants to the appropriate Data Center”

On UNOLS vessels, the responsibility for submission of all underway data is removed from the PI and is handled by the operator-institution through the Rolling Deck to Repository (R2R) gateway. **Investigators are reminded that they assume this responsibility for any research cruises on non-UNOLS vessels.**

