



NOAA's efforts in Equitable Grantmaking

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Achievements in equitable grantmaking

- DEIJ & Grant making working group, internal to NOAA
- NOAA created new focused opportunities with the BIL/IRA funds that attempted to reach communities identified as underserved, underrepresented, and highly vulnerable. A couple of examples:
 - 2023 Coastal Habitat Restoration and Resilience Grants for Tribes and Underserved Communities (Fisheries)
 - 2024 Regional ocean partnerships for federally recognized tribes to increase tribal participation in this existing program (Ocean Service/OCM)
- Assistant Secretary Jainey Bavishi advocates for changes to improve equity in grantmaking
- NOAA's releases new equity framework



Leadership support for equitable grantmaking across NOAA

In summer 2023, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Deputy Administrator, Jainey Bavishi, gathered a team to conduct interviews with NOAA program officers. Goals:

- Signal agency prioritization of equity in NOAA grantmaking
- Clarify opportunities to improve equitable outcomes through NOAA grantmaking
- Remove policy and process barriers to equitable grantmaking at NOAA, where possible
- Provide resources (i.e., information, support) for program offices to drive equitable outcomes through grantmaking

DEIJ and grantmaking working group

Created a forum for identification of barriers and solutions to NOAA's DEIJ and grantmaking goals among program officers

Topics Addressed to date:

- Refining NOFO language to emphasize equity outcomes
- Best practices for capacity building for applicants
- Improving outreach to targeted groups, seeking feedback on application process
- Allowable costs that promote participation by underserved individuals and groups (e.g., paying for child care at community engagement events)
- Supporting applicants in identifying community partners
- Need for shared resource guides for federal program officers
- Use of generative AI in grants
- State laws restricting some applicants in responding to DEIJ requirements
- Evaluations of applicant and awardee diversity



Challenges

- Legal restrictions on using race or ethnicity to influence a funding decision
- New grants system (eRA) has created many new technical barriers to applicants (many more applications are rejected due to credential problems and minor formatting errors than with the previous system)
- Lack of data on applicants to know what the applicant pool looks like (can't easily tell if changes have resulted in improvements in diversity)
- Universities based in U.S. territories lack capacity to manage awards
- State limitations on responses to federal DEIJ requirements in NOFOs
- Many programs in NOAA do not compensate reviewers, resulting in low diversity review panels

America COMPETES

Under 33 U.S.C. § 893a(a): The Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall conduct, develop, support, promote, and coordinate formal and informal educational activities at all levels to enhance public awareness and understanding of ocean, coastal, Great Lakes, and atmospheric science and stewardship by the general public and other coastal stakeholders, including underrepresented groups in ocean and atmospheric science and policy careers.

In conducting those activities, the Administrator shall build upon the educational programs and activities of the agency, with consideration given to the goal of promoting the participation of individuals identified in sections 1885a [**women**] and 1885b [**minorities** and people with disabilities] of title 42 in STEM fields and in promoting the acquisition and retention of highly qualified and motivated young scientists to complement and supplement workforce needs.



Guidance from Dept. of Commerce Federal Assistance Law Division

A federal financial assistance program may confer a benefit on members of a certain race or ethnicity in two general ways:

- (1) the government program can call for special treatment based on race or ethnicity (RACE-BASED Program); or
- (2) the government program can use race-neutral terms of eligibility and does not call for special treatment based on race or ethnicity (RACE-NEUTRAL Program).

If the government confers a benefit (like a grant award) on the basis of an individual's racial or ethnic classification, the highest level of judicial scrutiny applies. *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 200, 227 (1995).



Approaches underway to address these challenges

FY2021 Program Office NOFO

Included in priorities: “This Program Office is also interested in supporting research projects that employ and educate undergraduate or graduate students from groups underrepresented in marine science careers, including minorities.”

Applicants were asked to describe how these students will be employed, educated and supported in future Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) careers as part of the project.

This priority was also reflected in application review criteria.

FY2022 Program Office NOFO

- Modified language in funding solicitation to be **inclusive, relevant, accessible to communities** most vulnerable to climate change impacts; avoid use of term “minority”
- **“underserved** members of the community, defined here as people who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, who are also highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. These underserved and **highly vulnerable** community members face greater exposure to extreme weather and climate change impacts, and they have fewer resources to prepare for and adapt to the associated risks”

Products due to support from Jainey Bavishi and Working Group

Product: Best Practices in Grantmaking Guide

- Will be released by end of year
- Product of two years of interviews from Bavishi's team
- A tool for NOAA program officers that details the current barriers to equity and actions NOAA programs can take to improve equitable outcomes through the grantmaking process. This guide synthesizes industry-wide best practices other Federal agencies have adopted – related to outreach and technical assistance for application development and review – to improve their grantmaking, as well as lessons learned from NOAA programs.

Example of barriers identified in guide

- Federal grant applications are lengthy and complex
- Lack of capacity to develop competitive proposals
- Increasing diversity of reviewers is a significant challenge without compensation for time and travel

There is a history of investment in the same organizations..you can't compare the readiness of a new applicant with that of older, established applicants.

We can't help them develop concepts though but that's what is needed — support in concept to development

There is a schism between the gatekeepers who are good at getting grants and the community. The gatekeepers might be doing work in the community but they aren't necessarily community oriented.

Examples of program successes in guide

- Pay panelists and reviewers when possible
- Diversify review panels beyond Federal reviewers
- Train panelists on DEIJ review criteria
- Offer small grants for planning, pre-proposals, and grant writing
- Hold “office hours” to provide technical assistance for application development
- Provide checklists, tips, and templates
- Develop a plain language NOFO companion guide

There is still not diverse representation on review panels, and the expertise that they can provide on DEIJ is limited. There is intentionality that is needed to bring in a diverse panel that make the recommendation. Having a diverse panel is a significant challenge.

Demographics form to collect data

- Another important product coming out due to combined efforts to address issues
- Goal: identify and address any inequities based on gender, race, ethnicity, or disability of awards' proposed applicants.
- Applicant(s) will be encouraged to submit requested information. Voluntary and not a precondition of award.
- Working on PRA approval and creating a version that can be easily used across programs in NOAA.

Q: Do you live in a rural area (as defined by the Census Bureau - open country and settlements with fewer than 2,000 housing units and 5,000 residents)

A: Yes/No/Prefer not to answer

Q: Citizenship Status:

A:

- U.S. Citizen
- U.S. National
- Permanent Resident
- Self-Identify (fill in the blank)
- Prefer not to answer

Section 3: Career Path Information

Q: Career Stage:

A: (check all that apply)

- Student (Currently enrolled in any degree type)
- Early Career (Up to ten years past your terminal degree)
- Mid-Career (Ten+ years past terminal degree and pre-retirement)
- Switch careers or job field
- Retired/Emeritus



Thank you!

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