



Northeast Regional Ocean Council

Request for Proposals:

Identify natural resource conservation issues for regional ocean planning in New England

RFP Issued: July 31, 2012

Proposals Due: August 29, 2012

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Part 1: Scope of Work

- 1. Statement of Purpose:** The Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) is seeking proposals for contractor assistance to engage the marine science and conservation communities to identify and better understand natural resource conservation issues that can be addressed through regional ocean planning. For the purposes of this RFP, the term “natural resource conservation issues” is broadly defined to include existing data and models of species and habitat distribution and abundance, and the potential use of these information sources in management/decision making (e.g., resource protection, restoration, mitigation, performance standards, and to inform other interactions with other ocean uses). Products from this project will include an overview of existing efforts to characterize New England’s marine resources, including data sources and current management and decision-making utility, and an outreach program culminating in a workshop or series of workshops discussing the use of this information in regional ocean planning.
- 2. Background:** NROC, established by New England’s Governors in 2005, is a state-federal partnership formed to implement solutions to New England’s most pressing ocean and coastal issues that require a regional response. NROC member states include Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont. Federal agencies, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Department of Interior (U.S. Geological Survey, Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Homeland Security (U.S. Coast Guard), and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, have been full members of NROC since its inception.

In recent years, NROC has focused on ocean planning. NROC has led the New England region’s implementation of important parts of the National Ocean Policy and has developed a work plan and framework for regional ocean planning (see the NROC web site <http://collaborate.csc.noaa.gov/nroc/default.aspx>). To help achieve its goals, NROC has brought on additional capacity through hiring of staff and in-kind support from member agencies.

This particular project is an important component of the NROC work plan and is intended to provide a better understanding of how natural resources can be considered in regional ocean planning through a review of current data and analyses and their use in existing management decision-making, combined with stakeholder engagement. NROC is currently engaging other interests—commercial fishing, recreational boating, maritime commerce (shipping), energy, and aquaculture—

through several similar projects. NROC intends for this project to run concurrently with those projects through 2012 and early 2013.

Additionally, two other NROC projects are related to potential work through this RFP. First, a collaborative working group, including NROC, is developing the Northeast Ocean Data Portal for ocean planning (www.northeastoceandata.org). Through the Northeast Ocean Data Portal, NROC and its partners are developing a publicly accessible database of ocean uses, biological resources, and physical characteristics. It is expected that the selected contractor will work closely with the Data Portal Working Group as many datasets relevant to natural resources have already been inventoried and developed, or are scheduled for development in the next 12-18 months. Second, NROC is concurrently issuing a separate RFP to compare marine habitat classification schemes in New England coastal waters and to work with the NROC states to develop an action plan for the coordinated mapping and classification of marine habitats. It is expected that the selected contractor will coordinate with these efforts and benefit from this work.

- 3. Objective:** The primary objective of this RFP is to incorporate natural resource science and an understanding of resource conservation issues into ocean planning through a characterization of marine resources and a robust outreach program to the science and conservation communities. NROC intends for this project to contribute to natural resource identification and related issues, opportunities and concerns to be considered during ocean planning. For purposes of this RFP, the general area of interest is in estuarine and marine areas including state and federal waters in New England (the Gulf of Maine, Long Island and Block Island Sounds, and waters south of Rhode Island and Massachusetts). However, NROC recognizes that the general area of interest may change depending on the geographic range of the biological and/or physical resource in question. Some resource considerations may be sub-regional (Gulf of Maine, Southern New England, etc.), while others may go beyond NROC's planning area (Northwest Atlantic, Atlantic, etc.).

In order to achieve this primary objective and ensure this effort is complementary to other data collection, resource characterization, and stakeholder engagement projects, NROC suggests the following general tasks.

Task 1. Identify key science and conservation stakeholders to assist with outreach and implementation

The selected contractor will assist NROC to identify and contact a small group of resource science and conservation stakeholders that will provide recommendations for the project, including identifying other stakeholders and subject matter experts, reviewing agenda(s) for stakeholder workshop(s), and providing feedback on draft products. It is expected that this group of key stakeholders will represent a range of subject matter expertise and interests (marine mammals, seabirds, fish habitat, etc.) from a regional perspective to ensure NROC's outreach will be inclusive and efficient. Responses to this RFP should propose a strategy for identifying and utilizing these key stakeholders, recognizing the limited budget and time available, to:

- A. Identify marine resource conservation themes and related subject matter experts and stakeholders for each theme;
- B. Review and comment on a proposed strategy to identify existing marine resource characterizations, ongoing research, and an assessment of current protections;
- C. Review draft products and agenda(s) for stakeholder workshop(s).

