



NROC
Northeast Regional
Ocean Council

Request for Proposals:

Communications support for regional ocean planning in New England

RFP Issued: January 14, 2013

Proposals Due: February 8, 2013

Northeast Regional Ocean Council Request for Proposals: Communications support for regional ocean planning in New England

Part 1: Scope of Work

- 1. Statement of Purpose:** The Northeast Regional Ocean Council (NROC) is seeking proposals for contractor assistance to provide communications support for regional ocean planning. NROC recognizes the importance of successful communication for its regional ocean planning efforts and defines success as having an open, transparent, efficient process that engages the public and key stakeholders in regional ocean planning activities. For purposes of this Request for Proposals (RFP), NROC intends that “communications support” will include using on-line and traditional forms of communications such as the NROC web site (www.northeastoceancouncil.org) and potentially other electronic and print media (i.e., email, social media, fact sheets), and the like. NROC intends that its communications efforts will ensure regional ocean planning stakeholders are aware of regional planning efforts in a timely fashion and have an opportunity to be engaged. NROC is also interested in potential ways to track the efficacy and efficiency of its communications efforts, as described below.
- 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 the 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 developed a work plan and framework for regional ocean planning (see the NROC web site www.northeastoceancouncil.org for more information). To help implement this work, NROC has obtained additional capacity through hiring of staff and in-kind support from member agencies. In general, the focus of this ocean planning work is on estuarine and marine waters from Long Island Sound north around the waters south of Massachusetts and Rhode Island through the Gulf of Maine.

While many of the ongoing projects include a direct stakeholder engagement element, there is also a need to expand communications efforts beyond these individual project efforts to ensure broader communications goals are met. NROC recognizes that several methods of communicating will be

necessary to achieve this goal, as described below, and the purpose of this RFP is to solicit proposals that potentially address that need.

- 3. Objective:** The primary objective of this RFP is to provide communications support to the regional ocean planning effort underway in New England. NROC recognizes that for an effort such as this, several different communications tasks are likely needed (given potential differences in targeted stakeholders and practical issues necessary to ensure timely communication). A key consideration for this RFP will be the proposed structure and project management activities in support of the Tasks below. Generally speaking, NROC is interested in an approach to this work that is efficient and provides a central point of contact for implementing the tasks in this RFP. The tasks in this RFP are inter-related and will benefit from a centralized approach, not by a broad, multiple-lead team approach. Proposals should provide detailed information on how efficiency will be maximized. Within this general approach, NROC strongly urges creativity in proposals responding to the following tasks.

In developing this RFP, NROC has provided an estimated number of hours that NROC anticipates for each task to provide respondents an idea of NROC's thinking of the effort needed to complete these tasks. NROC developed this estimate considering anticipated needs over a twelve-month period, the anticipated duration of this contract. However, proposals should include and explain detailed estimates of effort, hours, and budget proposed to complete these tasks.

Task 1. Identify specific communications vehicles directly related to regional ocean planning communications goals and needs.

The selected contractor will assist NROC with identifying specific communications vehicles that directly relate to regional ocean planning communications goals and needs. NROC has identified certain needs to date, which are summarized in the attachment to this RFP ("NROC Ocean Planning Communications Strategy"), and continues to maintain and update its contact database. However, communications efforts associated with regional ocean planning in New England need to be creative in addressing identified goals and needs, dependent in part of specific target audiences, and it may be desirable to take advantage of social media and/or other opportunities. Therefore, while NROC has identified certain tasks for this RFP, NROC also welcomes additional expertise on this subject.

Because NROC has identified other immediate needs such as those identified below, NROC does not anticipate that Task 1 will be a lengthy process prior to other tasks commencing. Therefore, this task is intended to build on discussions that have already occurred that have led to the development of the attached Communications Strategy, for example. Additionally, it may be appropriate to revisit this issue throughout the term of the project (i.e., based on the outcomes of Task 5 below).

For this task, NROC anticipates that work would occur primarily through conference calls led by the contractor and NROC staff and including other NROC members and Regional Planning Body members as appropriate. The contractor would be responsible for convening and conducting calls

and providing written summaries of decisions made. NROC estimates an approximate need of 100 hours total to address this task over the course of the year-long contract.

Task 2. Develop and distribute materials through on-line communications vehicles

Working with NROC, the selected contractor will prepare specific materials for NROC review prior to disseminating. Such materials will include web-site project-specific material update, updates to NROC's on-line calendar, and other specific documents for other communications needs such as are identified through Task 1. NROC anticipates that writing skills, layout skills particularly related to on-line presentation through the NROC web site (including provision and use of stock photography, maps, and other visual components), and technical skills to enable final material to be posted to the NROC web site (or distributed via additional on-line vehicles) will be necessary to successfully complete this task. The NROC web site is designed using Drupal.

