

NOTICE OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

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Executive Summary

Federal Agency Name

NOS Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS)

Funding Opportunity Title

FY25 Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program

Announcement Type

Competitive

Funding Opportunity Number

NOAA-ONMS-NFS-2025-28612

Assistance Listing Number(s)

11.429

Dates

Starting in Fall of 2024, the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program will use a pre-application process prior to applicants being invited to submit a full application.

Important Dates:

- An informational webinar about the FY2025 NOAA Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program funding announcement will be held on October 15, 2024 at 2:00 PM Pacific Time. To register for this webinar please visit the Foster Scholarship website (<https://fosterscholars.noaa.gov>) or go to: <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/7865883534944915805>.
- Pre-applications must be received via email to fosterscholars@noaa.gov on October 31, 2024 by 11:59 pm Eastern Time. If a paper application is deemed necessary, it must be postmarked no later than October 31, 2024 and sent to the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Pre-applications received after the date and time will be disqualified.
- Pre-application applicants will be notified by December 13, 2024 if they have been invited to submit a full application. Only those who receive an invitation from NOAA following its review of the pre-application are eligible to submit a full application package.

- Full applications are due on February 14, 2025 by 11:59 pm Eastern Time. Full applications must be received by Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>) on the due date listed above. If a paper application is deemed necessary, it must be postmarked no later than February 14, 2025 and sent to the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Full applications received after the due date will be disqualified.
- Scholarships are formally announced by May 30, 2025.

Please Note: We encourage all Grants.gov applicants to begin the submission process several days before the February 14, 2025 deadline. All applicants should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant schedules for delivery of the application. It may take Grants.gov up to two (2) business days to validate or reject the application. Please keep this in mind in developing your submission timeline. Electronic applicants are advised that volume on Grants.gov can be extremely heavy, resulting in further delays. Paper applications are only allowable for the following reasons: 1) Grants.gov is unable to accept applications electronically in a timely fashion; 2) if the applicant does not have access to the internet; or 3) if the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter. Otherwise, all applications must be submitted via Grants.gov.

Funding Opportunity Description

Diversity Statement

The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program is dedicated to ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the core of every action and every decision. We know that having varied perspectives helps generate better ideas to solve the complex problems of a changing world. To be effective stewards we must ensure our programs reflect the communities in which we live, work, and play. The longevity and success of our system depends on creating a culture that is welcoming and inclusive of all.

Funding Opportunity Description

The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program provides support for master's and doctoral degrees in oceanography, marine biology, maritime archaeology—these may include but are not limited to ocean and/or coastal: engineering, social science, marine education, marine stewardship, cultural anthropology, and resource management disciplines—and particularly encourage minorities and women to apply.

Individuals who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents, or citizens of U.S. territories, and are applying to or have been accepted to a graduate program at a U.S. accredited institution, may apply. Prospective scholars do not need to be enrolled in a graduate program at the time of application, but must be admitted to a graduate-level program by the time they accept the award. Scholarship selections are based on academic excellence, letters of recommendations, research proposals, relevant experience, and financial need. Applicants must have a cumulative 3.30 grade point average (GPA) to be eligible to apply and maintain a minimum cumulative and term GPA of 3.30 for every term and for the duration of their award.

Foster Scholarships may provide, subject to appropriations, yearly support of approximately \$47,000 per student (a 12-month stipend of \$35,000 in addition to an education allowance of \$12,000), up to \$10,000 of support for one 4-6 week program collaboration at a NOAA facility, and travel expenses to attend Capitol Hill Ocean Week (first week of June annually) before the end of the scholarship period. Applicants can only obtain funding for the number of years they have remaining in their graduate studies when they apply for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program. For example, if you have already completed two years of your Ph.D. studies, and you become a Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship recipient and indicate it will take you two additional years to complete your degree, you will only be able to obtain funds for the remaining two years of your graduate studies. Note that scholars may request a one-time no cost extension for up to one year that must be requested at least 60 days before the end of the award, and Scholars will need to provide a justification.

Foster Scholarship recipients will be required to:

- Participate in an annual week-long Foster Scholar Orientation and Communication Training organized by scholarship staff. This is an opportunity for scholars to meet with local NOAA staff at the sanctuary host site for the Orientation and Communication Training. This training normally occurs for one week in either June, July, or August. If scholarships have not been awarded before this training, recipients may be asked to incur pre-award costs that will be reimbursed after award funds have been issued.
- Develop an outreach product (e.g., video, infographic, lesson plan, or other educational product) within the scholarship time period. The outreach product may be about their research or some other relevant topic. Discussions with the Foster Scholarship Team can be helpful when determining the product and the topic.
- Provide at least one presentation about the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program and the scholar's research to a diverse audience, such as undergraduate students at a minority serving institution, historically black colleges and universities, student organizations promoting diversity at their campus, or other appropriate venue(s).
- Complete a 4-6 week program collaboration based on appropriated funding (required for every doctoral scholarship award and optional for master's degree students). Scholars may opt out of the program collaboration if there are unforeseen circumstances that prevent them from completing this requirement, but this discussion must happen with the Foster Scholarship Team and the Federal Program Officer before a decision is made. For master's degree level scholars, completion of a 4-6 week program collaboration is strongly recommended, but is not required. The program collaboration is designed to allow scholars to participate in research or other activities for 4-6 weeks at a field office of the National Marine Sanctuary System or other NOAA program offices.
- Attend Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW) in Washington, DC at the end of the scholarship period. CHOW occurs the first week of June annually, and travel expenses to attend CHOW will be provided before the end of the scholarship period. This will be for scholars who are in their final years of the scholarship.
As a recipient of the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship, you become a recognized member of the NOAA community. NOAA provides significant financial resources to help you pursue your independent graduate degree, as well as the staff expertise to assist you with your research. In support of the goal of the scholarship to promote excellence in ocean sciences, Foster Scholars must conduct outreach efforts to enhance awareness of ocean careers and conservation efforts related to oceanography, marine biology and maritime archaeology. To the extent feasible, Foster Scholars also are encouraged to raise awareness of NOAA and the programs and opportunities that it provides to the public.

Full Text of Announcement

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program is authorized at 16 U.S.C. 1445c-1 and 16 U.S.C. 1445c to recognize outstanding achievement in master's and doctoral degrees in oceanography, marine biology, maritime archaeology—these may include but are not limited to ocean and/or coastal: engineering, social science, marine education, marine stewardship, cultural anthropology, and resource management disciplines—and particularly encourages women and members of minority groups to apply. The scholarship supports independent graduate-level research through financial support of graduate degrees in such fields. Gender and minority status are not considered when selecting award recipients. Scholarships are distributed by disciplines, institutions, and geography, and by degree sought, with selections within distributions based on financial need, the potential for success in a graduate level studies program (academic achievement), and the potential for achieving research and career goals. The program is administered through the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and is funded annually with 1% of the amount appropriated each fiscal year to carry out the National Marine Sanctuaries Act.

B. Program Priorities

The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is seeking applications for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program from individuals, particularly women and members of minority groups, who, due to financial constraints, may otherwise not be able to pursue an advanced degree in the scientific disciplines supported by this program.

The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries conducts, sponsors, and facilitates research to better understand ecosystems and cultural resources in national marine sanctuaries, their changing condition, and the significance of threats. The National Marine Sanctuary System uses conservation science to support policy decisions, develop effective response capabilities, evaluate management practices, and support broader, NOAA-wide responsibilities for marine conservation and management. Science priorities are identified through assessments of threats and resource conditions within national marine sanctuaries and management plans and are necessary to protect and conserve sanctuary resources, manage risks, reduce threats and respond to unexpected events. Strong partnerships, expert scientific content and judgment, and peer review enhances the accuracy and credibility of monitoring and research. In addition, science, education, outreach, and policy development work together to raise awareness and prompt effective action that will address ocean problems. More information on the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries conservation science can be found at <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science>.