Task 2. Compile data and information on marine resources, resource protections, and the utilization of this information in decision making

A key component of this project is reviewing existing information on marine resources to characterize the current state of knowledge, including assessments of marine resource distribution, abundance, significance, and current protections. This task should be completed in coordination with existing efforts, particularly those of the NE Ocean Data Portal (www.northeastoceandata.org), individual State planning and data integration efforts, and Federal agency initiatives such as the Multipurpose Marine Cadastre (<http://www.marinecadastre.gov>). Therefore, the selected contractor will be expected to develop a work plan for this task with NROC that considers the scope and products of existing efforts to ensure this project consolidates and builds on previous work in the region in a limited timeframe. This task shall result in a report summarizing the following for each marine resource conservation theme identified by NROC and the selected contractor in Task 1.

- A. Inventory existing data sources and current research that characterize the abundance and distribution of marine resources. The selected contractor is not expected to duplicate efforts, but instead to build on the work of the NE Ocean Data Portal and state ocean planning work by reviewing existing information sources and identifying and acquiring new sources of information or ongoing research that have not already been obtained. New information sources may include raw observation data, derived products characterizing species or habitat distribution and abundance, or predictive model output, including models that predict physical characteristics potentially indicating the presence of marine species or habitat, and projects that are looking at temporal changes in habitat/species distribution (historically and in the future). New data sources should adhere to common geographic and metadata standards recognized by the NE Ocean Data Portal. Note that NROC anticipates that because of existing efforts (e.g., the NE Ocean Data Portal), much of the investigative portion of this task on individual topics has already been completed;
- B. Identify efforts that have used information from Task 2A to map and/or define particular resource areas, populations or habitats for particular management actions (e.g., protection, conservation, restoration, and/or use in performance standards);
- C. Identify current designations and/or protections for marine resources (threatened & endangered; essential fish habitat; etc.);
- D. Identify natural and regulatory temporal trends that will affect the distribution and abundance of marine resources (species and habitats);
- E. Identify and prioritize knowledge gaps for further scientific investigation;

- F. Identify existing research, analyses or models that characterize the interactions between ocean uses and marine resources or that combine data sources to indicate areas of ecological significance (ecological valuation, ecosystem service provision, etc.);
- G. Describe how these data, analyses and protections are used by government agencies, the conservation community, and marine industry. NROC anticipates that much of this effort will be a synthesis of existing practices.

Task 3. Develop and implement an outreach program to the science and conservation communities

Through this task, the selected contractor will assist NROC to develop and implement a robust outreach program to the science and conservation communities that is complementary to NROC's engagement of other stakeholders in ocean planning. In each of these projects, NROC and its contractors are engaging stakeholders to review existing information and to identify potential regional ocean planning issues. At a minimum, responses to this RFP should include a detailed work plan for engaging science and conservation interests that:

- A. Recognizes and is consistent with NROC's ongoing stakeholder engagement in ocean planning;
- B. Describes the approach to engaging experts from government, academia and nongovernmental organizations in New England;
- C. Supports the identification and compilation of data and information requested in task 2;
- D. Identifies agency or organizational goals and plans for advancing resource protection or conservation; and
- E. Identifies potential resource conservation issues that can be addressed through regional ocean planning.

Task 4. Organize, host, and document a workshop or series of workshops to review results of Tasks 2 and 3.

This project should culminate in a workshop or series of workshops that bring together marine resource scientists and conservation stakeholders to review draft products from task 2, discuss their potential utility in ocean planning, and to discuss resource conservation issues that have been identified in task 3. These workshops should make progress towards defining and mapping marine resources areas in New England that could be considered in ocean planning, including suggesting which data and models could be used and which knowledge gaps should be prioritized to improve characterization of marine resources and decision making. The workshops should also result in recommendations for which related resource conservation issues could be addressed by regional ocean planning.

The selected contractor will be responsible for producing all meeting materials, including developing draft maps that include options for depicting marine resources using current information identified in task 2. Responses to this RFP should consider options for remote participation, meeting documentation, and for maximizing workshop meeting time, including providing draft materials and

a forum for comments in advance of the workshop(s). The selected contractor will be expected to produce a report summarizing workshop outcomes and contextualizing the products developed in tasks 2 and 3.

