



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS FISHERIES INNOVATION FUND: NEW ENGLAND GEAR INNOVATION FUND

2023 REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Pre-Proposal Applicant Webinar

[\[Register Here\]](#):

May 2, 3:00 PM Eastern Time

Pre-Proposal Due Date:

Rolling acceptance, Thursday, May 22, by 11:59 PM Eastern Time as final deadline*

Full Proposal Due Date:

(By Invite Only) Thursday, July 13 by 11:59 PM Eastern Time

*To allow for efficient processing of pre-proposals, there will be rolling submission and review, meaning pre-proposals will be reviewed as they are received. To best meet the needs of applicants and rapidly support the development of innovative fishing gear, this RFP will also allow early submissions. **If you are interested in the early submission track, please contact Program Staff (Gray Redding – gray.redding@nfwf.org) immediately for key information including early submission deadlines for both pre and full proposals. No preference is given to proposals submitted early and NFWF reserves the right to shift early submitted proposals to the standard timeline.** Early submissions are meant for project concepts that are ready to implement and applicants seeking early submissions should be prepared to discuss why their work would benefit from receiving earlier funding within calendar year 2023. See “Timeline” below for additional information, including anticipated award announcement date for each submission track.

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is soliciting proposals to promote the development and adoption of innovative gear technologies that reduce the risk of lethal or sub-lethal fishing gear entanglement for the critically endangered North Atlantic right whale (NARW) in fixed gear fisheries throughout New England. The Fisheries Innovation Fund (FIF): New England Gear Innovation Fund program is assessing the funding need of the region and will award grants towards that need, providing up to \$18 million in grants through this solicitation, pending availability of funding.

The New England lobster fishery is the largest and most lucrative pot or trap fishery in the United States. The fishery is an important economic driver of the region and is key to the cultural identity of coastal communities. Lobstermen have a long history of pioneering innovations to conserve lobster and other species, nimbly responding and adapting to conservation challenges as they arise. The fishery overlaps with several other resource users and marine species including the critically endangered NARW. There are fewer than 350 NARW remaining, with less than 70 breeding females. Environmental changes are one reason for this decline, but human induced threats to the



species include entanglement in fishing gear and vessel strikes. The fishery deploys a string of traps along the ocean bottom, with vertical buoy lines attached to each end, allowing for marking and gear retrieval, but these vertical lines can entangle animals like the NARW. One-way innovative gears may reduce entanglement risk is the removal of these vertical lines. However, the removal of vertical lines and traditional fixed-gear surface markings creates new challenges for fishermen, managers, and enforcement. To address these challenges, it is necessary to develop and implement an interoperable system for deploying and retrieving innovative gear and sharing geolocation data across fisheries. Ensuring all users can locate innovative gear is key to avoiding gear conflicts and supporting management. The FIF: New England Gear Innovation Fund program will provide support for New England fisheries such as the lobster, Jonah crab, and other fixed gear fisheries to voluntarily develop and test innovative gear solutions that will allow these fisheries and the NARW to sustainably coexist.

The New England Gear Innovation Fund program is a partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), who provided funding through money appropriated by Congress.

GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS

While projects need not necessarily take place in New England, competitive projects need to demonstrate a substantial likelihood of reducing the risk of fishing gear entanglement and associated lethal and sub-lethal effects on NARW. The distribution of vertical lines, known habitat use of right whales, and record of entanglements shows that among U.S. fisheries, New England fixed gear fisheries pose a significant gear entanglement risk to NARW. Projects will likely be directly tied to New England fixed gear fisheries like lobster and Jonah Crab, or in certain cases mobile gear fisheries that may be impacted by innovative gear like New England groundfish. In cases where engineering, design, or testing of innovative fishing gear is occurring in other regions, those proposals must demonstrate substantial engagement with New England fishing communities.