NOAA recognizes the student's need to ensure that scholarly research, which is often hypothesis based, addresses critical gaps in knowledge about ecological processes, physiological mechanisms, evolutionary underpinnings, human behaviors, preferences and values, and related areas. The nature of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' research, as well as interactions with sanctuary staff and partners with similar goals, can help students fulfill their degree requirements through work benefiting not only national marine sanctuaries, but marine conservation more broadly and ecosystem science as a whole. In addition to natural resource studies, scholars may investigate socioeconomic, maritime archaeological and maritime heritage resource studies in national marine sanctuaries.

General science priorities for the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries are stated below. Applicants are strongly encouraged to visit the Science Needs Assessment page (<https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment/>) to determine if your research proposal aligns with science needs of one or more sites within the National Marine Sanctuary System. If you feel the need to discuss your research proposal with a site Research Coordinator, contact information is available at https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment/research_coordinators.html. For questions on project proposals that address the entirety of the National Marine Sanctuary System, you can contact FosterScholars@noaa.gov with a snapshot of your proposed research.

C. Program Authority

16 USC 1445c-1 and 16 USC 1445c.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Subject to appropriations, approximately \$500,000 may be available for awards under this program during fiscal year (FY) 2025. The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program anticipates that each year approximately 2-5 scholarships will be awarded. The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program provides yearly support of approximately \$47,000 per student (a 12-month stipend of about \$35,000 in addition to a tuition allowance of about \$12,000) and \$10,000 support for one 4-6 week program collaboration at a field office of the National Marine Sanctuary System or other NOAA facility. Additionally, travel support of up to \$3,000 may be provided to all scholars to attend the Foster Scholar Orientation and Communication Training and up to \$3,000 for doctoral level scholars to attend the Capitol Hill Ocean Week. An aggregate amount of approximately \$110,000 may be provided to master's degree level students (up to two years of support, one program collaboration opportunity, and travel support for the Foster Scholar Orientation and Communication Training) and approximately \$213,000 may be provided to doctoral level students (up to four (4) years of support, one (1) program collaboration opportunity, and travel support for the Foster Scholar Orientation and Communication Training and Capitol Hill Ocean Week). It is important to note that Foster Scholarship funds cannot be used toward research costs.

Based on the availability of funding, the completion of one program collaboration is required for every doctoral scholarship award. For master's degree level scholars, completion of a program collaboration is recommended, but is not required. Federal support for the program collaboration may be used toward allowable costs such as: travel to and from the NOAA facility, housing, per diem, laboratory costs, research vessel support, and consumables while conducting research at the NOAA facility. Funds cannot be used toward research costs. Scholars are required to provide their own health insurance coverage during the program collaboration. More details on allowable costs can be found in 2 CFR part 200, Subpart E – Cost Principles. If scholars choose to do their program collaboration during a specific year, they must notify the Foster Scholarship Team by December of the academic year in which they intend to participate in the collaboration. Approval from NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is required prior to embarking on the program collaboration. Scholars may opt out of a program collaboration if there are unforeseen circumstances that prevent them from completing this requirement. But this discussion must happen with the program collaboration Coordinator and the Federal Program Officer before a decision is made. Funds for the program collaboration would not be provided to the scholar if they opt out of this opportunity.

A mandatory Foster Scholar Orientation and Communication Training will be held annually for incoming and current scholars. Scholars must participate in this training to ensure a basic knowledge of the scholarship program and also to meet with the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries leadership and staff. Travel support for the training, including travel logistics and per diem, not to exceed \$3,000 per year, will be provided to Foster Scholars. Travel support to attend Capitol Hill Ocean Week, including travel logistics and per diem, not to exceed \$3,000, will be provided for doctoral level Foster Scholars who are in their final years of the scholarship.

B. Project/Award Period

The award periods are up to two (2) years for a student in a master's level program and up to four (4) years for a doctoral level candidate, to be funded one year at a time. The anticipated start date is June or July 1, 2025. Though an applicant is selected for initial funding, NOAA reserves the right to revoke funding at any point. For example, receipt of funding beyond the first year is contingent upon the availability of funds from Congress, satisfactory performance, compliance with program guidelines, and continued relevance to program objectives and will be at the sole discretion of the Department of Commerce. Scholars may request a one-time no cost extension for up to one year.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

The funding instrument will be a cooperative agreement to the individual applicant. The requirement for “substantial involvement by NOAA” in a cooperative agreement includes a program collaboration, a component where the scholar is required to spend approximately 4-6 weeks at a NOAA facility to contribute to their education and training. The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries’ staff intends to work with each scholar to facilitate placement at a NOAA facility and to help the scholar refine the scope of their program collaboration, if necessary.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

To apply, each applicant must:

- be a U.S. citizen, permanent resident or a citizen of a U.S. territory (as defined by 16 U.S.C. 6602(9));
- pursue or intend to pursue a masters or doctoral level degree in oceanography, maritime archaeology or marine biology, including all science, engineering and resource management of ocean and coastal areas (or related areas), at a U.S. accredited graduate institution;
- have and maintain a minimum cumulative and term grade point average of 3.30 or higher*; and
- maintain full-time student status, as defined by the university that the scholar is attending, for the duration of the scholarship award.

*Scholars must maintain a minimum cumulative and term GPA of 3.30 for every term and for the duration of their award. If an applicant does not maintain this GPA, they will be placed on probation for one term following the term in which the 3.3 GPA was not maintained. If the GPA is not brought up within the probationary term, the recipient’s scholarship may be terminated. In addition, satisfactory progress must be made toward the completion of a thesis or dissertation. If it is determined that the scholar will not complete their thesis or dissertation prior to the end of the award, funding may be withdrawn.

Individuals who already receive NOAA or federal funding from grants or scholarships for graduate school are not eligible to receive the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship. If a student is willing to turn down the other federal funding, then they are eligible to receive the award.

Universities or other organizations may not apply on behalf of an individual. Prospective scholars do not need to be enrolled in a graduate program at the time of application, but must be admitted to a graduate-level program in order to be awarded this scholarship. Eligibility must be maintained for each succeeding year of support, and annual reporting requirements, to be specified at a later date, will apply. Individuals who are in their last year of graduate school are unlikely to receive this award.

B. Cost Share or Matching Requirement

There are no matching requirements for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Only those who receive an invitation from NOAA following its review of the pre-application are eligible to apply.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Grants.gov requires applicants to register with the system prior to submitting an application. This registration process can take several weeks and involves multiple steps. In order to allow sufficient time for this process, applicants should register as soon as they decide they intend to apply, even if they are not yet ready to submit their applications.

Adobe Acrobat is continuously making updates to their software. We recommend that applicants check the compatibility of Adobe products with the application’s required forms well in advance.

Additional guidance on the application package, instructions, submission procedures, and an application checklist can be located on the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program website: <https://fosterscholars.noaa.gov>. More information about the scholarship and the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries research priorities can be found at the following websites: <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov> and <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment>, respectively.

Information in hard copy may be requested from:

Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program
NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
99 Pacific Street
Monterey, CA 93940

B. Content and Form of Application

There are two required elements of this application, the pre-application and the full application. Each element has different format and content requirements, so please review carefully.

