



Request For Proposals

Contract to evaluate the National Coastal Resilience Fund and the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Program

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: September 26, 2021, 8PM EST

OVERVIEW

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) seeks a qualified contractor to evaluate resilience investments made through two grantmaking programs: the National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) and the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Program (Sandy). One award will be made for this contract.

BACKGROUND

The [National Coastal Resilience Fund](#) (NCRF) aims to restore, strengthen, and enable rapid recovery of natural systems so they may protect coastal communities from the impacts of coastal storms, sea and lake level changes, flooding, and coastal erosion. By restoring or otherwise enhancing natural systems, habitat improvements can simultaneously benefit fish and wildlife resources. The NCRF was established in 2018 in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The NCRF invests in conservation projects throughout the United States that restore or expand natural features such as coastal marshes and wetlands, dunes and beach systems, oyster and coral reefs, forests, coastal rivers and floodplains, and barrier islands that minimize the impacts of storms and other naturally occurring events on nearby communities. Between 2018 and 2020, the NCRF has invested over \$95 million in approximately 125 projects to strategically plan for, design, restore, and monitor coastal habitats that reduce threats to flooding from sea level rise, coastal erosion, increased frequency and intensity of storms, and impacts from other chronic and episodic events. Although all 125 grant projects could potentially be reviewed as part of the evaluation, several of the evaluation questions only pertain to restoration projects (50 of the 125 grants).

Through the [Hurricane Sandy Resiliency Grant Program](#), NFWF and the Department of the Interior (DOI) have invested in resilience projects in the northeastern states most impacted by Hurricane Sandy (Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia). Between 2013 and 2016, the Hurricane Sandy Program, administered through both DOI and NFWF, invested more than \$302 million to support 160 projects designed to improve the resilience of ecosystems and communities to coastal storms and sea level rise. The three overarching goals of the program were to:

1. Reduce the impacts of coastal storm surge, wave velocity, sea-level rise, and associated natural threats on coastal and inland communities.
2. Strengthen the ecological integrity and functionality of coastal/inland ecosystems to protect communities and to enhance fish and wildlife and their associated habitats.



3. Enhance our understanding of the impacts of storm events and identify cost-effective resilience tools that help mitigate the effects of future storms, sea level rise, and other phenomena related to climate change.

Commissioned by DOI and NFWF, Abt Associates conducted an initial external [evaluation](#), completed in 2019, of the 160 Hurricane Sandy Program projects funded between 2013 and 2016. Only a subset of these projects (39) will be included in this evaluation.

Monitoring and Assessment

Both NFWF resilience programs include ecological and socio-economic monitoring of on-the-ground resilience projects. Over the years, NFWF has actively developed standard metrics and monitoring protocols to help measure the impact of coastal resilience investments.

For NCRF, grantees implementing on-the-ground restoration work are required to conduct ecological monitoring of their projects. For Hurricane Sandy, DOI and NFWF have funded long-term ecological monitoring of a subset (39) of the Hurricane Sandy Program grant portfolio which will be evaluated under this contract. Socio-economic benefits for both programs are in the process of being assessed by a third-party contractor.

In addition, NFWF has commissioned the development of a web-based metrics database and related data repository to store ecological and socioeconomic data on NFWF-funded resilience projects. The metrics database, still in development, will house data on key monitored metrics. The data [repository](#) contains additional monitoring data collected by grantees that provide in depth information or context for the data in the metrics database. Data from Sandy and NCRF grants are currently being entered into the data repository and may be available to support the evaluation. Data are anticipated to be entered into the metrics dashboard over the coming 1.5 years.

SCOPE OF WORK

The Scope of Work for this contract is for an evaluation of up to 125 projects funded under the National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF) and 39 projects funded under the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Program (Sandy), focusing on the evaluation questions listed below. The Offeror should propose a technical approach for conducting the evaluation that clearly describes robust and appropriate methods for answering these questions. The Offeror should also propose a project schedule that allows for a thorough but timely evaluation of each of these questions. The period of performance should not exceed 24 months.

Ecological Outcomes:

1. What ecological outcomes have been achieved by the NCRF and Sandy restoration grants?
2. How do actual project-level improvements in habitat structure and function compare to theoretical timelines¹ from the literature for restoration of that habitat type to its full maturation?

¹ Theoretical timelines for marsh restoration, beach and dune restoration, living shorelines, and aquatic connectivity were developed as part of the Phase I Hurricane Sandy program [evaluation](#).

- a. What factors (e.g., project characteristics or activities, environmental conditions) were associated with increased or delayed maturation relative to the theoretical timeline?

Community Resilience Outcomes:

3. What community resilience and broader community benefits have grantees and community members observed (e.g., flood reduction, recreation, tourism) following implementation of the NCRF and Sandy projects?
4. What evidence is there, if any, that individual coastal resilience projects that were funded by NFWF, DOI, and NOAA and clustered geographically, generated cumulative human community resilience impacts that were greater than the sum of their parts?

NCRF Program Priority Areas:

5. Are the NCRF program priority areas (see four priority areas [here](#)) the most appropriate ones for effective implementation of the program? Do they address formerly identified challenges to effective program implementation, such as permitting challenges?
6. To what extent do planning and design grants lead to funding and construction of restoration projects?
 - a. What attributes of planning and design grants contributed most to increased development of future restoration projects? Does the NCRF support those attributes sufficiently?