PROGRAM PRIORITIES

Proposals should address one or more of the program priorities listed below. All proposals should outline the conservation benefits of the project relating to the main goal of promoting the innovation and adoption of gear technologies that substantially reduce the risk of lethal or sub-lethal fishing gear entanglement for NARW in fixed gear fisheries throughout New England. The New England Gear Innovation Fund program has the following priorities:

- 1) Research to develop, test, or deploy innovative gear technologies that meet fishery participants' needs in a viable and economically feasible way and that reduce entanglement risk posed by vertical lines on lobster traps and other fixed gear fisheries. Priority issues to address include:
 - a. Developing accurate, open source, interoperable, and cost-efficient real-time geolocation tools for innovative gear, including allowing real time knowledge of gear location by fixed gear fishermen and maritime users. Tools should take into account telecommunication capabilities on a variety of fishing vessels across the

- geographic range of the fisheries and focus to the extent possible on using hardware already present on, or required to be on, fishing vessels such as navigation systems or vessel monitoring systems.
- b. Trialing and adoption of innovative gear including geolocation to improve the gear's usability and safety in real world fishing situations. These trials may seek to match realistic gear densities and address how innovative gears and geolocation of such gears function in a variety of weather conditions, tidal conditions, depths, and evaluate reliability of innovative gear over long term use. As needs may differ between and within different states and segments of fisheries, applicants should consider testing across this diversity spectrum.
 - c. Developing and scaling innovative fishing gear that removes persistent vertical lines from the water column and allows reliable, efficient, and safe retrieval and redeployment of gear in a variety of weather conditions, locations, and boat or crew configurations.
- 2) Conduct outreach with fishermen to encourage participation in the process of developing, testing, and voluntarily adopting innovative gear.
- a. Conduct outreach on innovative gear developments and lessons learned across the New England region through sharing of best practices, technical documentation, and fishermen targeted materials.
 - b. Convene fisheries participants and stakeholders working on innovative gear, including the grantees of this funding opportunity, or work with participants in some other way, to discuss and share their perceptions of innovative gear technologies and needs from this gear.
 - c. Design or develop curricula or other tools necessary for training the fishery workforce on safe and effective operation of innovative gear under future implementation.

Fishing Community Impact and Engagement: Projects that incorporate outreach to and direct engagement of New England fishing communities leading to measurable conservation benefits are strongly encouraged. When possible, projects should be developed through New England fishing community input and co-design processes to secure maximum benefits for fishing communities and the sustainability of outcomes post-grant.

PROJECT METRICS

To better gauge progress on individual grants and to ensure greater consistency of project data provided by multiple grants, the New England Gear Innovation Fund RFP has a list of metrics that will be available in Easygrants for applicants to choose from for future reporting. We ask that applicants select only the most relevant metrics from this list for their project (all possible proposal metrics are shown in the table below). If you think an applicable metric has not been provided, please contact Gray Redding (gray.redding@nfwf.org) to discuss acceptable alternatives.

A variety of tracking metrics are provided below for applicants to use in their proposals. All metrics are potentially appropriate for projects under this RFP. Some key metrics of interest are the number of innovative gear tools developed, tested, or implemented, the number of fishermen involved in an

innovative gear effort, the number of fishermen who gain knowledge on the use of innovative gear, and the number of hauls or fishing days completed using innovative gear.