Each applicant must submit a pre-application by October 31, 2024, 11:59 pm Eastern Time through email to fosterscholars@noaa.gov. All applicants will receive a response to their pre-application via email from NOAA indicating whether or not they are invited to submit a full application. Only those who receive an invitation from NOAA following its review of the pre-application are eligible to apply to the full application.

1. Pre-Application Required Elements

Each pre-application package must include the items listed below unless otherwise indicated. Information in the pre-application should be submitted as a single Adobe PDF document in the order listed below and emailed to the FosterScholar@noaa.gov email address or mailed to the address listed above postmarked by the due date if you are unable to access a computer. Failure to submit any items as described in this section is likely to result in disqualification. Please do not include a cover page for your pre-application.

1. General Information Sheet: Provide the information outlined below, but do not exceed one typewritten single-spaced page, font size 12 in Times New Roman, with a 1" margins.
 - Personal Data: Provide your full name (including all aliases and maiden/married names); country of citizenship; current address and/or permanent address; current phone number; email address; and optional demographic data.
 - Degree Sought: State your proposed field of study oceanography, marine biology, or maritime archaeology—these may include but are not limited to ocean and/or coastal: engineering, social science, marine education, marine stewardship, cultural anthropology, and resource management disciplines—and the degree being sought (e.g. M.S., M.A., Ph.D.), including the month and year the degree is expected. If already enrolled in a graduate program, state the name and location of your institution and your academic department for your graduate study. If not enrolled, please clarify your status (e.g., applications submitted, in preparation, etc.)
 - Education: List the academic degrees received, or you expect to receive by the start of your proposed graduate degree for this program, including the institution, date of receipt, and your cumulative GPA. If enrolled in an institution, include your current GPA. If enrolled in graduate school, provide your graduate advisor's name, telephone number, and email address. If your GPA includes coursework from a U.S. university or an international institution that does not align with the typical 4.0 GPA system for grades, please have a school representative, advisor, or independent reviewer submit a letter that states you meet the 3.30 GPA requirement and provides an accurate conversion. Provide your original GPA and your converted GPA in this section.

2. Statement of Career Goal(s): In 5-6 sentences on one page, state your career goal(s) in a clear and concise way also indicating how it aligns to NOAA and Office of National Marine Sanctuary priorities. If this section exceeds 5-6 sentences or one page it may result in disqualification of your pre-application.
3. Snapshot Summary: Provide a snapshot summary of your proposed research and what NOAA national marine sanctuary science need(s) and/or resource protection issue(s) your research will be addressing. This section should not exceed 500 words and one page. Summary should be typewritten and single-spaced, font size 12 in Times New Roman, with a 1" margin. If the summary of the proposed research exceeds 500 words or one page it may result in the disqualification of your pre-application. Please include the following elements:
 - o Title of your research project
 - o Location of your research, including which national marine sanctuary you will be conducting your research.
 - o The current status of the research (e.g., idea, vetted through advisor, proposed, underway, and whether it is funded or not).
 - o Summary of your research that provides enough information to determine whether it is of high priority to the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and should include the topic of your research.
4. Statement of Financial Need: The Statement of Financial Need requires the following documentation:
 - o Department of Education's Student Aid Index (SAI) determination: To evaluate financial need, NOAA will use the Department of Education's SAI determination. To receive an SAI determination, applicants must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to the Department of Education. See <https://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. In response to the FAFSA, the Department of Education will provide the applicant with a Student Aid Report (SAR), which will contain the SAI determination. It may take up to two weeks to receive these results, so please make sure to budget enough time. A copy of the first two pages of the SAR, which includes the SAI and the applicant's name and/or last four digits of the applicant's social security number, must be submitted. The documentation of SAI must be from the Department of Education and not exceed two pages.
 - o Financial Need Information Questions (answers to these questions must not exceed one page, 12 pt font, Times New Roman). Questions do not need to be repeated on the single page to allow you more space to write your answer; however, the question number should be included before each answer.
 1. How likely are you to get a paid teaching or research assistantship in your program for the upcoming school year? Choose from the following choices: a) highly likely, b) somewhat likely, c) unlikely, or d) there is no opportunity for assistantship. Write 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.
 2. Do you have other money supporting your degree (e.g., grants or scholarships)? Please answer yes or no, and if needed, provide 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.
 3. Are you a first-generation college/university graduate? A first-generation college/university graduate is defined as a student whose parent(s)/legal guardian(s) have not completed a bachelor's degree. This means that you are the first in your family to attend a four-year college/university in any country to attain a bachelor's degree. Please answer yes or no, and if needed, provide 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.

4. Is your financial need based on personal hardships? Please answer yes or no, and provide 5-6 sentences explaining your answer. This is a snapshot of your personal story and an opportunity to give insight into your financial status, including any challenges, hardships, or information that may not be evident.

NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues (e.g., minor errors or omissions) that can be easily rectified.

2. Full Application Required Elements

For those applicants that completed a pre-application and were notified by NOAA by December 13, 2024 that they are invited to complete the full application, please follow the directions below. Each full application package must include the items listed below unless otherwise indicated. Failure to submit any items as described in this section is likely to result in disqualification. Full application packages are available through Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>). Please do not include a cover page for your full application.

Each full application package must be included within the single Adobe PDF document in the correct order as outlined in Section B of the Application and Submission Information. Note that some of the content asked in the full application was already asked in the pre-application but must also be included in the full application package.

Please provide a title of the item (for example, General Information Sheet, Statement of Intent, etc.) on each page in a Header Section except when a previously formatted PDF is added, such as transcripts or a PDF copy of a letter of recommendation.

1. Standard Form 424 (SF-424), Application for Federal Assistance, is located on the Grants.gov portal and must be completed with information pertinent to the applicant. Specific guidance on how to complete the SF-424 form for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program can be found at

https://fosterscholars.noaa.gov/media/docs/sf-424_guidance.pdf. Item number 21 on the SF-424 cannot be used as a replacement for the declaration statement required in Item 10 below. The SF-424 must be uploaded to Grants.gov separately from the items outlined below. If submitting a paper application, the application packet must also include a completed SF-424 and the SF-424 must be signed and dated with pen and ink.

Numbers 2-10: The following items of the full application listed below shall be uploaded into Grants.gov in the single Adobe PDF file, in the order outlined below. Failure to provide the single Adobe PDF file with all of the components in the order listed below is likely to result in disqualification. If submitting a paper application, the full application must be in the order outlined below or the application is likely to result in disqualification. If sealed letters of recommendation are included in a full paper application these envelopes can be added to the mailing envelope and not included in the rest of the correctly organized application package and should be referenced in the table of contents as attachments at the end. Submitting a full paper application is only acceptable for the following reasons: 1) Grants.gov is unable to accept applications electronically in a timely fashion; 2) if the applicant does not have access to the internet; or 3) if the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter.

2. Table of Contents: On a single page, please list the items and page numbers of the following required information. Page numbers are not required for pre-existing PDF documents, such as transcripts or PDF letters of recommendation, but should still contribute to the page count. If the sealed letters are in envelopes, the table of contents should reference them as attachments.

3. General Information Sheet: Provide the information outlined below, but do not exceed two typewritten single-spaced pages, font size 12 in Times New Roman, with a 1" margin. General Information Sheets that are longer than two pages in length and/or do not follow the formatting requirements listed above are likely to result in disqualification.

