



Request for Proposals

Independent Contractor(s) – Fisheries Liaison and Communications Specialist for Communications Networks and Mapping Tools to Reduce Bycatch Project

Release Date: 9 February 2021 | Proposal Deadline: 2 March 2021

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks a qualified independent Contractor(s) to support the Communications Networks and Mapping Tools to Reduce Bycatch project (Hotspot Project) by working with the Project Team to complete two separate tasks, as follows: 1) develop and carry out the Hotspot Project Plan and 2) generate and support implementation of a communications plan for the Hotspot Project. The Hotspot Project is supported through a partnership between NFWF and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Project Team that leads the project is comprised of NFWF and NOAA as well as additional subcontractors. The Contractor(s) selected under this RFP to undertake the tasks listed under Fisheries Liaison will also serve as a liaison between the Project Team and fishing communities in and around the Gulf of Mexico.

The successful Offeror(s) will be selected through a competitive process that assesses the Offeror's plan for achieving stated work items, technical qualifications, and cost considerations. The award level will be based on NFWF's evaluation of the proposal and budget documentation.

The Contract Period of Performance is estimated to be 12 months (1 year); NFWF may extend the period of performance for one additional year. The selected Contractor(s) should be based in the Gulf of Mexico or have the ability to travel regularly to the Gulf of Mexico as circumstances allow while following all necessary COVID-19 precautions. The Contractor(s) should have the willingness and ability to start as soon as possible. Travel within the Gulf is expected when circumstances are safe to do so.

BACKGROUND

In 2016, the natural resource Trustees for the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill finalized a comprehensive restoration plan for the Gulf of Mexico that includes a settlement of up to \$8.8 billion in order to resolve claims for natural resource damages related to the spill¹.

The Communications Networks and Mapping Tools to Reduce Bycatch – Phase 1 project is one of 18 projects included in the *Deepwater Horizon* Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan 2, released in December 2019², to partially compensate for injuries to fish, sea turtles, marine mammals, and mesophotic and deep benthic communities.

¹ *Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill: Final Programmatic Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan and Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement*. Available online: www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-planning/gulf-plan/

² *Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Final Restoration Plan 2/Environmental Assessment: Fish, Sea Turtles, Marine Mammals, and Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities*. Available online: <https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/2019/12/226-million-projects-approved-second-open-ocean-restoration-plan>



The goal of the Hotspot Project is to reduce the amount of bycatch and mortality of injured species by the identification of bycatch hotspots and development of tools and analyses to help commercial fishermen, recreational for-hire fishermen, and private anglers avoid bycatch during fishing. The objective of this Phase 1 project is to determine the feasibility of voluntary systems to reduce bycatch mortality of fish species injured by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill – with particular focus on fisheries, fishing communities, or fishing fleets (referred to through the rest of the document simply as “fisheries”) that take place in and around the Gulf of Mexico. This will involve identifying priority fisheries and designing systems and approaches to create near-real time maps of bycatch hotspots in fisheries selected for this project, which would be coupled with communication tools that inform fishermen of the high bycatch risk in those areas. These systems may take advantage of emerging or existing advanced technologies and tools. Priority fisheries for the feasibility study will be identified based on factors such as benefits to injured species, the interest of fishery participants, current fishery bycatch challenges, fishery bycatch data availability, existing fishery management regimes, and industry characteristics. current fishery bycatch challenges, fishery bycatch data availability, existing fishery management regimes, and industry characteristics.

The primary outcome from this Phase 1 project will be the creation of designs for communication networks, and hotspot mapping technology or approaches, as well as options for implementation. This Phase 1 project is expected to require up to four years of work to select and plan for potential future bycatch networks. Implementation of these designs is anticipated to be accomplished in future project phases and potentially supported by subsequent restoration plans.

This process will rely heavily on close coordination with fishermen, stakeholders, and state and federal fishery managers to identify priority fisheries and design effective approaches. Because of this close coordination and the variety of fisheries the Hotspot Project aims to work with, it is essential that the leaders of interested fisheries understand and are fully engaged in the project goals and strategies. The project may target a wide array of fishing communities in and around the Gulf of Mexico and Southeast U.S. including Caribbean fisheries, Vietnamese-American fishing communities, and other diverse groups. The Project Team will need to develop and execute a broad communication strategy that can effectively articulate the goals, strategies, and progress of the Hotspot Project to and effectively engage these diverse audiences. The Contractor selected to execute Task 1 below (see “Scope of Work”) will be expected to lead communication strategy development.