Project Activity	Recommended Metric	Additional Guidance
CAPACITY		
<i>Train and build fishermen's skills in and knowledge of using innovative fishing gear.</i>	<i>Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people with knowledge</i>	<i>Enter the number of people, especially fishermen, demonstrating a minimum level of knowledge, attitudes, or skills necessary to use innovative gear now or in future implementations. In the "Notes." section please describe the minimum skill level and how fishermen demonstrate they have reached it.</i>
<i>Grow organizations to increase capacity for innovative gear development, testing, and future implementation.</i>	<i>Building institutional capacity - # FTEs with sufficient training</i>	<i>Enter the number of staff or full-time equivalents with sufficient training and skills engaged in innovative gear testing, training, or manufacturing. Provide the skills that the staff will have in the "Notes" section.</i>
INNOVATIVE GEAR USE AND ADOPTION		
<i>Implement an innovative fishing gear program.</i>	<i>Monitoring - # of fishing hauls using innovative gear technology</i>	<i>Enter the number of fishing hauls using innovative gear technology including geolocation technology over the grant period. In the "Notes", please specify the type of gear.</i>
<i>Implement an innovative fishing gear program.</i>	<i>Monitoring - # of fishing days using innovative gear technology</i>	<i>Enter the number of fishing days using innovative gear technology including geolocation technology over the grant period. In the "Notes", please specify the type of gear.</i>
<i>Help fishermen or other stakeholders implement a new practice or other behavioral change such as using an innovative fishing gear.</i>	<i>Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people with changed behavior</i>	<i>Enter the number of people reached, such as fishermen, that have demonstrated a minimum threshold of behavior change. Examples</i>



		of this change could be adoption of innovative gear, use of a new gear marking technology, accessing a new fishing area through innovative gear, or manufacturers adopting interoperability principles. This metric should only be chosen if the project has clear methods to define and measure behavior change, which should be described in the "Notes" section.
Fishermen use innovative fishing gear units for testing or fishing.	Capacity, Outreach, Incentives- # of innovative fishing gear units available for use	Enter the number of innovative fishing gear units that are in use by the project or fishing organizations partnering with the project for testing or implementation. In the "Notes" section please describe how these gear units were acquired such as through purchase or lending from a gear library.
DEVELOPMENT AND ENGINEERING		
Develop a formal plan to implement an innovative gear or technology trial or monitoring program.	Management or Governance Planning - # plans developed	Specify the number of plans developed with input from multiple stakeholders including fishermen. Plans should identify monitoring or system improvement objectives. Examples of types of plans may include an implementation plan or operations plan for a gear trial, technology interoperability plan, data management plan for geolocation data, software design document, etc.
Develop, test, or implement a tool or technique for decision making, data collection, interoperability, gear innovation, or other use.	Tool development for decision-making - # tools developed;	This field represents multiple metrics, based on where tools are in the process of implementation. Enter the number of tools developed, tested, or implemented, and

	<p><i>Tool development for decision-making - # tools/techniques tested;</i></p> <p><i>Tool development for decision-making -# tools/techniques implemented</i></p>	<p><i>specify the type of tool(s) in the “Notes” section.</i></p> <p><i>Developing a tool would mean early conceptualization and creation. Testing a tool would represent the pilot stage. Implementing a tool would occur through at-scale deployment of the tool.</i></p>
OUTREACH		
<i>Engage fishermen or other stakeholders in a project through education, assistance, or other means.</i>	<i>Outreach/ Education/ Technical Assistance - # people reached</i>	<i>State the number of people such as fishermen reached by outreach, training, or technical assistance activities. Use the “Notes” section to identify the type of outreach or assistance, and level of engagement had with people reached.</i>
PARTNERSHIPS		
<i>Engage government agencies, non-governmental organizations, fishing associations, and other stakeholder groups in testing or implementing innovative gear.</i>	<i>Capacity, Outreach, Incentives- # of organizations contributing to goals</i>	<i>Enter the number of organizations participating in the project. In the “Notes” section, please briefly list the entities, the type of entity (fishing association, local, state, or federal government, NGO, for-profit business, etc.) and how they are participating.</i>

ELIGIBILITY

Eligible and Ineligible Entities

- Eligible applicants include relevant state government agencies, local governments, regional governments, Tribal Governments and Organizations, educational institutions and non-profit 501(c) organizations with expertise in commercial fisheries, gear innovation, and NARW conservation, relevant port authorities, commercial (for-profit) organizations, and individuals including vessels owners and operators or those involved in the maritime industry. Consortiums or partnerships of such groups listed above are also eligible.



- Ineligible applicants include individuals or entities that are not located in the United States. International individuals or entities can be a contributing partner in a consortium but should not be the primary applicant. Federal government entities are also ineligible.
- For-profit applicants: please note that this is a request for grant proposals, not a procurement of goods and services; see the Budget section below for specific cost considerations.