- a. Personal Data: Provide your full name (including all aliases and maiden/married names); country of citizenship; current address and/or permanent address; current phone number; and email address.

b. **Optional Demographic Data:** The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program is committed to broadening the participation of groups currently underrepresented in science. In order to accurately gauge whether the scholarship program is achieving this important goal, we ask that applicants indicate gender, race, and ethnicity. Please note that this information is voluntary. Your application will not be disqualified if you do not provide this optional personal data.

c. **Degree Sought:** State your proposed field of study oceanography, marine biology or maritime archaeology—these may include but are not limited to ocean and/or coastal: engineering, social science, marine education, marine stewardship, cultural anthropology, and resource management disciplines—and the degree being sought (e.g. M.S., M.A., Ph.D.), including the month and year the degree is expected. If already enrolled in a graduate program, state the name and location of your institution and your academic department for your graduate study.

d. **Education:** List the academic degrees received, or you expect to receive by the start of your proposed graduate degree for this program, including the institution, date of receipt, and your cumulative GPA. If enrolled in an institution, include your current GPA. If enrolled in graduate school, provide your graduate advisor's name, telephone number, and email address. If your GPA includes coursework from a U.S. university or an international institution that does not align with the typical 4.0 GPA system for grades, please have a school representative, advisor, or independent reviewer submit a letter that states you meet the 3.30 GPA requirement and provides an accurate conversion. Provide your original GPA and your converted GPA in this section.

e. **Academic Honors:** List any academic honors received.

f. **Relevant Experience:** List experience related to your field of study. You may include research and teaching assistantships and any other paid or unpaid work.

g. **Knowledge of Scholarship:** In a few words, please describe how you initially heard about the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program (e.g. word of mouth, current scholar, school/institution, specific professor/mentor, online database, etc.).

4. **Statement of Intent:** Provide the following components outlined below in two separate sections. The Statement of Intent must be typewritten, single-spaced, font size 12 Times New Roman, with a 1" margin and must not exceed one page in length including sections (a) and (b). Both sections (a) and (b) will be weighted equally; therefore, your descriptions must provide enough detail to review accordingly. Statements longer than one page and/or that do not follow the formatting requirements listed above is likely to result in disqualification. This statement should not be a research proposal or scientific abstract. This statement will be used to evaluate you as an individual, not necessarily as a scientist, it evaluates your motivation for applying for this scholarship, and evaluates your communication skills and ability to educate the public about your research. This statement must tell us something about why you are interested in this scholarship opportunity and demonstrate your organizational and written communication skills.

a. **Academic, Research, Career Goals and Aspirations:** A self-description of your academic, research, career goals, and how your proposed course of study or research will help you achieve these goals. This is your opportunity to present yourself, your aspirations and your career goals. Include any background information that is pertinent, such as work and academic experience, and extra-curricular activities that are relevant to your educational goals, and provide insight into why you choose to pursue these goals.

b. Communicating the Importance of your Research: As a Dr. Nancy Foster Scholar, you are asked to become a “National Marine Sanctuary Ambassador,” which emphasizes the opportunity to conduct science communication through education and outreach to the public (i.e. your college or university, community groups/organizations, or schools) about current research issues in the National Marine Sanctuary System. In this section, please provide a description of how you envision sharing your research and your results to the broader community and how the benefits of your research will impact society. Outline your ideas for a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding your research as it relates specifically to the National Marine Sanctuary System, as well as the global ocean. This must include anticipated locations and audiences for education and outreach events, potential partners in the community, and any potential outputs or outcomes from your activities. If you are a recipient of this scholarship, you will be required to show proof of completion of the project outlined in this section before the conclusion of your scholarship period.

To strengthen this section of your application, please provide one outreach letter from a community organization or group with which you would partner or collaborate to communicate your research. No more than one outreach letter will be considered. Please make sure it is on official letterhead, signed, and inserted after the statement of intent. The letter must outline your strategy for the outreach and education work you plan to undertake with this partner, their role in the collaboration, and the potential for success. Inclusion of this letter will be taken into consideration during the review process. Your full application will not be disqualified if you do not include this letter. However, an outreach letter is factored in when applicants are scored and is worth 5 points in the evaluation rubric.

Failure to submit a Statement of Intent as indicated above is likely to result in disqualification.

5. Transcripts: Applicants must submit transcripts for all complete years of academic training (both undergraduate and graduate), including courses in which you are currently enrolled. Headers are not required for transcripts. Transcripts from an institution or university that are only for one semester are not required (excluding work in progress) but may be included in the single Adobe PDF document if needed to support evidence of research experience. Applicants must currently have a cumulative 3.30 GPA to be eligible to apply. If applicants have completed at least a year towards their current graduate degree, the cumulative GPA considered will be from that program. If students have not completed at least a year, the cumulative GPA considered will be from their most recent degree you received. Students whose school does not follow a typical 4.0 GPA scale must submit a letter from a school representative, advisor, or independent reviewer that states you meet the 3.30 GPA requirement and provides an accurate conversion. Unofficial transcripts, which clearly state the name of the student and institution, submitted by the applicant are acceptable and must be included within the single Adobe PDF document in the correct order as outlined in Section B of the Application and Submission Information. All unofficial transcripts must list the student’s name and the name of the institution.

Failure to submit transcripts, as outlined above, is likely to result in disqualification. Official transcripts will be required prior to making an award.

6. Enrollment Verification or List of Graduate Schools Applied: For current graduate students, transcripts showing courses in which you are currently enrolled can be used as enrollment verification. Enrollment verification must include the name of school and applicant. If an applicant is not currently enrolled, but is applying to graduate schools, they must submit a “List of Graduate Schools Applied to” including the month and year graduate studies will begin, and any acceptance letters received at the time of application, with their application. Individuals selected to receive the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship award must provide proof of acceptance into a graduate program at a U.S. accredited institution at the time of notification or the individual will be ineligible to receive the award.

Failure to include the Enrollment Verification or "List of Graduate Schools Applied to," as applicable and as indicated above, is likely to result in disqualification. Applicants selected to receive the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship will be required to submit a certification of enrollment at the start of each academic term.

7. Research Proposal: The Research Proposal must be typewritten, single-spaced, font size 12 Times New Roman with a 1" margin and must not exceed three pages, including figures and other visuals, but excluding references. Do not include a cover page for your research proposal.

In the proposal, explain how your research supports NOAA's mission, particularly that of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and the science or education needs of one or more sites within the National Marine Sanctuary System.

Historically, proposals that do not support the science or education needs of the National Marine Sanctuary System do not rank as highly as those that do. Though not required, you are encouraged to contact the sanctuary site to discuss your research and its relevance to the site's priorities. If this contact has been made, state who was contacted and the result of that conversation. Information for the research coordinators at each site can be found at the following website:

https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/science/assessment/research_coordinators.html).

Please make sure your research and education goals, hypotheses, and project plans are clearly defined and communicated, and can be completed within the period of the scholarship. Make sure you clearly demonstrate your technical knowledge of the research area and the potential application of your findings. Your proposal will be evaluated on the alignment with NOAA and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries priorities, feasibility of the project, innovation and design, and technical understanding and clarity of the proposal.

8. Two Letters of Recommendation: Each full application must include only two letters of recommendation with handwritten or electronically created signatures on the actual letter from individuals who have knowledge of your academic record, research effort, and work and/or life experience. It is highly recommended that each letter is no more than two pages long. Letters of recommendation do not need to include headers.

One of these letters must be from someone in your current academic career. If you are currently not enrolled, consider submitting one letter from a professor who can provide knowledge of your academic career. Relevant paid work, such as internships and volunteer efforts, are applicable. Letters of recommendation must include: 1) Statements of the applicant's ability to succeed in the program proposal; 2) Familiarity with the applicant's work; 3) Statement that the individual writing the letter has a clear understanding of the goals and aspirations of the applicant on a personal and professional level; and 4) Clear support for the applicant.

