

Update from the IOOS Association

For the U.S. IOOS Advisory Committee, January 2026

The IOOS Association is a nonprofit membership organization of the 11 IOOS Regional Associations (RAs). We facilitate coordination and communication across the IOOS network and with the broader ocean observing enterprise. We communicate externally about the benefits of IOOS and coastal observing and engage in policy outreach and advocacy. Importantly, the IOOS Association is a policy-neutral, bipartisan organization that focuses on communicating the key message that IOOS delivers data for national priorities including the economy, public safety, navigation and maritime commerce, search and rescue at sea, weather and hurricane forecasting, and fisheries management.

FY25 Recap

The past year brought rapid change to the federal environment in which IOOS operates. We saw several Executive Orders and other actions from the White House – related to grant freezes, grant oversight, federal terminations and early retirements, and agency reorganization plans – that brought challenges and increased uncertainty to IOOS and its activities. The IOOS Association worked with the RAs and the NOAA Program Office to understand the impact – or potential impact – of these policies to effectively communicate that information to Congress. Some Executive Orders announced priorities that would benefit from robust ocean observing, such as maritime dominance and seafood competitiveness, and the IOOS Association undertook focused communications to convey the role that IOOS does and could play in meeting those policy goals.

In FY25 we operated under a full-year Continuing Resolution (passed in March), which kept IOOS regional observations at the FY24 enacted level of \$42.5 million. Each point in the process of ensuring the appropriated funds were added to the RA cooperative agreements faced new administrative hurdles, against which our Congressional champions provided invaluable interest and support. Ultimately, all of the RAs received full core funding before the end of the fiscal year, as well as FY25 funds under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). (Note that all five years of the Inflation Reduction Act funding to the IOOS RAs was obligated prior to the start of FY25.)

FY26 & FY27 Appropriations

IOOS started the FY26 appropriations cycle with an uphill battle since the President's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget proposed a complete defunding of IOOS regional observations. Despite that, we saw a lot of bipartisan support from Congress, as demonstrated by "dear colleague letters" – Congressional sign on letters sent to appropriators. The House letter, led by 6 bipartisan members – Ezell (R-MS, 4), Pingree (D-ME, 1), Weber (R-TX, 14), Bonamici (D-OR, 1), Radewagen (R-AS, AL), and Carbajal (D-CA, 24) – had the most signers ever (97) and the most

Republicans ever (18). The Senate letter, led by Wicker (R-MS) and Cantwell (D-WA), had similarly strong support to previous years with 28 signers (3 Rs).

We saw positive marks from both the House and Senate Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations subcommittees. The House bill proposed \$56M for FY26 – a \$13.5M increase, representing the authorized level. The Senate bill proposed a \$1M increase or \$43.5M. The [FY26 appropriations minibus](#) package funds IOOS regional observations at \$47.5M¹. This is the largest single year increase that IOOS has received since at least FY18, if not ever, and we look forward to discussions around how to allocate the funds. A downside to the bill is that it reallocates FY26 IJA funds to the Operations, Research, and Facilities (ORF) “base,” meaning that the RAs and other NOAA program grantees will not be awarded the final year of funding under that bill.

The RAs are currently operating in the final year of their five-year cooperative agreements – the awards that support their core / primary activities. This means that new proposals must be in place in order to allocate the FY26 funds to each RA. The RAs are waiting on the release of the FY26 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)² in order to submit proposals. The NOFO is delayed from normal timelines by more than six months at this point, though we are hearing the release will be soon. The delay does unfortunately create a high risk of funding lapses despite the positive FY26 appropriations news. Even with no-cost extensions in place some RAs / PIs could face a funding gap until the new awards are in place; these risks will become clearer as the RAs analyze spending over the coming months.

As we begin to look ahead to FY27, the IOOS Association’s funding request will be \$56M – the authorized level (pending, see below). Funding at that level is essential to sustaining IOOS’s core capabilities in the face of inflation and the rising costs of doing business. It would also help RAs meet the rising demand for critical ocean and coastal information, bringing key services into core, for example, the pan-regional hurricane glider program funded to date through disaster supplemental appropriations.

IOOS Reauthorization

The IOOS program is mandated by the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observation System (ICOOS) Act, first authorized in 2009. Its reauthorization in 2020 expired at the end of FY25. There are currently reauthorization bills moving in both the House and Senate, introduced by Representative Ezell and Senator Wicker, respectively. The House bill currently has 25 bipartisan co-sponsors, and the Senate bill has seven. Both bills would continue IOOS’s authorization level at \$56M per year through FY30 – this is authorization, which is different

¹ At the time of this written update, the FY26 minibus – H.R. 6938: FY2026 Consolidated CJS, Energy & Water, Interior Appropriations Act – has passed the House but has not yet been taken up in the Senate.

² As of January 14, the NOFO has not been released

from the appropriation that funds the program each year, but an important piece of the legislative process to establish the mandate for the program and a level of funding deemed necessary to conduct the program. Both bills have unanimously passed out of their committees of jurisdiction; the next step is reconciling differences between the House and Senate bills and votes by both full chambers to enact the legislation. Facilitating the bill to advance through Congress will be a top priority for the coming year.

Other Updates

The IOOS Association has finally made it onto social media – LinkedIn for now, but soon to expand. We've been using social media to raise the visibility of IOOS and its benefits to our user base across ocean sectors, focusing on thematic campaigns and leveraging the regional network to amplify our messages across social platforms. Please follow and engage with us there!