Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Open Ocean Research Grant Program
Global Fishing Watch

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Executive Summary

Funding Organization
Global Fishing Watch

Funding Opportunity Title
Open Ocean Research Grant program

Key Dates
Application Opening Date: [May 6, 2025]

Application Deadline: [June 17, 2025 anywhere on Earth]

Anticipated Award Notification Date: [July 31st, 2025]

Proposals must be submitted via this application form by June 17, 2025. See Section IV for detailed instructions on submission.

I.   Funding Opportunity Description

Global Fishing Watch seeks to advance ocean governance by creating and publicly sharing data on human activity at sea. Supported by the Audacious project, the [Open Ocean Project](#) will expand the suite of [Global Fishing Watch datasets](#) to reveal human activity on the ocean as never before.

The Global Fishing Watch network of research partners has been key to co-developing algorithms and datasets, exploring novel uses for them, and proposing data-based interventions to inform ocean protection and fisheries management decisions. The overall aim of the Open Ocean Research grant (OORG) program is to strengthen this network and maximize the impact of Global Fishing Watch datasets.

These grants will be open to researchers, developers, scientists and managers around the globe and directed to groups or individuals that can help advance Global Fishing Watch mission to improve ocean governance using Global Fishing Watch datasets and core technologies. A special priority will be given to research that aligns with [organizational core and enabled impacts](#), but other potential impacts using Global Fishing Watch data will be considered.

A. Open Ocean Research grant program objective

Global Fishing Watch is soliciting competitive proposals that align with institutional priorities and goals around increasing transparency on human activities at sea. Projects should focus on novel uses of Global Fishing Watch data that have the potential to increase transparency at sea, support sustainable fisheries management, and improve international collaboration for ocean governance. Projects that include local partnerships that contribute to the success of the project and build on or expand relationships within research networks will be given special consideration.

B. Global Fishing Watch impact areas

The Open Ocean Research grant program aims to advance Global Fishing Watch strategic priorities and impact. Please articulate the impact area(s) your research will focus on.

   a. Reveal novel aspects of human activity at sea
   b. Combat IUU Fishing: Reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing
   c. Protect Small-Scale Fishers: Safeguard the rights of small-scale fishers
   d. Enhance Marine Protection: Improve management of marine protected areas

e. Increase Transparency: Promote the publication and sharing of data to reveal human activities at sea
f. Support Sustainable Management: Inform better ocean management practices
g. Foster International Cooperation: Promote open data and transparency in ocean governance

C. Global Fishing Watch datasets and platforms

All proposals should use at least one of Global Fishing Watch datasets and clearly articulate how this use fits in the research proposal. The research proposals should also state the methods proposed to analyze the dataset(s).

These datasets are available in the Global Fishing Watch map, data download portal, APIs, and the R and Python packages that communicate with them. Some of the datasets that Global Fishing Watch is creating and are not yet publicly available may also be made available for selected proposals. More about the Global Fishing Watch datasets available for use in the proposals can be found in this resource.

There are different ways to interact with Global Fishing Watch data. Proposals should include one of the following:

a. Use Global Fishing Watch's public datasets in novel ways, including the application of datasets and algorithms to regional contexts to advance the impact areas listed above
b. Compare Global Fishing Watch datasets with other existing data sources that might come from observations or different algorithms than those used by Global Fishing Watch
c. Do research that requires combining Global Fishing Watch datasets with other datasets

D. Priority Geographies
We accept proposals from all around the world. Special consideration will be given to proposals that focus on the following countries, as detailed in Section V.A.4:

Africa	Asia	Latin America	Mediterranean	Pacific Islands
Benin	Indonesia	Brazil	Albania	Palau
Cameroon	Maldives	Chile	Greece	Papua New Guinea
Gabon	Philippines	Colombia	Italy	Republic of the Marshall Islands
Guinea	Sri Lanka	Costa Rica	Montenegro	Vanuatu
Kenya	Thailand	Ecuador	Morocco	

Madagascar	Vietnam	Mexico	Tunisia	
Senegal		Panama	Spain	
		Peru		

Please note that proposals focusing on or originating from countries subject to U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions are not eligible to participate.

Local collaborators and capacity building are key aspects of this grant program. The research proposal should describe the network of collaborators and any capacity-building plans in the area of study. More details are provided under evaluation criteria 3 and 4 found on pages 9-10.

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability
● Individual Category: $10,000 USD maximum for individuals
● Group category: $20,000 USD maximum for labs and organizations (2-5 people)
● Anticipated Number of Awards: 10

In addition to these funds, Global Fishing Watch will create a common fund for specific requests aiming to support the publication and outreach of the work plan outcomes (e.g., conference participation, publication fees). These will be awarded on a case-by-case basis.

B. Project Award Period

The project period is recommended to be at least 12 months and up to 24 months in duration. Unless otherwise directed by Global Fishing Watch, the earliest recommended start date for proposals is August 1st, 2025.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Global Fishing Watch will administer funds as grants supporting projects aligned with the research priorities outlined above.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Individuals ($10k award max): PhD students, early career researchers, researchers and developers affiliated with academic institutions, non-profit organizations, research institutions

and governmental agencies can apply. Individuals without formal affiliations can apply but should provide evidence of their technical expertise in their CVs and research proposals.