If an applicant plans to have a NOAA employee submit a letter of reference as one of the letters of recommendation required in this section, please note that the letter is limited to factual information and the NOAA employee's knowledge of the applicant's ability or character based on the employee's government interactions with the applicant. The letter may not endorse one applicant over other applicants. Subject to restrictions and management approval, a NOAA employee may submit a letter of reference to NOAA for the agency's use in evaluating the application. The supervisor must make a decision regarding whether it is in the agency's interest to write such a letter. If the supervisor approves the letter, it must be written on agency letterhead and the employee must use his or her NOAA title. The employee may not send the letter in his or her personal capacity. NOAA employees can sign the letter digitally, but it is advised to not have these letters signed with their CAC card to prevent PDF issues.

The two letters of recommendation must be included in the single Adobe PDF document. Each letter must have a handwritten or electronically created signature on the official letterhead of the person recommending the candidate. Page numbers are not required for pre-existing PDF documents, but should still contribute to the page count. If the person providing the letter of recommendation does not wish for the applicant to see the contents of the letter, the applicant must submit a paper copy of their full application, include their letters of recommendation in sealed envelopes, and reference the letters of recommendation as attachments in the table of contents. Note that if you are submitting a paper application, the SF-424 form must be signed and dated with pen and ink. Failure to provide two (2) signed letters of recommendation on official letterhead, as outlined above, will likely result in disqualification. If more than two (2) letters of recommendation are provided, it will likely result in disqualification.

9. Statement of Financial Need: Your EFC documentation (9a) must not exceed one page. Yearly tuition documentation may be more than one page, especially if you are applying to multiple colleges and/or universities. Answers to all questions in 9c (questions 1-8) must be answered within one page. The Statement of Financial Need requires the following documentation:

a. Department of Education's Student Aid Index (SAI) determination: To evaluate financial need, NOAA will use the Department of Education's SAI determination. A negative SAI indicates higher financial need. To receive an SAI determination, applicants must submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to the Department of Education. See <https://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. In response to the FAFSA, the Department of Education will provide the applicant with a Student Aid Report (SAR), which will contain the SAI determination. It may take up to two weeks to receive these results, so please make sure to budget enough time. A copy of the first two pages of the SAR, which includes the SAI and the applicant's name and/or last four digits of the applicant's social security number, must be submitted. The documentation of SAI must be from the Department of Education and not exceed two pages.

b. Yearly Tuition Documentation: Applicants must also provide documentation of estimated yearly tuition for each school they are applying to. The tuition estimate must clearly state the name of the school and applicants must also provide documentation of where this estimate comes from, either as a screenshot of a tuition estimate from the university's website, or a letter or other documentation from the school, on official letterhead, showing tuition costs. Tuition should not include room, board, and other miscellaneous fees. Only the forms of documentation outlined above will be accepted. This can be more than one page in length if needed.

c. Financial Need Information Questions (answers to these questions must be provided on one page): Questions do not need to be repeated on the single page to allow you more space to write your answer. Simply mark down the number for each answer.

1) How likely are you to get a paid teaching or research assistantship in your program for the upcoming school year? Choose from the following choices: a) highly likely, b) somewhat likely, c) unlikely, or d) there is no opportunity for assistantship. Write 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.

2) How likely are you to get a paid teaching or research assistantship in your program for the entirety of your degree? Choose from the following choices: a) highly likely, b) somewhat likely, c) unlikely, or d) there is no opportunity for assistantship. Write 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.

3) Do you have other money supporting your degree (e.g., grants or scholarships)? Please answer yes or no. If yes, include the amount of funding and if it is a one time or recurring award. Current funds that expire in the current school year do not need to be included.

4) What is the amount of tuition needed for each school you are applying to or currently attend? List school(s) and the amount needed for tuition. Remember tuition does not include room and board or other miscellaneous fees.

5) Are you a first-generation college graduate? A first-generation college graduate is defined as a student whose parent(s)/legal guardian(s) have not completed a bachelor's degree. This means that you are the first in your family to attend a four-year college/university to attain a bachelor's degree. Please answer yes or no, and if needed provide 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.

6) Are there circumstances that will waive your tuition such as a teaching assistantship, research assistantship, or other instances? Please answer yes or no, and if needed provide 1-2 sentences explaining your answer.

7) Is your financial need based on personal hardships (a hardship unique to you and your situation compared to peers in a similar situation)? Please answer yes or no, and if needed provide 1-2 sentences explaining your answer. Note that you will have an opportunity to share more about your financial need and personal hardships in your Statement of Need essay.

8) Provide your Estimated Financial Need for each school to which you are applying, which can be determined by performing the following calculation: (Estimated Tuition per Academic Year) - (Student Aid Index) = Estimated Financial Need (EFN). If your tuition is waived by your school, use zero (0) for the Estimated Tuition per Academic Year. Do not use room and board or any miscellaneous fees as part of your estimated tuition expenses. Please write out the calculation for your EFN. If your EFN is not calculated correctly or your calculation is not included, your application is likely to result in disqualification.

For example: Estimated Tuition (not to include room and board or miscellaneous fees) = \$12,000/year (documentation of this estimate is required) Student Aid Index (SAI) = \$8,000 (determined by Student Aid Report) $\$12,000 - \$8,000 = \$4,000$ (So \$4,000 is your EFN or Estimated Financial Need)

d. Statement of Financial Need: In a one page, single-spaced essay, provide a personal narrative of your financial need, personal hardship(s), and, if necessary, include further clarification for the answers to the Financial Need Information Questions section. This is your personal story and your opportunity to give insight into your financial status, including any challenges, hardships, or information that may not be evident in the statements above. In your essay describing your financial need, discuss how you plan to use these scholarship funds for your graduate level education and what the impact will be if you do not receive this scholarship.

10. Declaration: Applicants must certify that all statements and information in their application are true and correct by either 1) copying the following statement on a separate sheet of paper or 2) downloading the declaration statement from

https://nmsfosterscholars.blob.core.windows.net/fosterscholars-prod/media/docs/declaration_statement.pdf, then providing a handwritten or electronically created signatures on the same paper, and including it in the single Adobe PDF document:

I, the undersigned, declare, under penalty of perjury, that:

I understand and agree to the limitations of the allowable costs for the scholarship funds as defined in this Notice of Funding Opportunity and that I am aware of the data sharing stipulation policy applicable to all NOAA federal funding opportunities. This statement serves as my "Data/Information Sharing Plan" insofar as it expressly states that no funds associated with this award will be used for the collection or creation of any environmental information or data. If I engage in fraudulent conduct or fail to comply with any term or condition of the scholarship my funding may be withdrawn, or I may be required to repay the amount of funding already received. I understand that if determined by the selecting official that satisfactory progress towards a thesis or dissertation is not completed within the timeframe of the award, I may be required to pay the full amount of the scholarship provided.

All statements and information in my application are true and correct at the time of this application.

Executed on [insert date]:

Print or type name:

Signature: [insert handwritten or electronically created signatures]

Failure to include the exact statement above, signed in pen by the applicant, will likely result in disqualification.

Answers to frequently asked questions on the application process are available at: <https://fosterscholars.noaa.gov/faqs.html>.

NOAA, in its sole discretion, may continue the review process for applications with non-substantive issues (e.g., minor errors or omissions) that can be easily rectified.

This announcement is not seeking proposals that generate environmental data. Therefore, a Data Management Plan is not required as part of the Proposal.

Questions from the NOAA National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) questionnaire are not required to be answered because the scholarship has been determined to be exempt from NEPA review. Funds provided under this program cannot be used toward research costs.

C. Unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM)

Each applicant (unless the applicant is an individual or Federal awarding agency that is excepted from those requirements under 2 CFR 25.110(b) or (c), or has an exception approved by the Federal awarding agency under 2 CFR 25.110(d)) is required to: (i) Be registered in SAM before submitting its application; (ii) Provide a valid unique entity identifier (UEI) in its application; and (iii) Continue to maintain an active SAM registration with current information at all times during which it has an active Federal award or an application or plan under consideration by a Federal awarding agency. NOAA may not make a Federal award to an applicant until the applicant has complied with all applicable unique entity identifier and SAM requirements and, if an applicant has not fully complied with the requirements by the time NOAA is ready to make a Federal award, NOAA may determine that the applicant is not qualified to receive a Federal award and use that determination as a basis for making a Federal award to another applicant. No unique entity identifier and System for Award Management (SAM) registration is required for this scholarship program.

D. Submission Dates and Times

- Pre-applications must be received via email to fosterscholars@noaa.gov on October 31, 2024 by 11:59 pm Eastern Time. Pre-applications received after the date and time will be disqualified.
- Pre-proposal applicants will be notified by December 13, 2024 if they have been invited to submit a full application. Only those who receive an invitation from NOAA following its review of the pre-application are eligible to submit a full application package.
- Full applications are due on February 14, 2025 by 11:59 pm Eastern Time. Full applications must be received by Grants.gov (<https://www.grants.gov>) on the due date listed above. If a paper application is deemed necessary, it must be postmarked no later than February 14, 2025 and sent to the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. Full applications received after the due date will be disqualified.
- Scholarships will be formally announced by May or June, 2025.

The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries mailing address is located in Section IV.G. "Other Submission Requirements," below. Pre-applications and full application packages received after the due date will not be reviewed or considered and will likely result in disqualification. Applicants may submit pre-applications via email and the full application package via Grants.gov or paper applications. Date and time of receipt of each application is electronically recorded. For paper applications, each envelope is time and date stamped when received and needs to be postmarked by the due date mentioned above. In order for pre-application and full application packages to be considered "Complete" all items are required in subsection IV.B. If you choose to mail in a full paper application package, we suggest using a service that can guarantee confirmation of delivery.

Please Note: For detailed information about registering as an individual and applying in the Grants.gov system, please review the following video: <https://youtu.be/gOjwumQz0G8?si=w8Xgz7s8qtT1BFcE&t=41>. All applicants, both those using electronic and paper, should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant submission timelines for delivery of the application. It may take Grants.gov up to two business days to validate or reject the application. You will receive an official notice from Grants.gov if you have uploaded your application correctly. It is not the responsibility of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to verify receipt of any application. NOAA will not accept full application packages that are submitted late due to an applicant's error during the time of submission to Grants.gov. NOAA may allow more time for application submission due to a "systems issue" with Grants.gov that takes place at the time of application submission and is beyond the control of the applicant. In these limited circumstances where there is a systems issue, the applicant must contact the help desk for the relevant system (e.g. Grants.gov) and obtain a help desk ticket number. The applicant must contact the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries immediately upon discovering the issues and must still submit the required application documents in order for their application to be considered for review. Required information for the application, such as financial documentation, may require extra time to obtain, so please plan accordingly.

E. Intergovernmental Review

Applications under this program are not subject to Executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs.

F. Funding Restrictions

No special restrictions apply.

G. Other Submission Requirements

Please refer to important information in submission dates and times above to help ensure your application is received on time. Applications should be submitted via Grants.gov. If an applicant does not have internet access to complete the application through Grants.gov or prefers to submit a paper application, paper applications may be submitted in one envelope to:

Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program
NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
99 Pacific Street
Monterey, CA 93940

Please Note: For full paper applications, failure to submit all application items in one (1) envelope and in the correct order, including a completed SF-424 will likely result in disqualification. If submitting a paper application, the application packet must also include a completed SF-424 and the SF-424 must be signed and dated with pen and ink.

Applicants are required to apply online through www.grants.gov. Use of Grants.gov requires an advanced registration process that may take a few days or a couple of weeks. In addition, applicants must complete and maintain an additional registration to be eligible to apply for or receive an award: eRA Commons (www.era.nih.gov). All registrations must be completed prior to the application being submitted.

Applicant organizations must complete and maintain two registrations to be eligible to apply for or receive an award. These registrations include Grants.gov, and eRA Commons. All registrations must be completed prior to the application being submitted. The complete registration process for all systems can take 4 to 6 weeks, so applicants should begin this activity as soon as possible. Organizations can register with eRA Commons in tandem with completing their Grants.gov registrations; however, all registrations must be in place by time of application submission. eRA Commons requires organizations to identify at least one Signing Official (SO) and at least one Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) account in order to submit an application.

The first PD/PI listed on the application must include their eRA Commons ID in the "Credential, e.g. agency login" Applicant Identifier field on the SF424 form. Failure to register in the Commons and to include a valid PD/PI Commons ID in the Applicant Identifier field will prevent the successful submission of an electronic application.

H. Address for Submitting Proposals

Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program
 NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
 99 Pacific Street
 Monterey, CA 93940

V. Application Review Information

A. Pre-Application Pre-Application Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points: 50
<p>This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, federal, regional, state, or local activities.</p> <p>The evaluation criteria and weighting of the criteria are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Statement of Career Goal Goals Project Idea (10 points) 2. Applicability to NOAA and Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Priorities and feasibility to sanctuary site (20 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alignment with NOAA and ONMS Priorities - 15 points 2. Feasibility of Research - 2 points 3. Technical Understanding and Clarity of Proposal - 3 points 3. Financial Need (20 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Student Aid Index (SAI) - 4 points 2. Financial Need Information Questions - 11 points 3. Statement of Financial Need and Personal Hardships - 5 points 	
B. Full Application Full Application Evaluation Criteria	Maximum Points: 100
<p>This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives.</p> <p>The evaluation criteria and weighting of the criteria are as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic Record and Statement of Career Goals of the Students (20 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Statement of Intent - 10 points 2. National Marine Sanctuary Ambassador - 5 points 3. Outreach Letter - 5 points 2. Quality of Project and Applicability to Program Priorities (30 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Alignment with NOAA and National Marine Sanctuaries Priorities - 15 points 2. Innovation and Design - 5 points 3. Feasibility - 5 points 4. Technical Understanding and Clarity of Proposal - 5 points 3. Recommendations and or Endorsements of Students (10 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiarity of Applicant - 5 points 2. Strength of Support - 5 points 4. Additional Relevant Experience (15 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Experience - 7 points 2. Communication Skills - 8 points 5. Financial Need (25 points). For this program, this includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Estimated Financial Need - 5 points 2. Financial Need Information Questions - 7 points 	

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. Statement of Financial Need – 8 points4. Clarity of Financial Need Statement – 5 points |
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Evaluation Criteria

Review and Selection Process

1. Pre-Application Review and Selection to Submit Full Application

Pre-applications that pass the minimum requirements will be evaluated and scored individually in accordance with the assigned weights of the evaluation criteria outlined in Section V.A. by a review panel composed of at least three reviewers having expertise in NOAA related science and knowledge of the program priorities of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. The reviewers will rate the pre-applications using the evaluation criteria and weighting provided above and then discuss each application. The review panel will not come to a consensus regarding pre-application scores. Following review, only applications with scores of 7 and above for Career Goals (Category A.1.a.), 15 and above for Applicability (Category A.1.b.), AND 15 and above for Financial Need (Category C.1.c.) will be invited to submit full applications. Thus, a total score of at least 37 out of 50 points will be required for applications to move forward. Pre-applications that will not receive further consideration include those that are missing a required component; those judged to have no alignment to NOAA or ONMS priorities (score of zero); or those in which the research is determined to be not feasible (score of zero; this can happen when, for example, intended target species do not occur in the proposed study area).

