



Standard Operating Procedures

RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana

November 8, 2016





ABOUT THE RESTORE ACT CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR LOUISIANA

The mission of the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana (the Center) is to provide research directly relevant to implementation of Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan by administering a competitive grants program and providing the appropriate coordination and oversight support to ensure that success metrics are tracked and achieved. The Center is a separate program within The Water Institute of the Gulf, which is a not-for-profit, independent research institute dedicated to advancing the understanding of coastal, deltaic, river and water resource systems, both within the Gulf Coast and around the world. For more information about the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana, visit LA-COE.org.

This document was created by the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana with input from the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and the Center's Executive Committee.

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1.0 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish standard, guiding procedures for the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana (the Center).

2.0 Mission

The mission of the Center is to support research directly relevant to implementation of [Louisiana's Coastal Master Plan](#) by administering a competitive grants program and providing the appropriate coordination and oversight support to ensure that success metrics are tracked and achieved. The Coastal Master Plan, which was developed by the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) with input from citizens, legislators, parish representatives, and stakeholder groups using the best available science and engineering focuses state efforts and guides actions needed to sustain Louisiana's coastal ecosystems, safeguard coastal populations, and protect vital economic and cultural resources. The Coastal Master Plan is updated every five years, providing an opportunity for new knowledge and understanding to be incorporated.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Several organizations, committees, and boards are integral to the functioning of the Center. Participants collaboratively work toward the mission of the Center (Figure 1). CPRA is the Center project sponsor and contract manager with ultimate responsibility over the Center. The Center coordinates the Executive Committee (EC), External Review Board (ERB) and TWG (Technical Working Group).

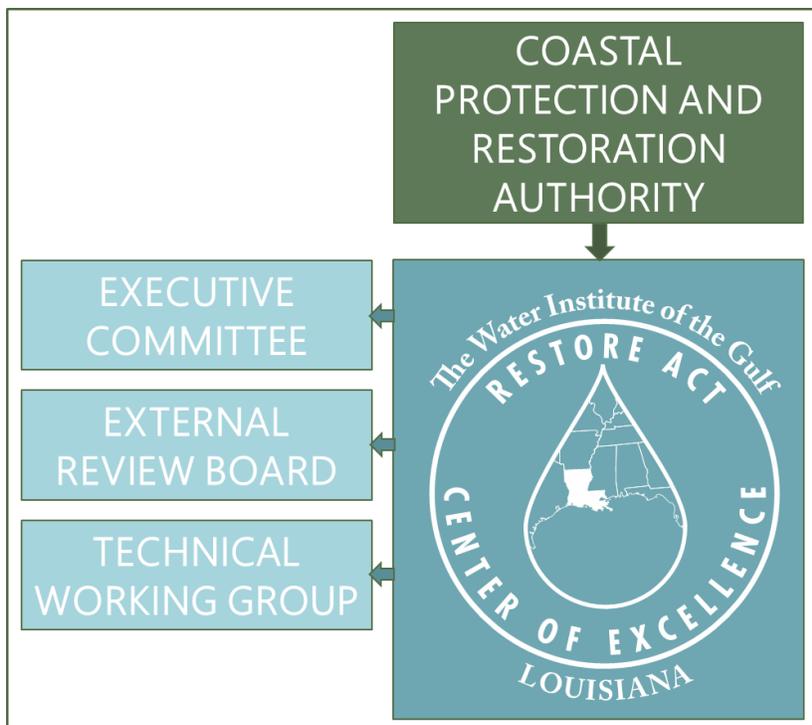


Figure 1. Organizational structure of the RESTORE Act Center of Excellence for Louisiana.

3.1. THE WATER INSTITUTE OF THE GULF

The Center is a separate program within the Institute existing organizational structure. Center staff oversee most activities related to functioning of the Center, including developing and adhering to the Center timeline; coordinating committees, working groups, and meetings to develop the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Research Strategy (RS), and Request for Proposals (RFP); the competitive grants process; grants management; subrecipient monitoring; establishing and ensuring adherence to appropriate data management practices; reporting; developing and accessing success metrics; and adhering to best practices and ethical standards. Center staff are responsible for several key aspects of Center activities and oversight:

Table 1. Center staff roles and responsibilities.

