

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration****Notice of Intent To Conduct Scoping in Preparation of the National Coral Reef Resilience Strategy for the Coral Reef Conservation Program**

AGENCY: National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent; announcement of public scoping period; request for written comments.

SUMMARY: NOAA announces its intention to prepare a National Coral Reef Resilience Strategy (National Strategy) in accordance with the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000 (CRCA), as reauthorized and amended by the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. NOAA administers the Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), which is implemented in the coastal areas and marine waters of Florida, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Gulf of Mexico, Hawaii, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, the U.S. Pacific Remote Island Area, and targeted international regions including the wider Caribbean, the Coral Triangle, the South Pacific, and Micronesia. Publication of this document begins the official scoping period to help identify content for specific elements of the National Strategy. The intended effect of this notice is to provide the public with background on the scoping, seek specific input, and provide a general opportunity for comment the agency can consider while developing the National Strategy.

DATES: NOAA will consider all relevant written comments received by May 8, 2023.

ADDRESSES: Comments may be submitted by either of the following methods:

- **Federal eRulemaking Portal:** Go to <http://www.regulations.gov/NOAA-NOS-2023-0043>. Click the “Comment Now!” icon, complete the required fields, and enter or attach your comments.

- **Email:** Dr. Harriet L. Nash, Deputy Director, Coral Reef Conservation Program, harriet.nash@noaa.gov. Include “2023 Strategy Scoping” in the subject line of the message.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Dr. Harriet L. Nash of NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program, by email at

harriet.nash@noaa.gov or phone at 240–410–3535.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**Background**

NOAA announces its intention to prepare a National Strategy in accordance with the Coral Reef Conservation Act of 2000, as reauthorized and amended by the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (Pub. L. 117–263, December 23, 2022, 136 Stat 2395; reauthorized CRCA). NOAA is preparing the National Strategy to support coral reef conservation and restoration activities throughout the United States, South Atlantic Ocean, Gulf of Mexico, and Pacific Island Regions, and priority international areas (*i.e.*, wider Caribbean, Coral Triangle, South Pacific, and Micronesia). After final publication, the National Strategy will replace CRCP’s current Strategic Plan (2018). The National Strategy will contain several elements, many of which exist in the current Strategic Plan (https://repository.library.noaa.gov/view/noaa/19419/noaa_19419_DS1.pdf), that will be developed in consultation with the Secretary of the Interior, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, covered States, and covered Native entities, as well as the Secretary of Defense; by engagement with stakeholders; and through public review and comment.

Pursuant to Section 204(b) of the reauthorized CRCA, the required elements of the National Strategy are:

- A discussion addressing:
 - continuing and emerging threats to the resilience of U.S. coral reef ecosystems;
 - remaining gaps in coral reef ecosystem research, monitoring, and assessment;
 - the status of management cooperation and integration among Federal reef managers and covered reef managers;
 - the status of efforts to manage and disseminate critical information, and enhance interjurisdictional data sharing, related to research, reports, data sets, and maps;
 - areas of special focus, which may include:
 - improving natural coral recruitment;
 - preventing avoidable losses of corals and their habitat;
 - enhancing the resilience of coral populations;
 - supporting a resilience-based management approach;
 - developing, coordinating, and implementing watershed management plans;

- building and sustaining watershed management capacity at the local level;
- providing data essential for coral reef fisheries management;
- building capacity for coral reef fisheries management;
- increasing understanding of coral reef ecosystem services;
- educating the public on the importance of coral reefs, threats, and solutions; and
- evaluating intervention efficiency;
 - the status of conservation efforts, including the use of marine protected areas to serve as replenishment zones developed consistent with local practices and traditions and in cooperation with, and with respect for the scientific, technical, and management and expertise and responsibilities of, covered reef managers;
 - science-based adaptive management and restoration efforts; and
 - management of coral reef emergencies and disasters.
- A statement of national goals and objectives designed to guide:
 - future Federal coral reef management and restoration activities authorized under Section 203 of the reauthorized CRCA;
 - conservation and restoration priorities for grants awarded under Section 211 of the reauthorized CRCA; and
 - research priorities for the reef research coordination institutes designated under Section 213(b)(1)(B).
- A designation of priority areas for conservation, and priority areas for restoration, to support the review and approval of grants under Section 211(e) of the reauthorized CRCA.
- Technical assistance in the form of general templates for use by covered reef managers and Federal reef managers to guide the development of coral reef action plans under Section 205 of the reauthorized CRCA, including guidance on the best science-based practices to respond to coral reef emergencies that can be included in coral reef action plans.

Public Comment

NOAA begins this National Strategy development process by soliciting input from the public and interested parties, including underrepresented groups, regarding information to be included in any of the elements stated above and any other pertinent information. Specifically, this scoping process is intended to accomplish the following objectives:

1. Invite affected Federal, State, and local agencies, and interested persons to participate in the scoping process for development of the National Strategy.

