

Frequently Asked Questions by Potential Signatories to the GCOOS MOA

Version 3: June 2014

1. What type of organization is the GCOOS-RA (federal, academic, non-profit...)?

- a. The GCOOS-RA (Gulf of Mexico Coastal Ocean Observing System Regional Association) began in 2005 as a non-incorporated association of Parties. In March 2012, it became a Texas Corporation. The GCOOS-RA received federal 501(c)(3) status Internal Revenue Service, retroactive to 24 February 2012. The activities of the observing system GCOOS itself, which are directed by the Board of Directors of the GCOOS-RA, are federally funded with the office located at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX.
- b. The Corporation is one of eleven regional associations that are building regional coastal ocean observing systems along the coasts of the United States and its territories, as part of the United States Integrated Ocean Observing System (IOOS®), as such system is defined and authorized by The Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System Act of 2009 (the “Act”). The system being built by the Corporation will provide data, information and products on a non-discriminatory basis to the Gulf of Mexico “stakeholder” community that includes, but is not limited to, the private sector, governmental agencies at all levels, academia and researchers, non-governmental organizations, and the general public.
- c. The Corporation is committed to (1) freely providing integrated, remotely-sensed and *in situ* information about the United States waters and related ecosystems of the Gulf of Mexico for use by managers, mariners, military, industry, researchers, educators and others seeking to understand this coastal environment, manage ocean and littoral resources, and/or develop commercial uses of marine resources, data and information; (2) developing new sensor technologies; (3) stimulating innovation and supporting commerce; and (4) planning and implementing the Gulf of Mexico component of the IOOS®.

2. What is the financial obligation of parties to the GCOOS-RA?

There is no financial obligation to individuals signing the MOA on behalf of an organization or of them. An individual representing an organization has the right to vote for Directors of the Corporation. An individual member does not have the right to vote unless he or she provides an annual contribution to the GCOOS-RA of at least \$2,000 US or an in kind contribution of personnel or equipment of equivalent or greater value.

3. What are the benefits of signing?

Many—emphasis is placed according to the organization being targeted. Benefits might include: broad distribution of member’s data or products, widely-distributed stories on a member’s activities, opportunity to participate in development of an observing system for the Gulf, or recognition as a participant in the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System. The GCOOS-RA has published a [brochure on membership benefits](#), which is available from our website.

4. Does the GCOOS-RA provide funds for instruments?

Currently, the GCOOS-RA does not own any monitoring instruments. However, limited federal funds have been used to support the operation and/or maintenance of instruments owned and operated by GCOOS data providers. In the future it is expected that the RA will have funds for observing system instruments. Funds will be distributed based on pier-reviewed proposals in response to announcements of funding opportunities.

5. What are the legal implications of sharing data with GCOOS?

The GCOOS-RA has a data sharing policy. In essence, we accept no proprietary or classified data. All data we accept will be freely shared via the web-based GCOOS Data and Products Portal. Sources for the data will be acknowledged.

6. Can the GCOOS-RA write letters of support for our program?

Yes. The RA has an [endorsement process](#) for partner organizations that wish to acquire a Letter of Support.

7. Have other organizations like us signed?

That is very likely. See [our Members Page](#) for a complete list of members and their affiliations.

8. Would we have free access to GCOOS data to make our own value-added products?

Yes. All data on the GCOOS Data Portal are freely available. Additionally, the RA works with different stakeholder sectors to identify product needs. It is the vision of the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System and the GCOOS-RA that value-added data providers become an integral part of the enterprise.

9. Can the GCOOS-RA provide training on how to access and use the data?

Yes. The GCOOS Councils, Committees, Task Teams, Board of Directors and Office Staff work to determine what is needed and most beneficial to stakeholders. Specific requests are welcome, and the RA encourages partnering with programs that have specific needs.

10. What is the difference between GCOOS and all of the other programs in the Gulf of Mexico (e.g., GOMA, NGI, GOMURC, SECOORA, GRI, GOM Foundation...)?

The GCOOS-RA is focused on the delivery of aggregated, integrated, and sustained oceanographic and meteorological observations, from the upper limits of tidal effect to the limits of the U.S. EEZ. It is one of 11 Regional Associations that comprise the U.S. IOOS Program. Because of oceanographic processes linking the east and west coasts of Florida, the West Florida Shelf part of GCOOS is shared with our neighboring RA, SECOORA. The two RAs work closely to provide synergies and avoid redundancies.

11. What does GCOOS provide that we can't provide ourselves?

There are many possible answers to this question. Contact us and we can discuss your particular case. See also the [membership benefits brochure](#) or contact Dr. Barbara Kirkpatrick, GCOOS-RA Executive Director, at barb.kirkpatrick@gcoos.org.

12. Who can join the GCOOS-RA?

U.S. institutions or individuals actively engaged in some aspect of coastal ocean observing in the Gulf of Mexico or using data, products or services from observing system elements in the Gulf are eligible to join the GCOOS-RA. Parties may include, but are not limited to, local, state and federal agencies, private industry, non-governmental organizations, port or harbor authorities, water management districts, academic and/or research institutions or individuals from those entities. Executive Director or Board approval is required prior to becoming a member.

13. Do international organizations participate in the RA?

Non-U.S organizations or individuals meeting the same criteria as other Parties may become members of the GCOOS-RA as "Associates." Associates are non-voting signatories but may attend meetings of the Parties and nominate members to the GCOOS Councils and Committees and so participate in activities of the Association (see Section XIII of the MOA).

14. What is the source of funds to the RA?

Currently, all funds directed by the RA are from NOAA awards. Now that the RA has non-profit status, we intend to solicit funds from a variety of governmental, private and foundation sources.

15. How are the funds to the RA used?

At this time our funds are used primarily for maintaining the organizational structure, accessing the needs of potential data or product users (stakeholders), data management and communication, and education and outreach. Data management and communication is a major activity of the RA. This includes assessing data collected by a wide variety of individuals and groups around the Gulf, processing those data into standardized formats, integrating those data into a data and products portal, and maintaining that portal so that data and products are freely and easily accessible to any user. Some limited funds are used to support the operation and/or maintenance of instruments owned and operated by GCOOS data providers.

More questions? Please contact the GCOOS-RA Executive Director, Dr. Barbara Kirkpatrick at barb.kirkpatrick@gcoos.org.