4. **Project Funding.** The maximum budget for this project is \$75,000. NROC reserves the right to re-allocate this funding if a satisfactory candidate(s) for this service is not determined or the services are no longer needed.
5. **Deliverables:** Proposals should include a detailed work plan, including a description of proposed approaches and methods to be used to complete the following deliverables:
 - Identification of target marine resources for this project and development of a database of stakeholders from the conservation and science communities (per task 1).
 - Draft report summarizing the items in task 2 for each marine resource theme, including an inventory of data sources not already identified by previous efforts and, where possible, acquisition and submission of those datasets in the appropriate format (ESRI geodatabase, Access, etc.) with appropriate documentation (FGDC metadata, etc.)
 - Draft report summarizing and documenting marine resource conservation issues identified in task 3
 - Development of all pre-workshop materials, including maps, and draft and final reports summarizing workshop outcomes from task 4

NROC anticipates that the first deliverable for this project will be a revised detailed workplan incorporating NROC comments.

6. **Project schedule:** NROC expects that work on this project will start immediately following completion of a contract. NROC prefers a schedule that results in delivery of a final report in early 2013, however respondents to this RFP should propose and justify a schedule that they feel is appropriate for their approach.

Part 2: Proposal Preparation and Submittal

The following sections describe the procedures and content for submitting proposals.

1. **Pre-submittal conference call.** NROC will host a pre-submission conference call to allow potential respondents to ask clarifying questions on August 14, 2012. Instructions to participate in this conference call will be sent to all people who express their interest via email at least 24 hours before the conference call.
2. **RFP clarification.** Questions and requests for clarifications regarding this solicitation should be sent to the email contact below. The deadline for submitting such an email is August 14, 2012. Responses will be posted to the NROC web-site on August 15th. Questions should be sent to:

Proposal@northeastoceancouncil.org

Nick Napoli, Ocean Planning Project Manager

Northeast Regional Ocean Council

- 3. Submittal requirements.** For review purposes, NROC requires responses to this RFP to be delivered electronically, via email as an Adobe™ .pdf file, to Proposal@northeastoceancouncil.org. Proposals must be received by email no later than 5:00 pm on August 29, 2012, and shall plainly identify the subject of the proposal and the name, phone, email, and address of the bidder.

It is the bidder's responsibility to ensure that NROC receives the proposals prior to the specified closing date. Proposals received after the specified closing date will not be considered.

- 4. Content requirements.** Proposals must be clear, succinct and shall not exceed 10 pages. Section dividers, cover letter, title page, and table of contents do not count in the overall page count of the proposal. Exclusions to the page limitation may include relevant work samples and/or resumes, as described below, provided in appendices. Each bidder is required to describe how they will provide the deliverables described above as part of their proposal. Information provided will be evaluated and scored by NROC; missing elements will adversely impact a proposal's overall score.

a. General requirements:

- i. Single-spaced pages when printed on 8.5" x 11" paper with 1-inch margins (top, bottom, left and right) with font no smaller than 11 point.
- ii. The total number of pages must not exceed 10 pages (not including appendices).
- iii. The proposal must be submitted as an Adobe™ .pdf document with all pages numbered and clearly identifying the name of the bidder.

b. Proposal organization and content:

- i. Cover letter. Provide a cover letter indicating your organization's commitment to implementing this initiative (e.g. senior management approval, etc.). Also, include appropriate point of contact information, including the person's name, title, address, phone number and email address.
- ii. Table of contents. Identify page numbers of main sections, including any appendices.
- iii. Executive summary. Summarize the proposal's approach to completing the deliverables required by this RFP and highlight any competitive advantages or unique approaches of your proposal, cost-effectiveness measures, and particular skills offered by the project team.

