

## 2024 LETTER OF INTENT EVALUATION CRITERIA

*(Criteria taken directly from NOAA's 2024 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) document for the CZM Habitat Protection and Restoration BIL funding. See Section V.1. of the 2024 NOFO for additional details.)*

This evaluation criteria are for all three project types: acquisition, restoration, and restoration planning, engineering and design. The Letter of Intent evaluation criteria for this program and the weights for each criterion are below. Each criterion will be assessed holistically, generally taking into account the supporting questions.

*DLCD will use this same LOI Evaluation Criteria to review and choose the top 3 LOI proposals to submit to NOAA.*

### **1. Alignment with Conservation and Restoration Program Goals (20 points). Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- Does the project meet any or several of the following ecosystem priorities:
- Does the project protect or restore (or develop plans toward restoration of) high priority natural ecosystems?
- Does the project protect or restore key ecosystem features and maintain species or habitat diversity?

Project type-specific questions relevant to this question include:

For **habitat restoration** and for **habitat restoration planning, engineering, and design projects**:

- Does the project restore important coastal habitats, ecosystem functions/species, and/or hydrologic connections between habitats?
- Is the project located on publicly-owned land, or land where a public entity holds a lease or easement that provides for adequate public control of the property?
- Does the project include a long-term plan for monitoring?

NOAA anticipates that highly ranked habitat restoration and habitat restoration planning, engineering, and design projects will satisfy most or all of the criteria listed in this section.

For **land conservation** projects:

- Does the target property have significant ecological value?
- Is there a demonstrated need for protecting the target property, in particular, is the property under an imminent threat of conversion that would diminish its natural state?
- Will the acquisition provide for non-Federal public ownership by the grant recipient or sub-recipient for conservation in perpetuity?
- Does the proposal demonstrate that the property can be effectively managed and protected in perpetuity?
- Does the acquisition provide for passive public access or other public benefit on some portion of the property (as appropriate and consistent with resource protection), or clearly describe why passive public access would be detrimental to the conservation goals of the property?
- Does protecting this property serve to mitigate the adverse impacts caused by coastal population growth in the coastal environment?

- NOAA anticipates that highly ranked land conservation projects will satisfy most or all of the criteria listed in this section.

**2. State, Regional, Tribal, and Community Priorities (20 points). Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- Is the target property identified in a State, tribal or regional conservation plan or watershed protection plan?
- Is the project site located geographically contiguous to other protected areas and/or high priority habitat?
- Will the project provide additional co-benefits to communities such as contributions to ecosystem and community resilience, increased business opportunities, public community revitalization, recreational opportunities, reduced safety hazards, and/or reduced maintenance costs?

NOAA anticipates that highly ranked projects will be identified in State, regional, tribal or watershed plans, as well as meet some or all of the other priorities described in this section above.

**3. Climate (10 points): Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- To what extent does the proposed project factor in enhanced climate resilience?
- Does the project or will the planning/design effort lead to a project that will:
  - protect pathways for habitat and species migrations in response to sea level rise or changing lake levels;
  - reduce existing stressors that hinder the ability of species or ecosystems to withstand climatic events;
  - protect key ecosystem features, (e.g. keystone species or habitats, or natural infrastructure) from climate change impacts; and/or iv. enhance community resilience to climate hazards?

**4. Equity and Inclusion (10 points). Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- Does the project involve outreach to and engagement with underserved communities, tribal governments or organizations, or Indigenous communities as a target audience or partner in the project?
- Does the project address heightened vulnerabilities and disproportionate impacts on these partners and communities?

**5. Project Readiness and Technical Merit (25 points). NOAA anticipates that highly ranked proposals will satisfy most or all of the following criteria, as applicable for type of project:**

- Is the approach appropriate for the stated goals and objectives?
- Does the project propose a habitat restoration and land conservation project that is 'shovel ready' or reasonably advanced in the acquisition due diligence process or propose a habitat restoration planning, engineering, and design project that has identified or will lead to a shovel ready project?
- Has the applicant proposed a realistic time-frame, and is it likely that the scope of the proposed project will be completed within the award period (completed within three years)?
- Does the applicant show the capability and experience in successfully completing similar projects?
- Are the investigators qualified and is the organizational framework appropriate to conduct a project of the nature and scope proposed?

**6. Project Costs (10 points). Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- Does the estimated cost of the project appear realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame? (8 points out of the 10 total for project costs)

- Does the applicant complement NOAA’s investment with other funding sources, including formal, non-Federal matching contributions and/or non-Federal and Federal leveraged funds? (2 points out of the 10 total for project costs). Points allocated for this factor will be as follows:
  - Budget does not include any formal, non-Federal matching contributions or informal, leveraged funds. (0 points).
  - Budget includes formal, non-Federal matching contributions and/or informal, leveraged funds, with a combined total that is less than a 1:1 ratio of matching or leveraged funds to NOAA funds. (1 point).
  - Budget includes formal, non-Federal matching contributions and/or informal, leveraged funds, with a combined total that meets or exceeds a 1:1 ratio of matching or leveraged funds to NOAA funds. (2 points).

**7. Partnership (5 points). Questions relevant to this criterion include:**

- Does the project demonstrate engagement with all relevant partners needed to effectively develop or leverage the project and networks?
- Does the project demonstrate community level support and engagement?

Letters of Intent (LOI) will undergo a technical review, ranking, and selection process to determine eligibility to submit a full application. The LOI Evaluation Criteria will be scored as follows:

- 0 – Poor: LOI does not address Evaluation Criterion;
- 1 – Fair: LOI marginally addresses Evaluation Criterion;
- 2 – Good: LOI adequately addresses Evaluation Criterion; or
- 3 – Excellent: LOI exceptionally addresses Evaluation Criterion.

The Letter of Intent’s average score is then calculated using the weights and ratings for each criterion, as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
 &(\text{Rating for "Alignment with Conservation and Restoration Program Goals"} \times 0.20) + (\text{Rating for "State, Regional, Tribal and Community Priorities"} \times 0.20) + \\
 &(\text{Rating for "Climate"} \times 0.10) + \\
 &(\text{Rating for "Equity and Inclusion"} \times 0.10) + \\
 &(\text{Rating for "Project readiness and technical merit"} \times 0.25) + \\
 &(\text{Rating for "Project Costs"} \times 0.10) + \\
 &(\text{Rating for "Partnership"} \times 0.05) \\
 &\text{Sum of all review scores} / \text{\# of reviewers} = \text{Total Score (Range: 0.00 - 3.00)}
 \end{aligned}$$