Groups ($20k award max): Groups of two to five eligible individuals per the criteria described above can apply. The team should assign a team lead, as a point of contact and person accountable for the project, and this person must be clearly identified in the proposal.

A diverse and wide range of applicants are encouraged to apply. Applicants are encouraged to start the proposal process early, and reach out to Global Fishing Watch with any process or administrative questions.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Content and Form of Application

Application Format:

All application materials should be written in or translated into English and submitted through the application form linked below. Proposals should be written in a common word processing format (word document, excel spreadsheet) or PDF. Content should be written in at least 12-point font.

Please ensure you submit a complete application that includes all documents outlined below. Failure to follow these requirements may result in the rejection of the application.

Each application must include:

- Research project narrative (not to exceed 6 pages, see below)
- Project budget and budget narrative (not to exceed 1 page)
- CV(s) of the individual in the case of individual applications and of the team members in the case of group applications
- Other supporting documentation, including but not limited to examples of related work, related publications (not to exceed 5 pages)

Please submit all materials through the following application form.

B. Proposal narrative content requirements

1. Title Page (Proposal cover sheet, 1 page)

   This page should include the project title, principal investigator (project manager), other team members (if applicable) with contact information, identification of impact area(s)

and how project will interact with Global Fishing Watch datasets, (I.B and C, pg. 3-4), and total cost of the project.

2. Project Summary (1 page)

This section will serve as a one-page, high-level project summary written for a general public audience, as it may be posted on the Global Fishing Watch website if the project is funded. The summary should briefly describe which types of Global Fishing Watch data are the focus, what the project proposes to do (goal and objectives), the overall timeline of the project, main activities, methodologies, and geographic area of focus, and the expected outcomes and policy implications/impact of the project.

3. Detailed Project Description (no more than 4 pages)

This section is a detailed description of the project. The project description should be a clear statement of all work to be undertaken and include the following:

   a. Project goals and objectives and how they relate to identified datasets, proposed research and Global Fishing Watch impact areas
   b. Project activities and plans
   c. Timeline including any milestones and key project outcomes
   d. Expected results of the project and impact/benefit to others
   e. Measures for evaluating the impact and overall success of the project
   f. Project management, including how the project will be organized and managed, and who will be responsible for carrying out the activities
   g. Any anticipated risks or challenges and a proposed mitigation plan

C. Budget and budget narrative

The proposal package must include a detailed budget in a spreadsheet format with an accompanying budget narrative in word or pdf format (1 page) explaining and justifying the proposed expenditures by object class categories. In the budget narrative, please:

   a. Include detailed descriptions and justifications of all costs.

   b. Note if you have other sources of funding to support this work plan. Proposed costs must be reasonable, allowable, and necessary to the supported activity.

   c. *Stipend(s) for project personnel:* Provide the name, title and role of key project personnel; provide the total stipend proposed and justification for the stipend. **This funding opportunity does not allow the grant recipient to make subawards or subcontracts.**

   d. *Supplies*: Show the unit cost of each item in USD, number needed, and total amount. Provide justification of the supply items and relate them to specific project objectives/activities.

Global Fishing Watch will reserve some funds to cover occasional expenses such as publication fees, conference participation, and travel directly related to the research project. These can be listed as expected outputs/outcomes for the project but do not need to be included in the budget. These expenses will be analyzed separately on a case-by-case basis during the course of the program.

D. Allowable and Unallowable Costs

Allowable	Unallowable
Personnel costs in the form of stipends	Personnel salary
Supplies or equipment directly involved in proposed activities	Supplies or equipment over 10k USD in value
	Indirect costs, i.e. expenses that benefit multiple projects or programs and are not directly tied to a specific project, such as administrative overhead or facility maintenance
	Contracts and sub-contracts

V. Application Review Information

Reviewers will assign scores to applications based on the five evaluation criteria outlined below. The maximum score for each criterion is indicated under total points available. Each criterion also includes the factors that reviewers will consider when determining how well an application meets the overall program goals and objectives. Applicants are encouraged to make explicit connections to the evaluation criteria and factors in their applications.

English will be used as a common language for communication, but proposals will not be qualified based on perceived English fluency. Please do not refrain from applying if you are unsure about your English skills.

A. Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Total points possible
Technical / scientific merit	**5**
- Goals of the proposal are clearly stated - Technically sound: the methods are thoroughly described and respond to the objectives of the proposal - Proposal states which Global Fishing Watch datasets will be utilized and how these are aligned with the goals of the proposal	
Relevance and applicability of proposed projects to GFW Impact Areas	**5**
-Clear articulation of how research connects with Global Fishing Watch strategic priorities and impact areas -Potential for direct use for policy and fisheries, conservation and management decisions	
Capacity building in local or regional contexts	**5**
-Potential for capacity building, especially in local or regional contexts -Proposal describes the role of partners or collaborators from the civil society, government and/or academia in the focused geography to achieve the goals of the proposal	
Furthering GFW research network in priority geographies	**2**
-Project focused on Tier 1 priority geographies (see list) (2 points) -Project focused on Tier 2 priority geographies (see list) (1 point) -Project in other geography (0 points)	
Qualifications of applicant and project costs	**5**
-Applicant clearly demonstrates the capacity and knowledge to conduct the proposed research -The proposed budget is cost-effective and in line with allowable costs -Proposed budget is realistic based on stated objectives and project timeline	

1. Technical and scientific merit (5 points)

Global Fishing Watch seeks to fund research that can improve the Global Fishing Watch platform or data products, including research by developers, academics and people working with artificial intelligence in applying fishing algorithms and other uses of the data. Proposals should clearly explain the methodology proposed for the execution of the project, describe the innovation of it (either in the application or the methods), and how the research will interact with the Global Fishing Watch platform or data products. *See examples of projects in the annex to the NOFO entitled* Global Fishing Watch Datasets and Project Examples.

2. **Relevance and applicability of proposed projects to Global Fishing Watch (5 point)**

Proposal clearly articulates how the proposed project links to Global Fishing Watch impact areas (I.B, pg. 3), including the associated impacts the research will have on conservation and management of fisheries, ocean governance and ocean protection. Proposal clearly explains how the project enables others to progress the shared goals of increasing transparency on human activities at sea and supporting responsible, transparent ocean management.

3. **Capacity building in local or regional contexts (5 points)**

Global Fishing Watch is interested in expanding the impact of the work beyond an academic scope to also include managers in government ministries / departments, other civil servants of government, and other key groups who do research, provide data, or contribute to decision making related to oceans and fisheries. Working alongside local researchers, civil society and governments is critical for project success and applied impact. Global Fishing Watch seeks these sorts of partnerships and collaborations and will look favorably on projects that incorporate strong and meaningful partnerships.

4. **Furthering Global Fishing Watch research network and partnerships (2 points)**

The research network is a critical component of Global Fishing Watch mission and work. Global Fishing Watch seeks to grow the global and regional networks of trusted partners by supporting projects that focus on the priority geographies below. These partnerships and collaborations are key to advance policy and practice and build momentum around the use of open data in general. An important aim of this funding opportunity is to expand Global Fishing Watch global partnerships and reach overall.

The following point allocation will be assigned for projects focused in the following countries:

First tier of priority countries (2 points): Albania, Benin, Brazil, Cameroon, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Gabon, Greece, Guinea, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Palau, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Senegal, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Vanuatu, Vietnam

Second tier of priority countries (1 point): Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belize, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Dem. Rep., Congo, Rep., Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Arab Rep., El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Fiji, The Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Honduras, India, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao PDR, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Paraguay, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sudan, Suriname, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, West Bank and Gaza, Zambia, Zimbabwe

5. **Qualifications of applicant and project costs (5 points)**

The applicant(s) should provide CVs, and proposed project personnel should clearly demonstrate the ability to oversee and execute projects. Proposals should clearly define all project costs and include sufficient detail and justification of needs. When collaborations with partners are key to overall project success, supporting documentation or examples of the partnership should be provided, i.e. letters of support and letters of commitment, or documentation showcasing past partnerships (academic publications).

B. Review and Selection Process

Global Fishing Watch will utilize a competitive, multi-tiered review process involving the following:

1. **Initial Screening:** Global Fishing Watch grant managers will ensure proposals are received by the deadline and in alignment with all rules and procedures outlined in this notice of funding opportunity.

2. **Individual Technical Merit Reviews**: A mixed internal-external group of technical experts will be engaged in the review process to help eliminate institutional biases and promote objectivity. This will involve identifying and selecting technical experts from outside of Global Fishing Watch to participate as technical merit reviewers as well as Global Fishing Watch staff with expertise in relevant subject areas to participate. This will result in quantitative scores for all proposals and qualitative, written feedback to inform the panel process.

3. **Virtual, Live Technical Review Panel:** Comprising experts who have reviewed all proposals, individual reviewer scores, and comments prior to the panel. The overall result will be proposals ranked in order of recommendation, with final approval and decision-making authority resting with Global Fishing Watch.

4. **Selection:** After applications have undergone the panel review, Global Fishing Watch will make the final decision regarding which applications will be funded based on the evaluations of the applications and resulting numerical rankings of proposals. Applicants will be notified by email within 60 days of the closing date of this notice of funding whether or not they are selected.

5. **Post-Selection**: Successful applicants will form a cohort of participants in the grant program that will be implemented as an interactive, collaborative partnership with Global Fishing Watch. Grant recipients will be directly supported and engaged by Global Fishing Watch at semi-regular intervals throughout project implementation. This is meant to facilitate collaboration and networking with Global Fishing Watch staff and other grantees in the program.

VI. Contact Information

For more information or questions regarding this funding opportunity, please contact Kara Miller, the Program Manager for this funding opportunity:

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