Ineligible Uses of Grant Funds

- **Equipment:** Applicants are encouraged to rent equipment where possible and cost-effective or use matching funds to make those purchases. NFWF acknowledges, however, that some projects may only be completed using NFWF funds to procure equipment. If this applies to your project, please contact the program staff listed in this RFP to discuss options.
- Federal funds and matching contributions may not be used to procure or obtain equipment, services, or systems (including entering into or renewing a contract) that uses telecommunications equipment or services produced by Huawei Technologies Company or ZTE Corporation (or any subsidiary or affiliate of such entities) as a substantial or essential component, or as critical technology of any system. Refer to Public Law 115-232, section 889 for additional information.
- NFWF funds and matching contributions may not be used to support political advocacy, fundraising, lobbying, litigation, terrorist activities or Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations.
- NFWF funds may not be used to support ongoing efforts to comply with legal requirements, including permit conditions, mitigation and settlement agreements. However, grant funds may be used to support projects that enhance or improve upon existing baseline compliance efforts.

FUNDING AVAILABILITY AND MATCH

Through the FIF: New England Gear Innovation Fund RFP, NFWF is assessing the funding need of applicants. Based on anticipated funding, NFWF will award no more than \$18 million in grants, pending availability of funding. Grants will likely range between \$250,000 and \$2,000,000, but applicants seeking grants larger or smaller than that are still encouraged to apply and are eligible. Applicants should design proposals that can be completed in 3 years or less and project periods should start approximately 4 to 6 months after the expected award date in August (early submissions) or November (standard submission deadlines) 2023 to allow for contracting. Proposals are encouraged to provide non-Federal matching contributions (both cash and in-kind), but there is no formal matching requirement for proposals under this RFP.

EVALUATION CRITERIA



All proposals will be screened for relevance, accuracy, completeness and compliance with NFWF and funding source policies. Proposals will then be evaluated based on the extent to which they meet the following criteria.

Program Goals and Priorities – Project contributes to the Program’s overall habitat and species conservation goals related to engaging fishermen in the process of developing and using innovative gear technology that can reduce the lethal and sub-lethal threats to the North Atlantic right whale, and has specific, quantifiable performance metrics to evaluate project success. Project addresses one or more of the program priorities.

Technical Merit – Project is technically sound and feasible, and the proposal sets forth a clear, logical and achievable work plan and timeline. Project engages appropriate technical experts throughout project planning, design and implementation to ensure activities are technically-sound and feasible. Where engineering and technical development are occurring, proposal has appropriately integrated open-source concepts and interoperability into their development process.

Partnership and Fishing Community Impact – The applicant organization partners and engages authentically and collaboratively with diverse local community members, leaders, community-based organizations, including fishing communities and other relevant stakeholders to develop and implement the proposed project. Projects that directly engage and work with fishing communities are strongly encouraged and will be more competitive during application review. This ensures long-term sustainability and success of the project and community acceptance of innovations. Non-traditional partners or communities are enlisted to broaden the sustained impact from the project. Proposals should describe the community characteristics of the project area, identify any communities impacted, describe outreach and community engagement activities and how those will be monitored and measured. Use demographic data to support descriptions and submit letters of support from community partners and/or collaborators demonstrating their commitment to the project and engagement in project activities as proposed.

Interoperability of Technology – In projects where innovative gear technology is being developed, tested, or deployed at scale, the proposal demonstrates an understanding and adherence to principles of interoperability. Interoperability of technology will be key to ensure public developments in innovative fishing gears have sustainable and transferrable benefit for resource conservation and fishing communities. For additional information on interoperability NFWF is aware that NOAA and other stakeholders are developing policies around interoperability for innovative gear. We encourage applicants to build approaches that incorporate or are adaptable to those upcoming guidelines.