2. Review and Selection Process for Full Applications

All full applications that pass the administrative review will be evaluated and scored individually in accordance with the assigned weights of the evaluation criteria outlined in Section V.B. by a review panel. The panel will be composed of three (3) or more individuals, having expertise in NOAA related science and knowledge of the program priorities of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. The reviewers will rate the full applications using the evaluation criteria and weighting provided above. The panel will then meet to discuss the full applications. The review panel will not come to a consensus regarding full applications' scores. The individual panelist scores will be averaged for each application and placed in a ranking order of all applications. The Program Officer will transmit the review information to the Selection Official and may make a recommendation to the Selection Official about applying the selection factors below. We strive to have varied research projects across selection factors, such as academic disciplines, type of institution, geographic area, national marine sanctuary priorities, degree in scientific area, and type of degree sought. The Selection Official will recommend in rank order unless an application is justified to be selected out of rank order based on one or more of the selection factors below.

Selection Factors

The merit review ratings shall provide a rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendation. The Selecting Official shall award in rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based upon one or more of the following factors:

1. Balance and/or distribution of funds
 - a. across academic disciplines
 - b. by types of institution
 - c. geographic area
 - d. new universities that the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries has not partnered with in the past through the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program
2. Availability of funds
3. Specific to the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries' science priorities
4. Meets the goals of NOAA education and pathways to future NOAA workforce
5. Degree in scientific area and type of degree sought

Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, review of pre-applications and full applications, as well as subsequent notification to applicants, expect to be completed by May 30, 2025. Funds are expected to be awarded by June or July 1, 2025, which is the start date that must be used on the Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424) for successful applications.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

PRE-AWARD COSTS. Per 2 CFR 200.458, NOAA authorizes award recipients to expend pre-award costs up to 90 days before the period of performance start date at the applicant's own risk without approval from NOAA and in accordance with the applicant's internal policies and procedures. Such costs are allowable only to the extent that they would have been allowable if incurred after the date of the Federal award. This does not include direct proposal costs (as defined at 2 CFR 200.460). In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for direct proposal preparation costs. Pre-award costs will be a portion of, not in addition to, the approved total budget of the award. Pre-award costs expended more than 90 days prior to the period of performance start date require approval from the Grants Officer. This does not change the period of performance start date.

GRANTS OFFICER SIGNATURE. Proposals submitted in response to this solicitation are not considered awards until the Grants Officer has signed the grant agreement. Only Grants Officers can bind the Government to the expenditure of funds. The Grants Officer's digital signature constitutes an obligation of funds by the federal government and formal approval of the award.

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY. Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not have been appropriated yet for the programs listed in this notice. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds. Successful applicants will receive an electronic notification that the application has been funded from the NOAA Grants Management Division. An email notification will be issued to each successful applicant with instructions on how to access the eRA system and view the terms of the award. The annual reporting requirements are also included in the award package.

The names, academic institutions, degrees being sought, research plans, photographs and biographical information of the scholarship award recipients will be posted on the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program website: <https://www.fosterscholars.noaa.gov> after selections have been confirmed and accepted. The information posted on the website may also be published in marketing materials developed to advertise the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program and further the mission of the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

Unsuccessful applicants should expect to be notified that their proposal was not recommended for funding or declined by May 30, 2025.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

UNIFORM ADMINISTRATIVE REQUIREMENTS, COST PRINCIPLES, AND AUDIT REQUIREMENTS. Through 2 C.F.R. § 1327.101, the Department of Commerce adopted Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards at 2 C.F.R. Part 200, which applies to awards in this program. Refer to <http://go.usa.gov/SBYh> and <http://go.usa.gov/SBg4>.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PRE-AWARD NOTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR GRANTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS. The Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of December 30, 2014 (79 FR 78390) are applicable to this solicitation and may be accessed online at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2014-12-30/pdf/2014-30297.pdf>.

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE (DOC) TERMS AND CONDITIONS. Successful applicants who accept a NOAA award under this solicitation will be bound by the DOC Financial Assistance Standard Terms and Conditions. This document will be provided in the award package in eRA at <http://www.ago.noaa.gov> and at <https://www.commerce.gov/oam/policy/financial-assistance-policy>.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT. Department of Commerce regulations implementing the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. Sec. 552, are found at 15 C.F.R. Part 4, Public Information. These regulations set forth rules for the Department regarding making requested materials, information, and records publicly available under the FOIA. Applications submitted in response to this Notice of Funding Opportunity may be subject to requests for release under the Act. In the event that an application contains information or data that the applicant deems to be confidential commercial information that should be exempt from disclosure under FOIA, that information should be identified, bracketed, and marked as Privileged, Confidential, Commercial or Financial Information. In accordance with 15 CFR § 4.9, the Department of Commerce will protect from disclosure confidential business information contained in financial assistance applications and other documentation provided by applicants to the extent permitted by law.

NOAA SEXUAL ASSAULT AND SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION AND RESPONSE POLICY. NOAA requires organizations receiving federal assistance to report findings of sexual harassment, or any other kind of harassment, regarding a Principal Investigator (PI), co-PI, or any other key personnel in the award.

NOAA expects all financial assistance recipients to establish and maintain clear and unambiguous standards of behavior to ensure harassment free workplaces wherever NOAA grant or cooperative agreement work is conducted, including notification pathways for all personnel, including students, on the awards. This expectation includes activities at all on- and offsite facilities and during conferences and workshops. All such settings should have accessible and evident means for reporting violations and recipients should exercise due diligence with timely investigations of allegations and corrective actions.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.noaa.gov/organization/acquisition-grants/noaa-workplace-harassment-training-for-contractors-and-financial>.

REVIEW OF RISK. After applications are proposed for funding by the Selecting Official, the Grants Office will perform administrative reviews, including an assessment of risk posed by the applicant under 2 C.F.R. 200.206. These may include assessments of the financial stability of an applicant and the quality of the applicant's management systems, history of performance, and the applicant's ability to effectively implement statutory, regulatory, or other requirements imposed on non-Federal entities. Special conditions that address any risks determined to exist may be applied. Applicants may submit comments about any information concerning organizational performance listed in the Responsibility/Qualification section of SAM.gov for consideration by the awarding agency.

REQUIRED USE OF AMERICAN IRON, STEEL, MANUFACTURED PRODUCTS, AND

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS. If applicable, and pursuant to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (“IIJA”), Pub.L. No. 117-58, which includes the Build American, Buy American (BABA) Act, Pub. L. No. 117-58, §§ 70901-52 and OMB M-22-11, recipients of an award of Federal financial assistance from the Department of Commerce (DOC) are hereby notified that none of the funds provided under this award may be used for a project for infrastructure unless:

1) all iron and steel used in the project are produced in the United States—this means all manufacturing processes, from the initial melting stage through the application of coatings, occurred in the United States; 2) all manufactured products used in the project are produced in the United States—this means the manufactured product was manufactured in the United States; and the cost of the components of the manufactured product that are mined, produced, or manufactured in the United States is greater than 55 percent of the total cost of all components of the manufactured product, unless another standard for determining the minimum amount of domestic content of the manufactured product has been established under applicable law or regulation; and 3) all construction materials¹ are manufactured in the United States—this means that all manufacturing processes for the construction material occurred in the United States. The Buy America preference only applies to articles, materials, and supplies that are consumed in, incorporated into, or affixed to an infrastructure project. As such, it does not apply to tools, equipment, and supplies, such as temporary scaffolding, brought to the construction site and removed at or before the completion of the infrastructure project. Nor does a Buy America preference apply to equipment and furnishings, such as movable chairs, desks, and portable computer equipment, that are used at or within the finished infrastructure project but are not an integral part of the structure or permanently affixed to the infrastructure project.

