

# PROPOSAL FORMAT/RE-GRANTING PROJECTS

## PART I: PROJECT SUMMARY

**1. Project name** (15 words maximum)

Improving the financial stability of the Southern Environmental Association (SEA)

**2. Project location** (Specify as much as possible: Protected Area, Municipality, town, Village, City) Include a map of the area where the project will be developed.

Placencia Village, Stann Creek District, Belize

**3. Beneficiary target group** (Please specify as much as possible: name(s) of organization(s), number of members, age and gender distribution, main economic occupation, etc.)

Direct Beneficiaries

SEA Board and Staff – 8 Board Members and 16 Staff Members all from stakeholder communities

Stakeholder Communities: tour guides, fishers and residents of 8 stakeholder communities around the Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve (GSSCMR) and Laughing Bird Caye National Park (LBCNP). These are broken down below:

	No. living in area	No. to benefit directly	No. of fishers	No. of tour guides	No. of people otherwise engaged in tourism industry
<b>Male</b>	12,334	1,233	313	270	3,879
<b>Female</b>	11,387	1,138	21	109	3,594
<b>Total</b>	23,721	2,372	334	379	7,473

**4. Summary of project** (100 words maximum)

SEA seeks to invest project funds in a financial mechanism identified in the Business Plan to improve the financial stability of the organization. This mechanism is an investment in the development of the Laughing Bird Caye Gift Shop and includes improvement on the visibility of SEA and the implementation of a Resource Mobilization Plan. SEA, the community based co-manager, plays an important role in marine protected areas management and the organization intends to build upon the success of previous projects to increase unrestricted income and less reliance on grants based funding. Continuous, sustained financing for protected areas management is key to conserving the marine ecosystem in Southern Belize.

## 5. Applicant organization/contact information

Name of organization applying

Southern Environmental Association

Summarize your organization`s mission (maximum 75 words)

SEA's mission is to continuously work towards improving stewardship and the environmental integrity of key marine areas in southern Belize through effective, collaborative protected areas management, community involvement, and strategic partnerships for the benefit of all stakeholders.

The Southern Environmental Association co-manages two important marine protected areas in Southern Belize: Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve and the Laughing Bird Caye National Park.

## 6. Duration of project

November 1, 2017 to October 31, 2019

## 7. Project continuity

- a) Is this proposal a continuity of a previous project granted by MAR Fund and/or Oak Foundation? YES
- b) What was the previous amount granted? \$665,208.00 US
- c) Briefly indicate the specific achievements/results obtained to date with the previous support (*Add rows as necessary*)
  1. SEA's Board of Directors completed a restructuring process and as a result, SEA now has an eight member Board of Directors with representation from the Business, Tourism and Fishing Sectors, Community Stakeholders and Marine Expertise.
  2. Following the restructuring and re-staffing, SEA's staff and Board of Directors undertook a session to reprioritize the Strategic Plan to reflect emphasis on financial stability and adaptive management during a joint staff work planning session.
  3. SEA has implemented two financing mechanisms: the Laughing Bird Gift Shop and Accommodations Rental at Little Water Caye, as outlined in the SEA Business Plan. Investments have been made in retrofitting the Gift Shop at Laughing Bird Caye and stocking with items for sale.

4. SEA has streamlined its fleet of vessels aimed at efficiency and cost effectiveness. The larger boats with out-sized engines, which required more fuel and frequent repairs and maintenance, have been replaced with smaller, newer vessels and fuel efficient engines. This allows Rangers to conduct more frequent patrols, have greater presence and for a vessel to remain permanently at LBCNP.
5. Scientific monitoring within LBCNP and GSSCMR has been carried out. Monitoring activities including: commercial species, spawning and aggregation, water quality, coral bleaching turtle, bird and lionfish have continued in 2015 and 2016. Quarterly analysis of all data sets are submitted to the Management Team, the Marine Science Rep on the Board of Directors and the National Networks. This data analysis has assisted with strategic enforcement operations and further investigations to guide the Science programme.
6. Ranger Stations for both protected areas have received well needed upgrades to the infrastructure and basic utilities, including changing of the entire roof and repair of the Compressor Room on Little Water Caye, the building of an additional Ranger Room and repair to the store room on LBCNP. The bathrooms and sewage systems of both stations have been improved.
7. All Rangers are Fisheries Officers and have been trained in enforcement and boat handling skills. Following the training, the 2015/16 commercial species and spawning and aggregation data were been used to strategically plan surveillance and compliance. Joint night patrols with the Fisheries Department have increased and the Coast Guard and SEA will implement a Memorandum of Agreement to have officers posted at Little Water Caye on two week rotations. Kindly see attached Enforcement and Boat Handling Manuals.