- iv. Work plan. Include a concise, yet detailed work plan for completing the deliverables described in this RFP and to ensure appropriate management of the scope, schedule, budget and overall quality of work. Include a time line, starting from contract execution, including all major tasks and their sequence, inter-relationships and dependencies between tasks and key milestones and deliverables.
- v. Detailed budget. Provide an itemized budget to produce the deliverables described in this RFP. Include all costs related to personnel (identify estimated hours and rate), administrative overhead, travel, materials, equipment, and any other anticipated expenditures required to complete the work described in this RFP. In this budget description, describe leveraging of existing work, funding, or other in-kind services. Note that because of the requirements of the source of funding for this project, indirect costs are limited to a maximum of 12.5% of allowable direct costs. For purposes of this RFP, indirect costs are defined as “overhead expenses incurred by an organization but not easily tracked to a specific project. They generally include administrative or other support functions such as executive oversight, institutional communication networks, accounting, grants management, legal support, insurance, utilities, technology, rent, and facility maintenance.” For purposes of this RFP, direct costs include all of the expenses that are required for, and can be tracked directly to, this project, including but not limited to personnel, consultants/contractors, or other direct expenses such as travel, training, supplies, computers, and software.

The total budget is not to exceed \$75,000.

- vi. Team structure and qualifications. Please provide the following:
 - Project team organization chart, including a brief description of the role of each team member.
 - Summary of the experience, skill or unique attribute of each team member. Description of the team’s understanding of the technical aspects of this RFP will be very helpful in this summary. In addition, including a maximum two-page resume for each team member is allowable in a “resumes” appendix.
 - Summary of related, successful projects that illustrate the capabilities and qualifications of the project team. In addition, providing a maximum two-page description of up to two recently-completed projects is allowable in a “related experience” appendix. Include references that NROC may contact for these projects.

Proposals must identify any tasks which will be assigned to subcontractors and associated budget details included in part v above. The successful bidder will be prohibited from subcontracting, assigning, or transferring any listed responsibilities without prior review and consent of NROC.

Part 3: Evaluation of Proposals

This section summarizes the general process and criteria NROC intends to use to evaluate proposals.

1. **General review process.** The NROC Ocean Planning Director will collect and assemble all proposals received by the RFP deadline. An evaluation team comprised of NROC members and the NROC Ocean Planning Director will be convened to evaluate and score all proposals, using the criteria below. Upon completion of the scoring process, the evaluation team will recommend to the NROC Executive Committee that the highest scoring bidder be awarded the project.
2. **Criteria.** NROC will use score all proposals according to the following criteria:
 - a. *Approach (30%).* Bidders will be evaluated on the detail, clarity, and soundness of their approach to this project, including strategies for overcoming any potential obstacles, creativity, and cost effectiveness. Strategies for maximizing expert stakeholder involvement will be a significant portion of this evaluation.
 - b. *Qualifications and experience of project team (30%).* NROC will evaluate a project team members' combination of education, training, and record of achievement and experience related to the tasks described in this RFP. Specific attention will also be focused on an assessment of a project team's direct experience with potential subject matter and with experts in pertinent fields.
 - c. *Cost Effectiveness (20%).* Bidders will be evaluated on the budget submitted with their responses to this RFP. Any leveraging of existing work, funding, or other in-kind services, will be a significant portion of this evaluation.
 - d. *Project Management (20%).* Bidders will be evaluated on their ability to complete the project within the schedule provided, track record of project management, and proposed project management strategies for this project.

Part 4. General Provisions

The following general provisions apply to this RFP and subsequent actions taken by NROC.

1. Response to this RFP does not commit NROC to award a contract or to pay any costs incurred during the preparation of the proposal.
2. NROC reserves the right to reject any or all of the proposals for completing this work. NROC also reserves the right to cancel or reissue the RFP at any time.
3. NROC reserves the right to eliminate the need for the selected bidders to complete one or more tasks, pending the outcome of preceding related tasks or issues, and/or the availability of project partners to complete that task.
4. NROC reserves the right to modify the final scope of work and deliverables prior to finalizing a contractual agreement with the selected bidder(s).

5. Subsequent procurement, if any, will be in accordance with an executed contract. This RFP and any response may, at NROC's discretion, become part of the executed contract.
6. All entities participating in this RFP process will be notified of acceptance or rejection. NROC reserves the right not to disclose reasons for the rejection. NROC is not obligated to accept the proposal with the lowest cost.
7. No publicity or media release about this RFP, response to this RFP, discussion of any kind related to this RFP, or the award of any contract related to the bid document, may be released without NROC's prior approval.
8. All materials submitted by bidders become the property of NROC. NROC will retain copies of all proposals for historical records and documentation.
9. Each Bidder agrees to comply with all federal regulations including those pertaining to non-discrimination in hiring and employment practices.
10. NROC owns all rights to deliverables and, within the bounds of acceptable practice as determined by limitations placed upon data used in this project by data providers, intends that products resulting from this project will be made publically available.