WAIVERS. When necessary, recipients may apply for, and DOC may grant, a waiver from these requirements. DOC will notify the recipient for information on the process for requesting a waiver from these requirements. 1) When DOC has made a determination that one of the following exceptions applies, the awarding official may waive the application of the domestic content procurement preference in any case in which DOC determines that: a. applying the domestic content procurement preference would be inconsistent with the public interest; b. the types of iron, steel, manufactured products, or construction materials are not produced in the United States in sufficient and reasonably available quantities or of a satisfactory quality; or c. the inclusion of iron, steel, manufactured products, or construction materials produced in the United States will increase the cost of the overall project by more than 25 percent. A request to waive the application of the domestic content procurement preference must be in writing. DOC will provide instructions on the format, contents, and supporting materials required for any waiver request. Waiver requests are subject to public comment periods of no less than 15 days and must be reviewed by the Made in America Office. There may be instances where an award qualifies, in whole or in part, for an existing waiver described at whitehouse.gov/omb/management/made-in-america.

DEFINITIONS. “Construction materials” includes an article, material, or supply—other than an item of primarily iron or steel; a manufactured product; cement and cementitious materials; aggregates such as stone, sand, or gravel; or aggregate binding agents or additives² —that is or consists primarily of: non-ferrous metals; plastic and polymer-based products (including polyvinylchloride, composite building materials, and polymers used in fiber optic cables); glass (including optic glass); lumber; or drywall. “Domestic content procurement preference” means all iron and steel used in the project are produced in the United States; the manufactured products used in the project are produced in the United States; or the construction materials used in the project are produced in the United States. “Infrastructure” includes, at a minimum, the structures, facilities, and equipment for, in the United States, roads, highways, and bridges; public transportation; dams, ports, harbors, and other maritime facilities; intercity passenger and freight railroads; freight and intermodal facilities; airports; water systems, including drinking water and wastewater systems; electrical transmission facilities and systems; utilities; broadband infrastructure; and buildings and real property. Infrastructure includes facilities that generate, transport, and distribute energy. “Project” means the construction, alteration, maintenance, or repair of infrastructure in the United States. -- 1 Excludes cement and cementitious materials, aggregates such as stone, sand, or gravel, or aggregate binding agents or additives. 2 IJJA, § 70917(c)(1).

LIMITATION OF LIABILITY. Funding for programs listed in this notice is contingent upon the availability of appropriations. Applicants are hereby given notice that funds may not have been appropriated yet for the programs listed in this notice. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds

DATA SHARING PLAN. This announcement is seeking proposals that do not generate environmental data; therefore, no data management plan is required as part of the application.

PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT. This notification involves collection-of information requirements subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act. The use of Standard Form 424 has been approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) under control number 4040-0004. Notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person is required to respond to, nor shall any person be subject to a penalty for failure to comply with, a collection of information subject to the requirements of the PRA unless that collection of information displays a currently valid OMB control number.

C. Reporting

In accordance with 2 CFR 200.328-9 and the terms and conditions of the award, financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually and performance (technical) reports are to be submitted annually. Reports are submitted electronically through eRA.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, 31 U.S.C. 6101 note, includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the FFATA Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at <https://www.fsrs.gov/> on all subawards over \$30,000. Refer to 2 CFR Part 170.

Foster scholarship recipients are required to provide annual reports documenting the scholar's activities, accomplishments, academic progress, research progress, and education and outreach progress. The report must include copies of receipts indicating disbursement of the education allowance and copies of receipts for allowable expenses under the program collaboration. The report must include a certification from the scholar's academic advisor indicating that the student's work is on track and a copy of the official transcript indicating the scholar has a minimum term and cumulative GPA of 3.30. These reports must be submitted through the eRA system.

At the conclusion of the program collaboration, recipients are required to submit a trip report documenting their accomplishments and including a summary testimonial of their experience. In addition, recipients will be required to participate in an evaluation survey. To help increase diversity of future applicants, Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program recipients must give at least one presentation about the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program to a diverse audience, such as undergraduate students at a minority serving institution, historically black colleges and universities, or other appropriate venue(s). Documentation of this outreach presentation must be included in the final scholarship report.

All Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program recipients are required to put together an outreach product (e.g., video, infographic, lesson plan, or other educational product) within the scholarship time period. The outreach product may be about their research or some other relevant topic. Discussions with the Foster Scholar team can be helpful when determining the product and the topic.

At the conclusion of the award, recipients are required to submit a final report encompassing their accomplishments during the award period and their post scholarship plans, especially regarding NOAA interactions and the "National Marine Sanctuary Ambassador" requirement. The final report must include a copy of the final transcript indicating a degree earned, if applicable.

All scholars are required to submit a copy of their master's thesis or doctoral dissertation upon completion of their degree.

Scholars are allowed a one-year no-cost extension that they must request at least 60 days before the end of the award and will need to provide a justification and a current budget.

This semi-detailed justification can include the following:

- 1) Completion rate of sampling/data collection, data analysis, and or writing;
- 2) Plan or timeline for finishing an uncompleted item;
- 3) Identify additional costs, if any, and funding sources;
- 4) Statement supporting the additional time requested will be sufficient to complete the remaining tasks, especially writing of dissertation and why.

The Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006 includes a requirement for awardees of applicable Federal grants to report information about first-tier subawards and executive compensation under Federal assistance awards issued in FY 2011 or later. All awardees of applicable grants and cooperative agreements are required to report to the Federal Subaward Reporting System (FSRS) available at <https://www.FSRS.gov> on all sub awards over \$30,000.

VII. Agency Contacts

Send requests for information to fosterscholars@noaa.gov or mail requests to:

Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program
NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries
99 Pacific Street
Monterey, CA 93940

VIII. Other Information

A. The Stipend and Education Allowance

The annual stipend (which consists of the full scholarship award) will be paid directly to the scholar. Tuition (including fall, winter, spring, and summer) and academic fees may be negotiated between the academic institution and the scholar prior to the receipt of funds. This negotiation is intended to leverage scholarship funds and enhance opportunities for scholarship recipients. In those instances, in which tuition and academic fees are not totally waived by the academic institution, the education allowance in an amount equal to the tuition and fee not waived (approximately \$12,000) will be paid directly to the scholar for remittance to the academic institution. If tuition and fees are reduced or waived by the academic institution, then that portion of the education allowance not needed (i.e., approximately \$12,000 in the case of a total waiver) will be retained by NOAA for future scholarships. No money will be paid directly to the student from the education allowance for purposes other than the payment of tuition, fees, and education costs including but not limited to books required for courses. Health insurance is an allowable education cost if it is directly billed on the tuition statement. You may work and receive loans if you receive this scholarship.

B. General Scholarship Information

Specific instructions regarding the disbursement, management, and reporting requirements for all stipend and tuition allowance payments will be provided to the scholarship recipients upon selection for the award. The awarding of funds beyond the first year will be based on availability of funds, continued eligibility of the student, semi-annual certification by the academic institution that adequate academic progress is being made, and in compliance with applicable reporting requirements. At its discretion, each academic institution may supplement a scholar's stipend from institutional funds in accordance with the supplementation policy of the institution.