## **PART II: PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

### **8. Introduction**

SEA and its predecessors have been involved in the co-management of protected areas in the Southern Barrier Reef Complex (SBRC) for over 9 years. GSSCMR is an important site for the spawning and aggregation of several fish species while LBCNP is one of seven sites that make up the World Heritage Site, the Belize Barrier Reef System. Both sites are important tourism destinations and protect important and unique representations of coral reefs and other associated ecosystems. SEA has continued to provide enforcement of

fisheries laws and regulations for the entire SBRC for 7 years and has collected several parameters of data including: commercial species, spawning and aggregation, water quality, coral bleaching and turtle, continuously used in adaptive management. In addition SEA provides enforcement and data collection within the sensitive Placencia Lagoon while taking the lead in advocating for its protection. Conservation outreach, education and activities continue in and around nine stakeholder communities (Independence, Seine Bight, Placencia, Monkey River, Punta Negra, Hopkins, Sarteneja and Sittee River Villages and Punta Gorda Town) spearheaded by the Association's Education Programme. SEA's work has been successful, having contributed to several prosecutions, maintained an enforcement presence, continued community awareness and education and contribution to better management of the marine protected areas system and the Belize Barrier Reef Complex and World Heritage Site. The work of SEA is noble and necessary for the conservation of marine resources in southern Belize and by extension, the successful management of the entire protected areas system. To continue to realize the successes, it is imperative that the life of the Association continues.

2014 and 2015 proved to be extremely difficult years for the Association. With restricted project specific grants and very little financing to accommodate operating costs, the Association resorted to executing only priority programme activities (enforcement patrols and science data collection), consolidating employment terms of reference and terminating employees to survive. This experience has taught the board and staff that reliance on a single income stream may be detrimental to the Association. Diversification of funding streams and financial stability is absolutely necessary.

SEA has since, proactively restructured the staff and Board of Directors with a view to improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency while seeking ways to lessen reliance on grant sources and increase funding for conservation activities. Currently SEA is implementing a financial sustainability component of an Oak Foundation and PACT grants to complete financial mechanisms within the Business Plan. The OAK Grant is a reported above and the PACT grant covers enhancement of the staff's capacity through customer service, business management and stock management training and refurbishment of the Little Water Caye Ranger Station.

The Oak funded activities are being done following a feasibility assessment and plan conducted through the NEST Consultation Firm. This consultancy took a critical look at the financial mechanisms provided in the Business Plan and in analyzing the favorability of all mechanisms. These mechanisms included: rental of equipment and coordination of formal events eg weddings at Laughing Bird Caye, the sale of data and data collection services. Further analysis of the market, activity, location and related expenses proposes that with the successful implementation will realize a moderate profit. NEST's projections show that the eventual planned expansion of the gift shop will assist with the financial independence of the Association and guaranteeing the continuation of the important conservation work within and around the SBRC.

## **9. Justification**

### *a) Identification of the main threats, needs and/or issues in the area*

The current organizational threats to SEA include:

1. Financial stability
2. Lack of financial planning

3. The increasing cost to manage the protected areas
4. Lack of internal communication between the Board of Directors and Staff.

The current threats to GSSCMR and LBCNP include:

1. Illegal incursions especially in the spawning and aggregation area of the GSSCMR.
2. Illegal fishing within Area 3 by fishers assigned to other managed access areas. Area 3 is perceived to be an area wealthy with marine resources by fishers. SEA has responsibility for management of the majority of Area 3.
3. Managed Access familiarization and outreach and catch data log book collection.
4. Unchecked, unregulated and illegal developments along the Placencia Peninsula and Placencia Lagoon. This includes illegal cutting and removal of several areas of mangrove.

*b) Project relevance for addressing these threats, needs and/or issues*

SEA's work in the two protected areas and Placencia Lagoon are the accumulation of over 10 years in conservation and management. Consistently, data collected by staff and community researchers from the stakeholders has been used to aid in adaptive management decisions at the network and systemic level. Annually cases of fisheries offences by our Rangers have been successfully prosecuted. Resources from SEA including fuel, vessels and personnel have been relied on by the Belize Coast Guard and the Fisheries Department in search and rescue operations within the SBRC and in the reporting and responding to development infractions by the Mining Department and the Department of the Environment. Education and Outreach campaigns have been executed in all stakeholder communities and four students have benefited from scholarships to study natural resource management at the Junior College level.