Center Role	Responsibilities
Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides strategic guidance and oversight • Liaison with other Centers of Excellence and RESTORE Council activities
Senior Technical Advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides technical guidance and support • Liaison with External Review Board
Deputy Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages technical aspects of Center operations, including development of the SOPs, RS, RFP, and peer review process • Tracks progress of subrecipient research • Coordinates adherence to Center policies and procedures
Grants Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manages all aspects of contracts and grants administration, including reporting
Program Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides program management support
Financial Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides financial management oversight
Data Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes data management procedures • Oversees management of all scientific and technical data

3.2. THE COASTAL PROTECTION AND RESTORATION AUTHORITY

CPRA is Louisiana’s single state entity with authority to articulate a clear statement of priorities and to focus development and implementation efforts to achieve comprehensive coastal protection for Louisiana. Its mandate is to develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive coastal protection and restoration Coastal Master Plan. CPRA is the Center project sponsor and contract manager with ultimate responsibility over the Center. CPRA works with the Center to develop the SOPs, RS, and RFP, and is involved in aspects of proposal review and selection, depending on the specifics of any RFP issued. CPRA and the Center communicate through in-person meetings, phone calls, and email as frequently as necessary to ensure completion of these tasks. Key personnel are responsible for Center activities and oversight.

Table 2. CPRA staff roles and responsibilities.

CPRA Role	Responsibilities
Program Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides Center program management for CPRA • Provides overall management and oversight of the contract between CPRA and the Center • Oversees reporting to Treasury
Technical Advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical guidance and support, including development of SOPs, RS, RFP, and peer review

3.3. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee is comprised of research officials from Louisiana’s universities and research organizations and is weighted towards those with a strong historic focus on coastal issues. Permanent members of the Executive Committee are:

- Chair- Center Director
- Senior Research Officials (or their representatives) at the following Institutions:
 - Louisiana State University
 - Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium (LUMCON)
 - Nicholls State University
 - Tulane University
 - University of Louisiana at Lafayette
 - University of New Orleans
- Two at-large two-year rotating appointments, beginning with Louisiana Tech University and Xavier University of Louisiana

The primary responsibilities of the Executive Committee are to:

- Work with the Center to develop the SOPs and RS
- Approve guidelines and requirements for the competitive grants program
- Approve processes to ensure research conducted and reports produced are appropriately reviewed and consistent with the RS
- Approve success metrics for the program;
- Work with the Center to establish the ERB by developing the ERB terms of reference, a document outlining the roles and responsibilities of the ERB, reviewing a list of ERB candidates, and recommending ERB members to the Center Director
- Work with the Center to establish the TWG.¹

Executive Committee members are not compensated for their service on the committee.

¹ The TWG is an ad-hoc group established for the purpose of drafting the RS. The TWG is selected by the Center and the Executive Committee and members work with research strategy contributing experts (individuals who support TWG member identification of research needs) to identify research needs. The Executive Committee sets an overall approach for RS activities but the TWG needs to be flexible, and thus no SOPs are established here.

Table 3. Executive Committee terms of reference.

Executive Committee	
Number of members	At least nine
Chair	Center Director
Meeting frequency	As needed, at least annually
Decision-making process	Consensus
Staff support for meetings (e.g., scheduling, summaries, etc.)	Center staff

3.4. THE EXTERNAL REVIEW BOARD

The ERB is a group of independent experts convened to provide technical feedback on Center research activities. Their role is to advise on the quality and importance of research proposals reviewed externally by independent subject matter experts; support the development of a relevant, balanced, and achievable long-term RS to support implementation of Louisiana’s Coastal Master Plan; and to guide the long-term advancement of coastal research under the Center. The ERB members provide independent and objective advice and guidance, yet do not make funding or strategic decisions.

The ERB is comprised of nationally and internationally recognized subject matter experts on topics relevant to Louisiana’s Coastal Master Plan. The ERB is comprised of two types of members:

- Up to six *standing members* with a range of expertise in fields of science and engineering relevant to overall restoration and protection issues in coastal Louisiana. One of the standing members of the ERB is appointed as the Board Chair.
- Up to six *temporary members* who will sit on the ERB during the proposal review process. These additional members are to ensure that the range of expertise on the Board is appropriate for the nature of the proposals under consideration.