Broader Impacts:

7. To what extent did NCRF and Sandy planning, design, and/or on-the-ground construction projects act as catalysts, demonstrations, or proofs of concept such that they led to:
 - a. Increased adoption of natural and nature-based features in resilience decision-making and implementation by others outside of the project, including other NFWF grantees, other resilience practitioners, and local and nearby community decision-makers?
 - b. Increased ability of grantees to raise other sources of funding?
 - c. Increased implementation of restoration best practices (e.g., use of new technologies, practices being applied in new locations) beyond the grants?
8. What project attributes were associated with increased adoption of natural and nature-based features in resilience decision-making and implementation by others outside the project?
9. Are there barriers to implementing larger scale natural and nature-based features and, if so, how could NFWF address them?

Long-term Sustainability:

10. Have practices and/or strategies that support the long-term sustainability of the resilience outcomes been incorporated into NCRF and Sandy projects and to what extent are they succeeding (or likely to succeed)? What risks to sustainability remain?

NFWF will provide the selected Contractor with the following information:

- Records of grant awards – amounts awarded, project descriptions and grantee information
- Project reports for specific grants, as needed
- Polygons of grant project locations
- Project data on ecological metrics that grantees have provided to NFWF
- Phase 1 Hurricane Sandy [Evaluation](#): *Evaluation of Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resilience Program* (2019)

Tasks:

- Finalize the evaluation questions and design, in consultation with NFWF
- Data collection and analysis
- Develop findings and recommendations
- Prepare contract deliverables

Deliverables:

- Monthly high-level written summaries of progress and key findings to NFWF (throughout contract term)
- Draft report for NFWF review and feedback
- Draft presentation to NFWF
- Final presentation to NFWF and key program funding partners
- Final report for NFWF staff and Board of Directors
- 2-page summary of the evaluation results for NFWF's Board of Directors

The reports and presentations should include evaluation results, key findings and recommendations. The deliverables are intended for a general audience and should be tailored appropriately. The final report will be made publicly available on NFWF's website.

Schedule: Anticipated start date is December 1, 2021. Offeror should include a project schedule for tasks and major milestones in the proposal. The Contractor should anticipate regular check-in calls with NFWF, as well as NFWF review of products throughout the project.

REQUIRED EXPERTISE AND PROPOSED STAFF

The successful offeror must have expertise in program evaluation, preferably in the field of natural infrastructure and resilience, as outlined below. Joint proposals from a prime and sub-contractors are welcome but please note that only one contract will be awarded for this project.

- The Lead Evaluator should have 10+ years of experience in evaluation study design and implementation, including experience using the research methods proposed for this evaluation.

- The proposed team's prior work should include evaluations of grantmaking programs, preferably in the fields of natural infrastructure and coastal resilience.
- Experience working with federal, state, and local governmental agencies, conservation districts and nongovernmental organizations involved with coastal resilience efforts is strongly preferred.
- Expertise in presenting complex information clearly and concisely to a non-technical audience in writing and verbally must be demonstrated.
- Ability to adhere to contract timeline and budgets must be demonstrated.
- Experience conducting and disseminating research involving humans as subjects is required.
- Education and training at the Masters or PhD level required for the Lead Evaluator and members of the team who are leading evaluation tasks.

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 evaluation. This section should also reference an anticipated timeline for completion, as well as 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 the evaluation should clearly describe the proposed methods necessary to conduct the project. The section must demonstrate that those methods are robust and appropriate for conducting the evaluation and address any areas of complexity or uncertainty associated with the evaluation questions. Weight: 30%
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: 20%
4. **Contractor's Past Performance.** The proposal should include information on the primary investigator(s)'s past experience in program evaluation, especially in the field of coastal resilience or natural infrastructure. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered. If sub-contractors are to be used, information should be provided that demonstrates their past performance as well and how the firms have successfully worked together in the past. Describe how that past performance is applicable to this evaluation. Weight: 15%
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 the 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. Small and minority businesses, and women's business enterprises are strongly encouraged to apply.

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 Proposal, or in subsequent correspondence (if the issue becomes known after the submission of the Proposal) 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 a 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 four distinctly labeled and separate documents: 1) Technical Proposal, 2) Budget, 3) Evidence of Financial Stability, and 4) Example report (unless embedded in the Technical Proposal).

Interested parties should submit proposals electronically to NFWF (Arielle Mion; Arielle.Mion@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. (Embedded tables can use a different font size from 11pt; however, please ensure the size is sufficiently large for readability.) Note: The only section of the proposal that has a page limit is the work plan narrative (maximum of 6 pages).
- **Contact information:** Primary contact person, company name, address, phone, email, website, DUNS number, and EIN/Taxpayer ID#.
- **Narrative on Proposed Work Plan:** Concise (6-page limit) description of the proposed work plan.
- **Past Experience:** Summarize applicant's expertise and experience. List recent (last 2-5 years) accomplishments and previous services related to the technical expertise offered.
- **Biographies:** Resumes and/or Vitae of key staff and their role in the proposed work area (not part of the 6-page limit).
- **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.
- **Example:** Provide an evaluation report on a similar topic, embedded in your technical proposal or attached separately.

2. **Budget:** The budget proposal must be submitted using the following [NFWF budget template](#).

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 and program partners will review the proposals. Offerors may be asked to modify objectives, work plans, or budgets prior to final approval of the award. Only one award will be made for this project. If multiple institutions are involved, they should be handled through subcontracts.



SUBMISSION DEADLINES

- Sept 6, 2021** Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF.
- Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Arielle Mion; Arielle.Mion@NFWF.ORG. NFWF will post all the questions and responses on its website 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 8:00 PM EST, September 6, 2021.**
- Sept 9, 2021** NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website [here](#).
- Sept 26, 2021** Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals.
- Proposals must be sent electronically as an email attachment to Arielle Mion; Arielle.Mion@NFWF.ORG by **8:00 PM EST, September 26, 2021.** Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.
- Dec 2021** Contract award to selected Offeror