The annual budget for the Fisheries Department was recently cut due to central government shortfalls, they among other regulatory bodies now rely on the technical skill and financial resources of partners like SEA to ensure the conservation of our precious marine resources. Without SEA to conduct sustained protected areas management and the related programme activities, especially with the current roll out of the Fisheries Managed Access Programme, the marine resources upon which thousands of residents rely on either through tourism or fisheries would be negatively impacted. It is incumbent on SEA to become financially stable to be able to continue our mandated work and continue to address the threats to the protected areas.

This project will build on three successful grants previously invested in SEA. Through a PACT Medium grant entitled "Cultivating the sustainability of two protected areas in southern Belize" SEA was able to build a gift shop on Laughing Bird Caye and conduct an Organizational Business Plan. The Financial Sustainability objective of an OAK project grant OCAY-13-275, allowed for SEA to fully stock the Laughing Bird Gift Shop with unique items and open on January 1, 2017. The PACT Single Investment Grant entitled "Improving the management of Laughing Bird Caye National Park and the financial stability of SEA" will allow SEA to provide Customer Service Training of Trainers to Staff and Business and Stock Management Training to Rangers. This grant also provided for the continual stocking of the gift shop.

A Feasibility Study conducted on the SEA Gift Shop by NESsT, and financed by the OAK Foundation and included a market and industry analysis explained that the Gift Shop location is ideal as Laughing Bird Caye is listed as the number one destination in Placencia on popular online tourist site Travelocity and indeed hosts over 75,000 tourists per year. Additionally there will be no competition as this is the only establishment on the island and tourists were inclined to purchase from a store that promotes and contributes to conservation according to an informal survey of the island's tourists in June 2016.

SEA's staff projection for the first year's profit will be \$12,000.00. Profit from sales in between January and June 2017 amount to \$11,752.50. This project will directly assist with the growth of the SEA Business. With a well-organized and properly managed business to contribute to the Association's conservation work, there will be less dependence on grant funding and less financial gaps in the management of GSSCMR and LBCNP. With the mitigation of both above problems through this project, the conservation management of LBCNP will improve as well as the financial stability of the Association with co management responsibility for the protected area. Greater financial stability will allow for improved protected areas management through the retention of staff, more surveillance and data collection and better contribution to the protected areas system through the timely submission of data and analysis.

## 10. Site characterization

### a) Total area of MPA

SEA currently is actively engaged in the on-site co-management of two key marine protected areas in the Southern Belize Reef Complex; 4,100 hectare Laughing Bird Caye National Park and 10,500 hectare Gladden Spit and Silk Cayes Marine Reserve. These areas are each unique and have important cultural, ecological and economic importance for Southern Belize. LBCNP is one of seven recognized sites within the Belize Barrier Reef World Heritage Site. GSSCMR is famous for its spawning aggregations which attract the world's largest fish, the whale shark (*Rhincodon typus*).

### b) *Brief history of conservation efforts regarding the topic of **this** proposal at this location (5 years):*

Minimal efforts were placed on the sale of gift items from the SEA Office and most fundraising focus was placed on the submission of grants resulting in a 78% reliance on project funding. Diversification of funding sources was necessary in 2014 when SEA projected a financial crisis would be inevitable. 2015 proved to be an incredibly difficult year with minimal funding to finance conservation efforts and protected areas management activities were severely minimized.

The Board took a critical look at the Association and decided to begin transformation from the leadership level and a Board restructuring and re-prioritization of strategic activities was conducted allowing the organization to refocus and develop.

In 2016, after the period of financial crisis, SEA's new Board of Directors focused on the investment of a Gift Shop on Laughing Bird Caye as a finance mechanism cited in the SEA Business Plan. Through a PACT Medium Grant, the building was

constructed and in June 2016, through an OAK Foundation project NESsT conducted an extensive feasibility study on the possibility of a gift shop. The results of the study favorably indicated profits from the business venture. Finally, in December 2016, the items for sale were set up and the staff launched the Gift Shop. Since its implementation, the gift shop has realized more than projected profits allowing the Association to resume conservation activities and hire staff.

The current barriers to conservation efforts include:

1. Sustainable financing for SEA conservation related activities. This has led to the refocusing of the strategic direction of the organization and the investment of time and finances in the development of a small business whose resources are directly reinvested in protected areas management.