Cost-Effectiveness – Cost-effectiveness analysis identifies the most economically efficient way to meet project objectives. Project includes a cost-effective budget that balances performance risk and efficient use of funds. Cost-effectiveness evaluation includes, but is not limited to, an assessment of effective direct/indirect costs across all categories in the proposed budget according to the type, size and duration of project and project objectives. Project budgets will be compared to similar projects to ensure proposed costs across all budget categories are reasonable for the activities being performed and the outcomes proposed.



Transferability – Project has potential and plan to transfer lessons learned to other communities and/or to be integrated into government programs and policies. Plans are also included for technology to be interoperable with other technologies ensuring transferability across the region.

Communication – Project includes a detailed plan to communicate information about the project to appropriate audiences.

Funding Need – Project establishes a clear need for the funds being requested, and demonstrates that activities would not move forward absent funding.

Monitoring – Project includes a plan for monitoring progress during and after the proposed project period to track project success and adaptively address new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Past Success – Applicant has a proven track record of success in implementing conservation practices with specific, measurable results.

Partnership – An appropriate partnership exists to implement the project and the project is supported by a strong local partnership that will sustain it after the life of the grant. Identify proposed partners, if known (including potential or contemplated subawards to third party subrecipients of the applicant), the roles they will play in implementing the project, and how this project will build new or enhance existing partnerships. (Note: a project partner is any local community, non-profit organization, tribe, and/or local, state, and federal government agency that contributes to the project in a substantial way and is closely involved in the completion of the project). Additional partners include fishing industry participants and other private sector stakeholders.

OTHER

Applicant Demographic Information – In an effort to better understand diversity in our grantmaking, NFWF is collecting basic demographic information on applicants and their organizations via a voluntary survey form (available in Easygrants). This information will not be shared externally or with reviewers and will not be considered when making grant decisions. For more details, please see the tip sheet and the Uploads section of Easygrants.

Budget – Costs are allowable, reasonable and budgeted in accordance with NFWF's [Budget Instructions](#) cost categories. Federally-funded projects must be in compliance with [OMB Uniform Guidance](#) as applicable. This funding opportunity will award grants of federal financial assistance funds; applicants must be able to comply with the OMB Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200). While for-profit entities are eligible applicants, charges to a potential award may include actual costs only; recipients may not apply loaded rates or realize profit from an award of federal financial assistance funds.



Environmental Services – NFWF funds projects in pursuit of its mission to sustain, restore and enhance the nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats for current and future generations. NFWF recognizes that some benefits from projects may be of value with regards to credits on an environmental services market (such as a carbon credit market). NFWF does not participate in, facilitate, or manage an environmental services market nor does NFWF assert any claim on such credits.

Intellectual Property – Intellectual property created using NFWF awards may be copyrighted or otherwise legally protected by award recipients. NFWF may reserve the right to use, publish, and copy materials created under awards, including posting such material on NFWF's website and featuring it in publications. NFWF may use project metrics and spatial data from awards to estimate societal benefits that result and to report these results to funding partners. These may include but are not limited to: habitat and species response, species connectivity, water quality, water quantity, risk of detrimental events (e.g., wildfire, floods), carbon accounting (e.g., sequestration, avoided emissions), environmental justice, and diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Matching Contributions – Matching Contributions consist of cash, contributed goods and services, volunteer hours, and/or property raised and spent for the Project during the Period of Performance. Larger match ratios and matching fund contributions from a diversity of partners are encouraged and will be more competitive during application review.

Procurement – If the applicant chooses to specifically identify proposed Contractor(s) for Services, an award by NFWF to the applicant does not constitute NFWF's express written authorization for the applicant to procure such specific services noncompetitively. When procuring goods and services, NFWF recipients must follow documented procurement procedures which reflect applicable laws and regulations.

Publicity and Acknowledgement of Support – Award recipients will be required to grant NFWF the right and authority to publicize the project and NFWF's financial support for the grant in press releases, publications and other public communications. Recipients may also be asked by NFWF to provide high-resolution (minimum 300 dpi) photographs depicting the project.