The selected Contractor(s) will coordinate closely with NFWF and NOAA staff in the development and initial scoping phases of the Hotspot Project.

SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Contractor(s) will coordinate aspects of the Hotspot Project that are at the intersection between the Project Team and fishing communities. NFWF anticipates that it may select multiple contractors to undertake the tasks listed below, which will take place concurrently. Offerors should indicate which task(s) they wish to complete and describe their knowledge and experience that qualify them to perform the role(s) identified. NFWF will determine which task or tasks will be assigned to the selected Contractor(s) based on qualifications and preferences outlined in the Offerors’ proposals. It is estimated that the level of effort will entail approximately 20 to 30 hours per week, but this may differ based on the number of tasks assigned to a selected Contractor(s). A not to exceed cost will be negotiated upon award with the selected Contractor(s).



Communications Specialist Role

Task 1: Develop project Communications Plan including identifying key audiences, developing project messages, and identifying relevant venues to reach fishery leaders. The selected Contractor(s) will generate and execute a communications plan to guide messaging, outreach, and communication for this phase of Hotspot Project. Due to the nature of this Project, this communications plan will be developed within the first 2-3 weeks to guide initial Project outreach and communication efforts and will be revised and updated on a periodic basis as the project progresses. It is expected that the communications plan will be developed in such a way that top priority deliverables are generated and available prior to completion of the entire plan. These deliverables include identification of audiences, recommended messaging, and development of educational materials. Applicants should explain how this will be accomplished and under what timeframe within the work plan description.

- Deliverable: The Hotspot Project communications plan within first 2-3 weeks, with regular updates based on new information and lessons learned through project execution, outreach, and stakeholder feedback.
- Timeline: As described above, the communications plan will be a living document, updated regularly. Key deliverables and components of the communication plan will be completed throughout the course of the contract period as outlined in the subtasks below.
- **Subtask 1: Outline key audiences and identify appropriate messaging strategies for each.** It is anticipated that various stakeholders, including (but not limited to) fisheries participants, managers, and members of the seafood supply chain will have interest in the Project. Through research, meeting with the Project Team, and conversation with stakeholders, the selected Contractor(s) will develop an understanding of each audience's interest and the best strategy to engage them.
- Deliverable: Develop a matrix that identifies target audiences and outlines a strategy for the group including appropriate messaging and the timeline of outreach.
- Timeline: This matrix should be completed by late spring 2021.
- **Subtask 2: Prepare informational materials targeted to fishermen and other stakeholders for project workshops, meetings and outreach.** The Hotspot Project will initially conduct a wide outreach and engagement effort to inform fisheries about bycatch communication networks and the opportunities available through the project. Later meetings will progressively target fisheries that show potential for successful bycatch network implementation, requiring more in-depth and customized materials.
- Deliverable: Develop effective communication materials to inform general fishery stakeholder audiences about the Hotspot Project and opportunities for involvement.
- Timeline: Basic informative materials will be necessary for initial project outreach in late spring 2021, with the opportunity to develop more specific materials as outreach continues.



Fisheries Liaison Role

- **Task 2: Conduct project outreach and engagement with fishing.** The selected Contractor(s) will represent the project and assist in the broad dissemination of project messages and materials to fishing communities in and around the Gulf of Mexico. The selected Contractor(s) will also encourage participation of these groups in project meetings and workshops.
 - Timeline: These activities are expected to begin in late Spring 2021 and continue throughout the project.
- **Task 3: Host and facilitate group meetings and 1-on-1 interviews with fishermen and diverse stakeholder groups around the Gulf of Mexico region.** The selected Contractor(s) will organize and facilitate meetings and interviews with a variety of stakeholder groups including fishermen, fishery managers, and scientists, to identify characteristics of fisheries that can successfully implement bycatch networks. Over the course of the project, the Project Team will focus outreach and engagement on fisheries that are identified as having the highest potential for successful implementation of bycatch networks. The selected Contractor(s) will also organize and facilitate these meetings and workshops that target development of bycatch network implementation plans.
 - Deliverable: The Project Team expects that the Contractor(s) will host at least two “listening sessions” with fisheries representatives and least one multiday workshop with fisheries leaders and experts to identify characteristics of fisheries that could lead to success of bycatch networks. Additional meetings with more focused groups of fisheries representatives may be necessary.
 - Timeline: Listening sessions will be an important part of initial outreach, and occur in late Spring or Summer 2021. The meeting with fisheries leaders and experts should be held in Summer 2021, with other meetings held throughout the period of performance as needed.
- **Task 4: Conduct research to evaluate the feasibility of potential future implementation of hotspot network in various Gulf of Mexico fisheries.** The selected Contractor(s) will conduct research on the environmental and socioeconomic characteristics of fisheries to allow the project team to evaluate the feasibility of bycatch networks in these groups.
 - Timeline: Fisheries will be evaluated following initial outreach, where fisheries express their interest in project participation. Therefore, work on this task is expected to begin no sooner than Autumn 2021.
- **Task 5: Participate as a member of the Project Team, including in the development of the project management plan.** The selected Contractor(s) will participate as a member of the Project Team along with NFWF and NOAA as well as additional subcontractors, including developing the project management plan that will describe the critical needs for implementing successful bycatch networks, the process to select fisheries for potential future network implementation including necessary meetings and outreach, and throughout the lifetime of the project.