2. Commitment of government in protected areas management. SEA has participated in sustainable financing workshops and PACT strategic planning consultations to advocate for direct financing prioritized for protected areas management. SEA has also approached the Forest and Fisheries Department Chief Executive Officer to discuss the implementing of a pilot ticket fee raise at LBCNP and GSSCMR.

c) *Applicant organization history in working at this site*

The Southern Environmental Association (SEA) was formed in 2008 when two existing NGO's responsible for the co-management of important marine protected areas, Friends of Nature and the Toledo Association for Sustainable Tourism and Empowerment merged to improve overall management efficiency and effectiveness in the marine reserves in southern Belize. Although, SEA is relatively young it brings the rich history and experience of the stakeholder communities, the deep passion of the Board of Directors and our reputation as an effective marine protected areas co-manager and conservation NGO. SEA has an established and well-respected field staff and is poised to greatly improve the management of the marine resources within the Southern Belize Barrier Reef Complex. SEA is actively engaged at all levels of MPA management including enforcement, biological monitoring, research, education and outreach. SEA also works closely with a wide range of partners both regionally and internationally.

SEA serves village communities that line the coast of southern Belize, including: Hopkins, Sittee River, Seine Bight, Placencia, Independence, Monkey River, Punta Negra, Punta Gorda. The organization currently has a staff consisting of administrative, education and outreach, science and enforcement personnel. SEA's board of directors consists of community leaders and key stakeholder representatives from Tourism, Business and other sectors.

## **11. Objectives**

### **General objective**

To strengthen the financial stability of the Southern Environmental Association through improved stakeholder awareness and the organization's visibility by

investing in business mechanisms and supporting the implementation of a resource mobilization plan.

### **Specific objectives**

1. To improve the financial stability of the Association by opening an additional gift/rental shop at the head office in Placencia resulting in revenues from the protected areas contributing 10% to the annual protected areas budget by January 2019.
2. To improve the visibility of the Laughing Bird Gift Shop and the two protected areas by the end of the project, with the purpose of increase gift shop sales and profits.
3. To improve the resource mobilization for the Association by selecting, through a workshop, an additional resources mobilization strategy to be implemented by January 2019.

## **12. Project description**

For each specific objective listed above, indicate the expected results.

*Expected results (200 words maximum):* are the products or outputs contributing to the achievement of the objectives through the activities implemented.

**Specific Objective 1:** To improve the financial stability of the Association by opening an additional gift/rental shop at the head office in Placencia resulting in revenues from the protected areas contributing 10% to the annual protected areas budget by January 2019.

This objective will build on the success of three previous grants by providing for the stocking of the Laughing Bird Gift Shop. The revenue from this business venture has garnered over \$20,000.00 in profit since its inception in January 2017. Through this project, SEA will continue the line of items at the Laughing Bird Gift Shop and extend the items sales to the head office in Placencia thereby building on the success of the gift shop. This unrestricted funding is directly invested in protected areas management supporting the financial stability of the Association and conservation work.

**Expected result:** Fully stocked gift shop and rental for 2018

**Specific Objective 2:** To improve the visibility of the Laughing Bird Gift Shop and the two protected areas by the end of the project, with the purpose of increase gift shop sales and profits.

This objective will implement the suggestion of the NESsT Consultancy to improve the visibility of the Laughing Bird Gift Shop within the stakeholder communities, especially Placencia and within the wider Belize tour business community. The main purpose is to increase gift shop sales and profit, thereby increasing unrestricted income that will be invested in protected areas management.

**Expected results:** The implementation of a visibility plan developed during the resource mobilization exercise.



**Specific Objective 3:** To improve the resource mobilization for the Association by selecting, through a workshop, an additional resource mobilization strategy to be implemented by January 2019.

Building on the drafting of the Resource Mobilization Strategy and Plan funded by the PACT Single Investment, SEA intends to implement the measures as prioritized during drafting consultation to ensure the sustainability of resource mobilization.

**Expected result:** Implementation of one Resource Mobilization Strategy that leads to the accumulation of \$20,000.00 in unrestricted funding to the Organization in the first year of the Strategy's implementation.