Individuals serving on the ERB and current members of their research team (graduate students, Post Docs, etc.) are prohibited from participating in any way in research proposals submitted to the competitive grants process, and thus it is likely that most members will be from outside of Louisiana. The Center solicits nominations for ERB members, including public suggestions on potential members. These nominations are compiled and shared with CPRA for comments and suggestions, and a recommendation for selection is made by the Executive Committee. The final decision on selection of the ERB members is made by the Center Director.

The primary responsibilities of the ERB are to:

- Review proposals and advise on the quality and importance of proposed research pursuits
- Support the development of a relevant, balanced, and achievable long-term RS
- Guide the long-term advancement of coastal research under the Center.

ERB members are compensated for their time and appropriate expenses.

Table 4. External Review Board terms of reference.

External Review Board	
Number of members	Up to 12
Chair	A standing member, selected by the EC
Meeting frequency	As needed
Decision-making process	No decision-making authority. Diverse views will be documented.
Staff support for meetings, e.g., scheduling, summaries, etc.	Center staff

4.0 Development of the Research Strategy

Following a mandate by the U.S. Department of Treasury requiring that Centers of Excellence must focus efforts on a selected set of disciplines, the Center focuses on the following:

- Coastal and deltaic sustainability, restoration and protection, including solutions and technology that enable citizens to live in a safe and sustainable manner in a coastal delta in the Gulf Coast region
- Coastal fisheries and wildlife ecosystem research and monitoring in the Gulf Coast region
- Sustainable and resilient growth, economic, and commercial development in the Gulf Coast region
- Comprehensive observation, monitoring, and mapping of the Gulf of Mexico

The RS is a core component of the Center. It guides the competitive research that the Center supports and is focused on the disciplines listed above as they are pertinent to Louisiana with emphasis on advancing Louisiana’s Coastal Master Plan. The RS is developed using a two-phased approach. During the first phase, occurring in year 1 of Center operations (November 1, 2015 – October 31, 2016), key topical near-term and mid-term research needs are identified. The second phase includes revisiting the document during year 2 of Center operations (November 1, 2016 – October 31, 2017) and key topical long-term research needs are included, resulting in a final RS document.

Research needs outlined in the RS are identified in coordination with CPRA, a TWG comprised of researchers from Louisiana academic institutions, RS contributing experts, and the public. Within the RS, research needs are grouped within topic areas relevant to the Coastal Master Plan. For each topic within the RS, the scientific and technical problems underlying research needs are outlined, research needs are identified, including some that address multiple topical areas, and potential outcomes (e.g., measurable impacts or results) are briefly summarized.

Procedures for revision of the RS may be developed following completion of the first round of research activities by the Center.

5.0 Competitive Grants Process

Center funds for research activities address topical areas and research needs identified in the RS through a competitive grants process. The approach used for the distribution of competitive funds is developed by

the Center in coordination with CPRA. Proposals for research funding are solicited via an RFP posted on the Center's website and by dissemination of the RFP through relevant list-servs. The specific nature of the RFP depends, during any funding cycle, on the amount of funds that are expected to be available. Letters of Intent, subject to review for the relevance and applicability of the proposed research, may be required prior to proposal submission. The competitive grants process incorporates at least three levels of independent review, including evaluation by independent subject matter experts selected by Center staff, subsequent review by the ERB, and a review of relevance and applicability by Center staff and CPRA.

6.0 Subaward Management

6.1. SUBAWARD ADMINISTRATION

Once the Center Director has selected research projects for funding, subject to CPRA's concurrence, the Center will execute final awards. Subawards will be issued using standard terms and conditions referenced in the RFP to allow for a smooth and efficient contracting process. Subaward administration will be conducted according to all applicable federal guidelines, the terms of the Center's Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with CPRA, and the Institute's internal operating procedures.