2. Initiate consultations with the Secretary of the Interior, the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, covered states, covered Native entities, and the Secretary of Defense, as appropriate, pursuant to the reauthorized CRCA.

3. Engage stakeholders, including covered states, coral reef stewardship partnerships, reef research coordination institutes, coral reef research centers, and recipients of grants awarded pursuant to Section 211 of the reauthorized CRCA.

4. Identify information that may be helpful in developing the elements listed above and in Section 204 of the reauthorized CRCA.

The official scoping period is from April 6, 2023 to May 8, 2023. Please visit the CRCP web page for additional information regarding the program: <https://coralreef.noaa.gov/>.

The preparation of the National Strategy for the CRCP will be conducted under the authority and in accordance with the requirements of the reauthorized CRCA.

Authority: Public Law 117–263, 136 Stat 2395.

Nicole R. LeBoeuf,

Assistant Administrator for Ocean Services and Coastal Zone Management, National Ocean Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Digital Equity RFC Listening Sessions

AGENCY: National Telecommunications and Information Administration, Department of Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of open meetings.

SUMMARY: The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) will convene four virtual listening sessions on the Digital Equity Act Request for Comment. The listening sessions are designed to collect stakeholder input to help inform the development and administration of the State Digital Equity Capacity and State Digital Equity Competitive grant programs.

DATES: The listening sessions will be held on April 10, 17, 24, and 29, 2023, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time.

ADDRESSES: The session will be held virtually, with online slide share and dial-in information to be posted at <https://www.internetforall.gov/calendar>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Please direct questions regarding this Notice to digitalequity@ntia.gov, indicating “DE RFC Listening Session” in the subject line, or if by mail, addressed to National Telecommunications and Information Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce, 1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20230; telephone: 202–482–3806. Please direct media inquiries to Virginia Bring, (202) 594–6254, or NTIA’s Office of Public Affairs, press@ntia.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background and Authority:

Recognizing the internet’s fundamental role in today’s society and its centrality to our nation’s continued health and prosperity, the Biden-Harris Administration will work to ensure that every community in America has access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service. On November 15, 2021, President Biden signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021¹ into law, also known (and referred to subsequently herein) as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which includes a historic investment of \$65 billion to help close the digital divide and ensure that everyone in America has access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service. The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), is responsible for distributing more than \$48 billion in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding through several different programs, including the \$2.75 billion Digital Equity Act of 2021 Program.

The COVID–19 pandemic highlighted what many have known for a very long time: High-speed internet access is not a luxury, but a basic necessity for all Americans. Since the pandemic, telehealth access and use has expanded and the workplace is changing as more workers are choosing to work from home. Passed on a bipartisan basis in both chambers of Congress, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law allocated \$42.45 billion to create the Broadband, Equity, Access and Deployment Program (BEAD), \$1 billion to create the Enabling Middle Mile Broadband Infrastructure Program, \$2 billion to help tribal communities expand high-speed internet access and adoption on tribal lands, and \$2.75 billion (through the Digital Equity Act of 2021 (Digital Equity Act), also passed as part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) to advance federal goals relating to digital

equity² and digital inclusion.³ These programs administered by NTIA are designed to work in tandem with other high-speed internet programs, including the Affordable Connectivity Program, which provides up to \$30 per month toward internet service for qualifying households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. With the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Congress took a significant step forward in achieving the Biden-Harris Administration’s goal of ensuring that all Americans not only have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed internet service but also the skills and resources needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States.

To help inform development and administration of the Digital Equity Act grant programs, NTIA has established multiple avenues for the public to offer input, including through a Request for Comment, published March 2nd, 2023, as well as these four public virtual listening sessions. This Notice is part of NTIA’s strategy to engage with partners, stakeholders, and most importantly, individuals with lived experiences who faced challenges of having access to and/or the skills and devices to fully utilize affordable, reliable, high-speed internet, to help meet the President’s goal to close the digital divide and transform the lives of all Americans. This is America’s opportunity to harness the talents and strengths of all parts of our country and remove systemic barriers and provide equal access to opportunities and benefits, so that everyone has a chance to reach their full potential. But in order to achieve this objective, we need to hear from you. This Notice provides an opportunity to provide direct responses to NTIA’s Request for Comment via public listening sessions, and to inform how NTIA designs a program that works to achieve this national and community driven opportunity for change.

² Section 60302(10) of the IIJA defines “digital equity” as “the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States.”

³ Section 60302(11) of the IIJA Law defines “digital inclusion” as “(A) . . . the activities that are necessary to ensure that all individuals in the United States have access to, and the use of, affordable information and communication technologies, such as—(i) reliable fixed and wireless broadband internet service; (ii) internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; and (iii) applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation, and collaboration; and (B) includes—(i) obtaining access to digital literacy training; (ii) the provision of quality technical support; and (iii) obtaining basic awareness of measures to ensure online privacy and cybersecurity.”

¹ Public Law 117–58, 135 Stat. 429 (November 15, 2021).