- Timeline: The Project Team will be active throughout the project. The development of the project management plan is expected to be complete by August 2021.

REQUIRED EXPERTISE

Communication Specialist:

- Expertise and experience developing communication strategies for conservation and environmental restoration projects. Experience with fisheries or marine related projects preferred.
- Ability to effectively communicate technical information to a wide range of audiences.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to work independently in a rapidly changing environment.
- Excellent organizational skills and attention to detail.

Fisheries Liaison:

- Advanced degree (Masters or Doctorate) or equivalent experience with concentration in fisheries ecology, conservation science, or environmental policy preferred.
- Three to five years' experience working with government agencies and/or nongovernmental organizations on issues related to fisheries conservation and natural resource management.
- Knowledge of fisheries in the Southeastern United States. Demonstrated experience working with fisheries in and around the Gulf of Mexico preferred.
- Familiarity with industry-based approaches to bycatch reduction and experience in facilitating constructive dialog with fishery leaders and communities.
- Experience building consensus and managing conflict among diverse partners.
- Ability to effectively communicate technical information to a wide range of audiences.
- Excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Ability to work independently in a rapidly changing environment.
- Ability to work successfully in a team environment.
- Excellent organizational skills and attention to detail.
- Computer proficiency, including databases, spreadsheets, word processing, and graphics. Familiarity with fisheries spatial data and fisheries technology is preferred.

CRITERIA FOR COMPETITIVE APPLICATIONS

Proposals will be evaluated and scored on the following criteria. Offerors should organize their Proposal Narrative based on these sections:



1. **Understanding of the Scope of Work.** The Scope of Work must demonstrate an understanding of the goals of the activities involved. This section should include a description of how you will communicate with NFWF and program stakeholders and report on progress, results, and deliverables. Weight: 10%
2. **Technical Approach.** The proposed technical approach for conducting project outreach, hosting, research, communications, and planning should clearly describe the proposed methods necessary to complete this work across multiple fisheries in and around the Gulf of Mexico. The section must demonstrate that those methods are robust and appropriate for conducting the Hotspot Project and address any areas of complexity or uncertainty associated with conducting the project. Weight: 20%
3. **Qualifications of Proposed Personnel.** This section should clearly describe which tasks each member of the team will conduct and how their training and experience provide the requisite experience to do so successfully. Weight: 25%
4. **Contractor's Past Performance.** The proposal should include information on the primary investigator(s)'s past performance experience relevant to engaging and informing fisheries stakeholders and/or communications planning. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered. If subcontractors are to be used, information should be provided that demonstrates their past performance as well. Describe how that past performance is applicable to this evaluation. Weight: 20%
5. **Budget.** The proposed budget should itemize work in sufficient detail to enable reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the entire funding request. You must use attached Contractor Budget Template. You may add columns to the template for additional tasks if needed, but should not make any other changes. If applicable, please include the proposed budget for equipment purchase in the proposal separate from the Contractor Budget Template. Weight: 25%