### **13. Project description Project Development Table**

Attached

### **14. Monitoring and evaluation**

The main method of evaluation will be via monthly technical and financial progress reports prepared by the Finance Manager and Board Treasurer and submitted to the Executive Director. The Executive Director will also track all project activities and expenses to ensure timeliness of execution and compliance with line items. The progress of the gift shop will be done on a monthly basis by both the Executive Director and the Finance Manager, via finance reports and quarterly site visits. All financial reports will be measured against the budget.

SEA will additionally utilize an existing a seven member Project Steering Committee that will meet once a quarter. This Committee will be made up of: the Executive Director, Board Treasurer, SEA Board Member, BTIA Board member, two Community Members (one fisherman, one tour guide), one faculty member from Independence Junior College (tertiary institution). This Committee will be tasked with reviewing financial and technical reports, providing monitoring oversight and two members must accompany each site visit.

### **15. Project Sustainability**

The project will also address the need for the implementation of a financial mechanism as listed in the SEA Business Plan that will contribute to the Association's annual budget. This financial mechanism is the investment in the Laughing Bird Gift Shop, which was established in January 2017 and has accumulated much needed finances that have been reinvested in protected areas management. The Association's recent financial distress has led to the restructuring of the Board of Directors and staff with a view to improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness while increasing independence on grant funding. The implementation of the associated activities within this project is key to the life of the Association making sustainability extremely important. With elevated stakes, the Board of Directors and staff is committed to the success and sustainability, therefore internal measures of monitoring will be implemented and corrective measures included immediately. Additionally the capacity of all staff members and their ownership of the Laughing Bird Gift Shop will be encouraged.

## **16. National and/or Regional relation/linkage**

### National Protected Areas System Plan

In addressing the capacity building within management agencies (Pg 32) the System Plan in 2.3.1 notes that many protected areas co-managers have weak capacities in accountancy, preparation of proposals...etc. This project seeks to directly address this gap within SEA through the capacity building component of this grant.

2.3.1 (Pg 33) within the financial management Capacity and Skills training speaks to trainings that are short-term and project driven. The trainings sited within this project are within the context of achieving strategies within the Strategic Plan and in implementing the Business Plan and as such are aimed at long term results for the Association.

2.4 Sustainable Financing Mechanisms- reveals that government allocations for operations budgets have been low ...but to protect and manage the nation's natural and cultural heritage...financial sustainability should be given national priority. The implementation of new funding mechanisms addressed in the Business Plan as an activity of this project will assist with providing continual funding for two key marine protected areas co-managed by SEA.

The financial sustainability actions will also help to realize result indicator "By 2019, the annual financing gap for the NPAS is reduced by 50%" (pg 72)

### National Sustainable Tourism Master Plan

Strategy 2: Integrated destination development – this strategy calls for the financial sustainability of protected areas. With the implementation of the Business Plan's financial mechanisms addressed in this project, SEA will begin to become independent and less reliant on grant funding thereby improving it's sustainability and that of the two protected areas it co-manages.

### SEA Strategic Plan 2014-2018

Strategic objective 1 Improved financial sustainability of SEA – this project will directly achieve the strategic action of implementing the Business Plan focused on self generating revenue. The strategic action of building the in-house capacity in business management.

Strategic Objective 5 Diversified and Increased Fundraising – by implementing the activities related to the financing mechanisms, SEA will be diversifying funding by placing emphasis on funding sources other than grants and ticket fees. Additionally by implementing a resource mobilization strategy and work plan financed through this project, there will be increased fundraising.

## **17. Cooperation (max 350 words)**

Describe the level of cooperation with other organizations and networks and explain how this cooperation helps achieve your goals.

- (a) **The Placencia Belize Tourism Industry Association** - SEA has maintained an excellent relationship with the PBTIA and uses their network for communication of activities and outreach. The main users and promoters of the business initiative will be the membership of the PBTIA. It is vital for SEA to continue with this association and make use of it for further communication. SEA's Executive Director is a member of the Board of Directors for the PBTIA and has continually volunteered in their activities, the members have been more than willing to cooperate with SEA's varied activities and initiatives.
- (b) **The Placencia Tour Guide Association** – the tour guides have the greatest interaction with the tourists on the day of the tours to Laughing Bird Caye. Their cooperation as direct advertisers is key. SEA presents to the Association's quarterly meetings and has continual communication with all tour guides that frequent the protected areas.
- (c) **Small business owners** – The business owners in the stakeholders communities are mainly tourism based and they have some interaction with our main target group. Ensuring they are kept up to date with developments is essential.
- (d) **Regulatory bodies** – The cooperation of the Forest Department with the development of the business is essential.