6.2. POST-AWARD ADMINISTRATION

Once the funds have been awarded to subrecipients, subawards are posted and managed through an integrated system. Expenses and reimbursement claims are processed, funds are disbursed, and financial and programmatic performance are monitored through integrated system functionality. Budget, time, and expense tracking in addition to payment capabilities are at the core of this process, including: forecasting and appropriation of funds, task allocation of time and expenses, requesting payment or reimbursement of funds, preparing paperwork, confirming the mechanism and date to issue payment order and transfer of funds to appropriate accounts, and calculating and accounting for funds.

6.3. REPORTING

Systems integration allows individual grants and overall programs to be analyzed to evaluate compliance with the project timeline in addition to financial and programmatic objectives.

6.4. SECURITY

System security protects the data and manages Center personnel, the reviewers' and subrecipients' authentication, and levels of authorization within the systems.

This integrated approach to project and financial tracking and reporting:

- Ensures funding is managed in accordance with CPRA's Internal Agency Policies
- Provides accurate and timely reporting
- Improves transparency and auditability of program activities
- Streamlines business processes from proposal to award through close out
- Allows for online access for the ERB and other authorized users to review applications and subawards, while restricting access in cases of conflict of interest
- Creates controls to ensure expenses are allowable and within budget based on the guidelines
- Reduces costs of operations by eliminating some manual processes for planning, managing, and reporting award activities

7.0 Subrecipient Monitoring

Monitoring award subrecipients is integral to supporting the mission of the Center and evaluates compliance with project timeline and programmatic objectives throughout the duration of the award. In addition to the risk assessment and monitoring requirements in 2 CFR 200.331, the Center monitors the technical aspects of subrecipient awards through:

- A ‘kickoff webinar’ hosted by the Center describing all subrecipient reporting and monitoring requirements, with mandatory participation by at least one Principal Investigator (PI) from each award, ensuring subrecipient awareness of requirements. The webinar is held within 60 days following execution of the subawards.
- Mandatory quarterly progress reports submitted to the Center on a Center-developed standard form, describing program progress and compliance with project timeline and program objectives, listing presentations and publications, and providing reasons if project timeline and achievements are not as identified in the proposal. Progress reports are due within 30 days of calendar quarters.
- An annual all-hands in-person meeting coordinated by Center staff in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with mandatory participation by at least one PI from each award. The meeting will promote collaborations and inform research progress. A PI from each award will describe their research progress-to-date and upcoming activities.

A technical point of contact will be assigned to each subaward to enable technical evaluation of progress and dialog with the PI as appropriate. Technical points of contact will be Center or Institute technical staff. If progress is not deemed adequate, Center staff will work with the lead PI to establish revised milestones. Failure to meet milestones and respond to Center requirements may result in discontinuation of or reductions in funding, as detailed in subawards.

8.0 Data Management

The Center follows the federal government’s definition of data in 2 CFR 200.315 and supports research that generates knowledge and information products, including but not limited to: data sets, databases, digital models and simulations, graphical illustrations and maps, software code and documents such as scholarly publications and reports. The Center implements data management practices that prepare data and information products for future use and ensures they are widely available for public access.

Therefore, the Center encourages practices that support data discovery and sharing, which allows the reproduction of research results, their verification as well as re-use of those data and results. The Data Manager oversees management of all scientific and technical information products and subrecipient adherence to data management requirements.

8.1. SUBRECIPIENT REQUIREMENTS

Subrecipients are required to make information products generated by program-funded projects, initiatives, and activities publicly discoverable and widely accessible in a timely manner after the final report is delivered (e.g. two years). All information products resulting from funded projects must be associated with detailed, machine-readable metadata and shared in a regional or national digital repository or data center (i.e., National Centers for Environmental Information, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, DataOne Dash) for discovery and long-term preservation. The Center encourages the use of free data repositories by subrecipients, although there might be situations when this

is not possible. Failure or delay to make data accessible may be considered by the Center when making future funding decisions. Metadata and details of the repositories used must be provided by subrecipients to the Center to enable tracking of all Center data and information products.