NROC anticipates that in order for the task to be conducted as efficiently as possible, the selected contractor may need to be in attendance at up to 15 regional ocean planning meetings, over the course of a year, to help ensure subsequent draft materials are appropriate in substance and tone—also dependent on audience. For purposes of updating the NROC web site, NROC anticipates approximately monthly updates (and possibly more frequent updates as needed to provide timely information on an on-line calendar). Additional elements of this Task may be identified as part of Task 1.

For this task, NROC anticipates that work would occur primarily through meeting attendance as described previously, developing (writing, designing, publishing/printing) materials, working with NROC staff to finalize those materials, and posting documents on-line. NROC estimates an approximate need of 600 hours total to address this task over the course of the year-long contract. This estimate includes a general allowance for specific efforts that may arise from the outcomes of Task 1.

Task 3. Develop project-specific print materials

The selected contractor will develop print materials such as brief (one to two page) summaries, fact-sheets, or similar overviews for communication to a general audience about regional ocean planning projects. This Task will occur as regional ocean planning projects are completed and/or are at a point suitable for this task. Over the coming year, NROC anticipates the need for six such documents related to the following projects:

- a. Commercial fisheries mapping
- b. Identifying issues for maritime commerce, energy, and aquaculture industries (3 separate fact sheets)
- c. Identifying natural resource issues
- d. Overview of regional ocean planning in New England

NROC anticipates that these documents will be available primarily on-line, along with a limited amount of hard-copy printing (approximately 100 copies of each). NROC anticipates layout, editing and writing, and production skills will be necessary to successfully complete this task.

For this task, work would occur primarily through developing (writing and designing) materials, working with NROC staff to finalize those materials, and producing final versions suitable for printing and on-line presentation. NROC estimates an approximate need of 400 hours total to address this task over the course of the year-long contract.

Task 4. Develop and implement communications delivery and tracking system

The purpose of this task is to determine if regional ocean planning communication efforts are effective in reaching intended audiences and to maximize engagement. Through this task, NROC wishes to understand who is looking at what information, and thus be able to track how effective regional ocean planning communications efforts are reaching specific audiences (the general public, representatives from certain marine industries, environmental non-governmental organizations, and others). Through this task, the selected contractor will assist NROC to develop and implement a robust communications delivery (i.e. identify content, design, delivery mechanism, when delivered, and to whom) and tracking system (i.e. what information is being read by which audiences and what is not being read) to help NROC track, assess, and modify (if necessary) communications activities (content and vehicles) for regional ocean planning. This task thus relates to Task 1. NROC recognizes that there are several existing services that may be helpful in this task (e.g., GovDelivery, Constant Contact, iContact, and many others), but there may also be additional approaches to accomplish this task. NROC welcomes creative approaches to accomplish this task.

For this task, NROC anticipates that work would occur primarily through conference calls with NROC and Regional Planning Body staff and members, and through implementing a delivery and tracking system. NROC estimates an approximate need of 200 hours total for this task.

Task 5. Assist with management of communications efforts related to regional ocean planning.

The purpose of this task is to assist NROC staff and the Regional Planning Body with overall management of communications efforts related to regional ocean planning. Through this task, NROC expects that the selected contractor will be primarily responsible for the day-to-day management of the other tasks identified in this RFP. While decision-making ultimately will be with NROC, there is a need for a central point of contact to ensure that regional ocean planning communications are appropriately consistent, timely, and of the highest quality, and that they are meeting the region's needs.

For this task, NROC anticipates that work would occur primarily through conference calls with NROC staff. NROC estimates an approximate need of 150 hours total for this task.

4. **Project Funding.** The budget for this project will be determined dependent on the selected contractor. NROC has provided an estimate of the number of hours for individual tasks, but these estimates are provided for guidance purposes only. Proposals should include the estimates of time that respondents feel is necessary to complete individual tasks, according to task, hourly rate(s) of individuals included in this proposal, and other direct costs (e.g., for printing). 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 specific communications vehicles/tasks necessary to achieve NROC goals and needs (per Task 1).
 - Draft materials for the NROC web-site, other on-line media, and other communications vehicles, as appropriate), final materials incorporating NROC comments (per Task 2).
 - Periodically updated on-line material, per Task 2.
 - Draft project-specific print materials, and final versions incorporating NROC comments in electronic and hard copy, per Task 3.
 - A communications delivery and tracking system, per Task 4.
 - Documented approach to project management, per Task 5.

6. **Project schedule:** NROC expects that work on this project will start immediately following completion of a contract. The contract will be for a duration of twelve months from the start date of the contract.

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 Thursday, January 31 at 1:00 pm. 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 Thursday, January 31. Responses will be posted to the NROC web-site on Friday, February 1. Questions should be sent to:

Proposal@northeastoceancouncil.org

John Weber, Ocean Planning Director
Northeast Regional Ocean Council

4. 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 February 8, 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.

5. 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 showing implementation, 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.
- 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. 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 include 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. Creativity in approach to accomplishing the tasks in this RFP is urged.
- 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 (10%).* 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 (30%).* 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. NROC will in particular look to the approach described to achieve Task 5, given NROC's interest in a centralized approach to managing this work, not by a broad, multiple-lead team approach.

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.