ELIGIBLE OFFERORS & CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Eligible applicants include institutions of higher education, other nonprofits, commercial organizations, international organizations, and local, state and Indian tribal governments.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the offeror warrants and represents that it does not currently have any apparent or actual conflict of interest, as described herein. In the event an offeror currently has, will have during the life of the contemplated contract, or becomes aware of an apparent or actual conflict of interest, in the event an award is made, the offeror must notify NFWF in writing in the Statement of Quotations, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the Statement of Quotations) of such apparent or actual conflicts of interest, including organizational conflicts of interest. Conflicts of interest include any relationship or matter which might place the contractor, the contractor's employees, or the contractor's subcontractors in a position of conflict, real or apparent, between their responsibilities under the award and any other outside interests, or otherwise. Conflicts of interest may also include, but are not limited to, direct or indirect financial



interests, close personal relationships, positions of trust in outside organizations, consideration of future employment arrangements with a different organization, or decision-making affecting the award that would cause a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts to question the impartiality of the offeror, the offeror's employees, or the offeror's future subcontractors in the matter. Upon receipt of such a notice, the NFWF Contracting Officer will determine if a conflict of interest exists and, if so, if there are any possible actions to be taken by the offeror to reduce or resolve the conflict. Failure to resolve conflicts of interest in a manner that satisfies NFWF may result in the proposal not being selected for award.

By submitting a proposal in response to this solicitation, the Offeror warrants and represents that it is eligible for award of a Contract resulting from this solicitation and that it is not subject to any of the below circumstances:

Has any unpaid Federal tax liability that has been assessed, for which all judicial and administrative remedies have been exhausted or have lapsed, and that is not being paid in a timely manner pursuant to an Contract with the authority responsible for collecting the tax liability, where the awarding agency is aware of the unpaid tax liability, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Was convicted (or had an officer or agent of such corporation acting on behalf of the corporation convicted) of a felony criminal violation under any Federal or State law within the preceding 24 months, where the awarding agency is aware of the conviction, unless the agency has considered suspension or debarment of the corporation and made a determination that this further action is not necessary to protect the interests of the Government; or

Is listed on the General Services Administration's, government-wide System for Award Management Exclusions (SAM Exclusions), in accordance with the OMB guidelines at 2 C.F.R Part 180 that implement E.O.s 12549 (3 C.F.R., 1986 Comp., p. 189) and 12689 (3 C.F.R., 1989 Comp., p. 235), "Debarment and Suspension," or intends to enter into any subaward, contract or other Contract using funds provided by NFWF with any party listed on the SAM Exclusions in accordance with Executive Orders 12549 and 12689. The SAM Exclusions instructions can be found here: <https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Proposals must be submitted under the same cover at the same time, in three distinctly labeled and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, 2) Budget, and 3) Evidence of Financial Stability. Interested parties should submit proposals electronically to NFWF (Gray.Redding@nfwf.org) using the requirements below:

1. Technical Proposal

- Format: Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF with a font size no smaller than 11 pt.
- Contact information: Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, DUNS number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#.
- Narrative: Concise (8-page limit) description of the work plan and a summary of the applicant's expertise and experience, organized by the Criteria for Competitive Applications.



- Biographies: Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area.
 - References: List two clients who have received services from the applicant that is similar in nature to the proposed work; include names, phone numbers, and email address.
2. **Budget:** The budget proposal must be submitted using the following NFWF budget template: https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Hotspots_Contractor%20Budget%20Template_Feb2021.xlsx
 3. **Evidence of Financial Stability:** The applicant shall provide proof of financial stability in the form of financial statements, credit ratings, a line of credit, or other financial arrangements sufficient to demonstrate the applicant's capability to meet the requirements of this solicitation.

SELECTION PROCEDURE

A panel of NFWF staff will review the proposals. Offerors may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. NFWF may select more than one Contractor through this opportunity to address the tasks outlined in the scope of work.

SUBMISSION DEADLINES

February 16, 2021	Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF. Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Gray Redding (Gray.Redding@nfwf.org) . NFWF will post all the questions and responses to all questions so that all offerors have access to them at the same time. In order to provide equitable responses, all questions must be sent to NFWF no later than 5:00 PM (EST), February 16, 2021.
February 18, 2021	NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website at: https://www.nfwf.org/media-center/announcements/request-proposals-independent-contractors-fisheries-liaison-and-communications-specialist
March 2, 2021	Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals. Proposals must be sent electronically as an email attachment to Gray Redding (Gray.Redding@nfwf.org) by 5:00 PM (EST), March 2, 2021. Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.
March	Interviews with selected finalists
April	Tentative NFWF Notification to Offerors