The State encourages the use of data collected for the purpose of dissemination of information through abstracts, scientific and technical papers, presentations of technical/scientific papers in symposiums, seminars, and/or workshops, publication in journals, newspaper articles and television news, etc. However, to ensure proper quality assurance/quality control (QA/QC) of the information released, the dissemination of data/project information collected via State contracts is subject to the following protocols:

- No data or results of activities funded through this Agreement shall be publicly released, published, or presented by the Center or its lower tier subrecipients by any means mentioned above, prior to submission of the final report to the CPRA Contract Monitor. In the event that the Center or its lower tier subrecipients wish to publish any findings from Agreement-funded tasks prior to submission of the final report, and unless such entity has obtained written permission to publish such findings from the CPRA Project Manager, the entity so desiring will furnish the State with two (2) copies of any materials intended for publication at least 60 days prior to the initial submission of those materials to the publishing group. The State shall then have 30 days from receipt of such materials to review and provide the entity with written comments with respect to the material. The Center and its lower tier subrecipients agree to give due consideration to any written comments made by the State and discuss any such written comments with State personnel prior to publication. If the entity receives no written response from the State within the 30-day period, it may proceed with the publication. The State's written comments shall specifically identify State confidential information that shall not be disclosed, unless subject to one of the exceptions listed in the Center's Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with CPRA.
- After submission of the final report, the data and deliverables are considered "public domain" and the Center, its lower tier subrecipients, and the State are free to use the data and results without restriction except as noted in the "Confidentiality" and "Patents and Copyrights" Articles of the Center's Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with CPRA.
- The State may post the final report and all interim reports on the CPRA website except as noted in the "Confidentiality" and "Patents and Copyrights" Articles of the Center's Cooperative Endeavor Agreement with CPRA.
- Publications by the State, the Center, or its lower tier subrecipients shall give credit to the Parties and to all other funding agencies unless any funding agency or Parties request that its credit acknowledgement be omitted.
- Consistent with developing federal policy on the open access of government-funded research, the Center, and/or its lower tier subrecipients will, to the extent provided for by law and in order to help advance science and improve the management of the Louisiana coastal area, make all reasonable efforts to ensure that any peer-reviewed journal manuscripts are made accessible to the public no later than 12 months after publication.

8.2. DATA MANAGEMENT PLANS

All full proposals submitted to the Center require a data management plan that follows guidelines outlined in the RFP. Requirements for data management plans may include, but are not limited to:

- Details on data and other information products, such as the type of data the proposed project will collect or create; the type of data formats that will be produced; the source and permissions for use of proprietary data; justification for protection if the proposed project involves creation or use of confidential or sensitive information
- Procedures to ensure quality control and data validation
- Details on short-term data management, such as naming responsible persons for managing and maintaining data and information products; hardware, software and infrastructure used to collect, process and store data; data organization plans; data back-up procedures and frequency
- Details on metadata creation, such as a description of metadata and other documents created with the proposed project; the machine readable metadata format used for the proposed data; management and storage of metadata
- Detailed procedures and timeline for release of data and associated metadata
- Details on long-term data management, such as identifying a national data center or digital repository for long-term data storage and archiving; process and timeline for transitioning from short-term to long-term data management; procedures for long-term data management and ensuring long-term data accessibility

9.0 Success Metrics and Assessment

Several metrics reflect both the operational success of the Center and the utility/quality of the research conducted and are categorized as follows: (1) competitive grants process, (2) research progress, (3) research accomplishments, and (4) outcomes. Success of each of these categories is comprehensively assessed with quantitative targets dependent on the current budget and number and size of awards associated with the competitive grants process and reflect the inclusion of academia, industry, non-profits, and agencies.

Periodic reports, at least every three years, are generated and submitted to CPRA to quantitatively track progress towards the targets and determine where both successes and problems have been identified. Amendments or changes to success metrics, assessment criteria, and targets require review and approval by the Executive Committee.

Table 5. Success metrics, assessment criteria, and targets.

