

# Coastal Zone Management Act

## Section 309 Projects of Special Merit (PSM) Competition

### Frequently Asked Questions

The list of frequently asked questions below represents broadly applicable questions related to the Projects of Special Merit (PSM) Competition, and will be updated regularly as questions are received.

*Last updated: 9/3/2021*

**Q. Is a draft 2021-2025 Assessment and Strategy sufficient to be eligible for the competition?**

**A.** No. Programs need to have an **approved 2021-2025 Assessment and Strategy** in place by the time the competition closes to be eligible. All PSM projects must further the objectives of an approved enhancement area strategy.

**Q. If one of our strategies does not have the box checked for the priority enhancement area that is eligible under this competition (e.g., Public Access, Coastal Hazards, or Ocean and Great Lakes Resources), but the work we're proposing relates to one of these priority enhancement areas, can we still apply?**

**A.** No. Your strategy must have identified the enhancement areas that are most relevant to that specific strategy, and if that did not include one of the priority enhancement areas eligible for the PSM competition, then you are not eligible to submit a PSM for that strategy.

**Q. If we ranked an enhancement area as "Medium" in our 309 Assessment and Strategy document and did not create a strategy for that enhancement area, can we still apply for a PSM?**

**A.** No. You can only apply for PSMs for enhancement areas that have strategies. For the future, you can work with your NOAA Office for Coastal Management liaison to amend your 309 Assessment and Strategy if that enhancement area is now a high priority for your program. You would need to then complete a Phase II Assessment and develop a strategy for that enhancement area.

**Q. Who should letters of support be addressed to?**

**A.** Letters of support can be addressed to the competition manager, but they do not need to be actually mailed separately; they **must be attached** to the application in order to be considered.

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**Q. Can you clarify if each proposal can be up to the maximum ceiling of approximately \$250,000 for a total of \$500,000? Or if the total request for an individual coastal management program should be \$250,000—for example only: two (2) proposals of \$125,000 each?**

**A.** A coastal management program may submit 2 proposals requesting up to \$250,000 per proposal, for a total request of up to \$500,000.

**Q. We're considering developing a project in collaboration with another state. Do you have any advice on this?**

**A.** We can think of a couple of possible mechanisms for setting up a collaborative proposal:

1. One state takes the lead in submitting the project proposal. If funded, the lead state could subaward or subcontract with the partner state as necessary. Alternatively, the lead state could subcontract with another entity—such as a nonprofit or regional planning group—who would lead the project on behalf of both states.

2. Both states could submit individual proposals. However, there is no guarantee that NOAA will fund both proposals, so we would strongly advise the project partners to plan for the possibility that only one project is recommended for funding. Each proposal will have to compete individually on its own merits.

Unlike some of the very early PSM competitions, the fiscal year 2021 PSM competition does not include any mechanism that allows several states to submit individual proposals that are evaluated together as a single regional application. We discontinued this joint-proposal model because we found that it was administratively cumbersome for both the state partners and NOAA staff.

**Q. Can applications be submitted without budget detail?**

**A.** No. The budget narrative is a mandatory section within the application, and we encourage applicants to include a detailed budget narrative in the initial application, including subaward and subcontractual budget information. Merit reviewers look at the budget narrative as well as the project narrative.

We realize that sometimes it is not possible to develop detailed subaward or subcontractual budgets if the recipient has not yet completed their subaward or subcontract selection process. If a project is recommended for funding without sufficient detail in the budget narrative, then the NOAA program officer will work with the recipient to revise the budget narrative to include sufficient detail.

Alternatively, NOAA will place a Special Award Condition on the award that restricts the expenditure of funds until the coastal management program provides the required budget information.

For the PSM competition, please note that the budget narrative should be included within the appendix—the budget narrative does NOT count against the 10-page limit for your project narrative. For more information, please see the *Mandatory Budget Narrative and Justification* section in the Notice of Funding Opportunity.

**Q. How many proposals do you usually receive?**

**A.** The number of applications varies from year to year. We've had years with as few as 9 proposals, and other years with more than 20 proposals submitted. The average is around 14-15 proposals per competition.

**Q. Do projects need to start in October? Is there flexibility with a later start date?**

**A.** Unfortunately, we do not have flexibility to schedule a start date earlier or later than Oct 1.

**Q. Can we send you our draft ideas for feedback?**

**A.** The competition staff can answer proposal eligibility questions. However, because this is a competition, Office for Coastal Management staff can't give you any feedback on the actual project ideas, since we don't want to give anyone an unfair advantage.