Receiving Award Funds – Award payments are primarily reimbursable. Projects may request funds for reimbursement at any time after completing a signed agreement with NFWF. A request of an advance of funds must be due to an imminent need of expenditure and must detail how the funds will be used and provide justification and a timeline for expected disbursement of these funds.

Compliance Requirements – Projects selected may be subject to requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act (state and federal), and National Historic Preservation Act. Documentation of compliance with these regulations must be approved prior to initiating activities that disturb or alter habitat or other features of the project site(s). Applicants should budget time and resources to obtain the needed approvals. As may be applicable, successful applicants may be required to comply with additional Federal, state or local requirements and obtain all necessary permits and clearances.



Permits – Successful applicants will be required to provide sufficient documentation that the project expects to receive or has received all necessary permits and clearances to comply with any Federal, state or local requirements.

Federal Funding – The availability of federal funds estimated in this solicitation is contingent upon the federal appropriations process. Funding decisions will be made based on level of funding and timing of when it is received by NFWF.

TIMELINE

Dates of activities are subject to change. Please check the [program page of the NFWF website](#) for the most current dates and information.

To best meet the needs of applicants and rapidly support the development of innovative fishing gear, this RFP will allow early submissions before the pre-proposal deadline. **If you are interested in the early submission track, please contact Program Staff (Gray Redding – gray.redding@nfwf.org) immediately for key information including early submission deadlines for both pre and full proposals. No preference is given to proposals submitted through the early or standard processes, as all proposals are evaluated using the same criteria and awarded on a competitive basis. Early submissions are meant for project concepts that are ready to implement and applicants seeking early submissions should be prepared to discuss why their work would benefit from receiving earlier funding within calendar year 2023. NFWF plans to distribute the majority of award funds through proposals received under the standard submission track.** To allow for efficient processing of pre-proposals, there will be rolling submission and review, meaning pre-proposals will be reviewed as they are received. Successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals. For pre and full proposals going through the early process, NFWF anticipates announcing successful early awards in August, 2023. NFWF reserves the right to shift early submitted proposals to the standard timeline. For full proposals submitted through the standard process, with full proposals due July 13, 2023, NFWF expects to announce successful awards in November, 2023.

Pre-Proposal Applicant Webinar [Register Here]	May 2, 2023, 3:00 PM, Eastern Time
Pre-Proposal Due Date	Rolling acceptance, Thursday, May 22, by 11:59 PM Eastern Time as final deadline
Full Proposal Due Date	(By Invite Only) July 13, 2023, 11:59 PM, Eastern
Review Period	July to August
Awards Announced	August 2023 (Early); November 2023 (Standard)

HOW TO APPLY

All application materials must be submitted online through National Fish and Wildlife



Foundation's Easygrants system.

1. Go to easygrants.nfwf.org to register in our Easygrants online system. New users to the system will be prompted to register before starting the application (if you already are a registered user, use your existing login). Enter your applicant information. Please disable the pop-up blocker on your internet browser prior to beginning the application process.
2. Once on your homepage, click the "Apply for Funding" button and select this RFP's "Funding Opportunity" from the list of options.
3. Follow the instructions in Easygrants to complete your application. Once an application has been started, it may be saved and returned to at a later time for completion and submission.

APPLICATION ASSISTANCE

A *Tip Sheet* is available for quick reference while you are working through your application. This document can be downloaded [here](#).

Additional information to support the application process can be accessed on the NFWF website's [Applicant Information](#) page.

For more information or questions about this RFP, please contact:

Gray Redding

Gray.Redding@nfwf.org

For issues or assistance with our online Easygrants system, please contact:

Easygrants Helpdesk

Email: Easygrants@nfwf.org

Voicemail: 202-595-2497

Hours: 9:00 am to 5:00 pm ET, Monday-Friday.

Include: your name, proposal ID #, e-mail address, phone number, program you are applying to, and a description of the issue.