Success Metric	Assessment	Target
Competitive Grants Process	Percent of submitted proposals including more than one Louisiana-based institution ²	>50%
	Percent of submitted proposals including collaborations between colleges/universities and industry/non-profits/agencies	>25%
	Percent of proposals that provide training opportunities for graduate/undergraduate students or postdocs at Louisiana-based colleges/universities	>90%
	Percent of topical areas identified in the Research Strategy addressed by the proposals	100%
	Maximum time from initiation of the contract to execution	10 weeks
Research Progress	On-time reporting	100%
	On-time completion of deliverables	100%
	On-time adherence to data management procedures	100%
	Percent of proposals for which no-cost extensions are requested	<20%
Research Accomplishments	Number of publications per funded project within one year of project completion	1–3
	Percent of funded projects that train graduate/undergraduate students or postdocs at Louisiana-based colleges/universities	>90%
Outcomes	Number of Coastal Master Plan projects and programs that directly utilize research findings within one year of project completion	>10

10.0 Reporting

The Center will assess and report on progress using defined metrics and address federal reporting requirements including reports to the Treasury. In addition to financial and performance reports required by 2 C.F.R. Part 200, the Center shall assist CPRA with providing the following:

- Any performance report as required by Section 5.0 Treasury’s RESTORE Act Centers of Excellence Research Grants Program Guidelines and Application to Receive Federal Financial Assistance and any reports as prescribed by Treasury in accordance with 31 C.F.R. § 34.706(b).
- An annual report to the Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) in accordance with 31 C.F.R. § 34.706(a) in a form set by the Council no later than 60 days after the end of the federal fiscal year, and provide a copy to Treasury.

² Louisiana-based institutions are defined as those institutions with their main office based in Louisiana.

- The annual report, at a minimum, shall include the following:
 - Executive summary
 - Information on subrecipients
 - Subaward amounts
 - Discipline or disciplines addressed
 - Research projects undertaken
 - Status of performance
 - Any other reporting information the Council may require

11.0 Best Practices and Ethical Standards

The Center implements best practices and follows the highest ethical standards for financial tracking and reporting. Center management accepts responsibility for the preparation and fair presentation of financial statements including the design, implementation, and maintenance of internal control. The Institute’s Board of Directors meetings are held quarterly during which time detailed financial reports are presented to them and the Board reviews the Institute’s annual Tax Return Form 990 before filing. The Board of Directors adopted—and the Institute has implemented—a code of ethics and conflicts of interest policy given to all employees in the employee handbook that is followed by all Center personnel.

In addition to the conflicts of interest policy implemented by the Institute, the Center complies with the conflicts of interest provisions referenced in the CPRA Internal Agency Policies, as well as any additional agency conflicts of interest policies or procedures that CPRA may implement in the future. Any entity or individual performing work subject to any form of legal agreement with the Institute, including without limitation, lower tier subrecipients, consultants, contractors and subcontractors, must fully disclose any previous or current actual or potential conflicts of interest. In doing so, the entity or individual must establish that no conflict of interest exists regarding any existing or anticipated contractual and/or funding agreements and the receipt of funding from CPRA or The Water Institute. The entity or individual must also agree to make CPRA and the Institute aware of, and obtain prior written approval, before (i) accepting any funds from any party to litigation pending before the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana captioned “In re: Oil Spill by the Oil Rig ‘Deepwater Horizon’ in the Gulf of Mexico on April 20, 2010”, MDL No. 2179 (Oil Spill Litigation)³, (ii) providing any services or conducting any research that is in any way Oil Spill related, or (iii) becoming involved in any other work, research and/or projects that could potentially affect the State of Louisiana’s claim for natural resource damages in the Oil Spill Litigation.

³ The following is a list of the responsible parties to the Oil Spill Litigation to which conflicts may apply: BP Exploration & Production, Inc.; BP Corporation North America, Inc.; BP America, Inc.; BP America Production Company; BP p.l.c.; Anadarko Exploration & Production LP; Anadarko Petroleum Corporation; Transocean Holdings, LLC; Triton Asset Leasing GmbH; Transocean Deepwater, Inc.; Transocean Offshore Deepwater Drilling, Inc.; Transocean Ltd.; and Halliburton Energy Services, Inc.

12.0 Amending the Standard Operating Procedures

Any amendments or changes to the Standard Operating Procedures by the Center will require review by the Executive Committee and CPRA. In the event of any inconsistent or incompatible provisions for subrecipients in these SOPs, the terms and conditions of the subaward takes precedence.





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