



## Request for Proposals

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

**Release Date: 30 March 2023 | Proposal Deadline: 24 April 2023**

#### 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 (Hotspots Project) by working with the Project Team to complete two separate tasks, as follows: 1) carry out the Hotspots Project Plan including fishing community engagement and 2) support implementation of a communications plan for the Hotspots Project including updating the existing communications plan as needed. The Hotspots 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, with anticipated participation by Contractor(s) once selected. The Contractor 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 based on need and a review of performance for an additional 12 months or more. 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. Travel within the Gulf is also expected. The Contractor(s) should have the willingness and ability to start in approximately May 2023.

#### 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 spill<sup>1</sup>.

The Communications Networks and Mapping Tools to Reduce Bycatch – Phase 1 Project (Project) is one of 18 projects included in the *Deepwater Horizon* Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Restoration Plan 2, released in December 2019<sup>2</sup>, to partially compensate for injuries to fish, sea turtles, marine mammals, and mesophotic and deep benthic communities.

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<sup>1</sup> *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/](http://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/restoration-planning/gulf-plan/)

<sup>2</sup> *Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Final Restoration Plan 2/Environmental Assessment: Fish, Sea Turtles, Marine Mammals, and Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities*. Available online:



The goal of the Project is to reduce 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 these hotspots during fishing. The objective of the 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 engaging an array of priority fisheries and designing systems and approaches to create near-real time maps of bycatch hotspots in those fisheries. These maps would be coupled with communication tools that gather information from and provide information to fishermen on the high bycatch risk in those areas. These systems may take advantage of emerging or existing advanced technologies and tools. An initial universe of priority fisheries for the feasibility study was identified over the last few years of work 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. Generally, these fisheries include a variety of shrimp trawl fisheries, all sectors of the reef fish fishery, and the commercial highly migratory species fishery among others. The project's interest in these fisheries is primarily based on known challenges with bycatch or initial feedback from the fishery on interest in these tools. This list of fisheries is not exhaustive as the project seeks to inform and engage all Gulf of Mexico or nearby fisheries where these networks may benefit both the fishery and the restoration of species injured by the DWH oil spill.

The primary outcome from the ongoing Project will be designs or implementation plans for communication networks, and hotspot mapping technology or approaches that can be implemented in the future. These implementation plans will be developed through conversations with a variety of fisheries stakeholders to understand data elements, incentives, and guidelines or organizational structure needed to drive voluntary participation and realize bycatch benefits. The Project is expected to require an additional two years of work to select and plan for potential future bycatch networks, with approximately two years of work already completed. Implementation of designed hotspot networks is anticipated to be accomplished in future project phases contingent on funding 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 engage priority fisheries and design effective, voluntary approaches. Because of this close coordination and the variety of fisheries the 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. With prior contractor support, the Project Team has developed an internal communications strategy that works to articulate the goals, strategies, and progress of the Project to a variety of audiences. The Contractor selected to execute Task 1 below (see “Scope of Work”) will be expected to initially review this existing communication strategy before updating, revising, and leading its execution.

The selected Contractor(s) will coordinate closely with NFWF and NOAA staff in the execution of their roles in the Project.

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<https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/2019/12/226-million-projects-approved-second-open-ocean-restoration-plan>



## SCOPE OF WORK

The selected Contractor(s) will coordinate aspects of the Project between the Project Team and fishing communities. NFWF anticipates that it may select multiple contractors to undertake the 2 roles listed below, which will take place concurrently. Offerors should indicate and budget which role(s) they wish to compete for and describe their knowledge and experience that qualify them to perform the role(s) identified. NFWF will determine which task(s) 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: Review and update as needed project Communications Plan to guide both current and long-term communications strategies.** The selected Contractor(s) will execute a communications plan to guide messaging, outreach, and communication for this phase of the Project. As the project has an existing communications plan, the selected contractor will initially focus on reviewing and updating the plan to reflect their approach. This process should begin upon contract execution with the goal to complete the update within the first month. The communications plan will also be revisited and updated on a periodic basis as the project progresses. Key deliverables associated with the communications role include a revised communications plan containing a description of key audiences and messaging strategies to reach them. Additionally, this role will be responsible for developing educational materials targeted at various audiences with the input of the Project Team. Note that materials may need to be translated into Vietnamese, Spanish, or other languages to most effectively reach target communities. The proposal and workplan should describe the offeror's approach to accomplish this work and the expected timeframe. While additional communication channels are likely to be utilized, NFWF currently hosts a Project webpage that will serve as a key communication platform (<https://www.nfwf.org/programs/bycatch-hotspots-initiative>).

- **Timeline:** As described above, the communications plan will be a living document, updated regularly. Key deliverables and components of the communication plan and related activities will be completed throughout the course of the contract period as outlined in the subtasks below.
- **Subtask 1: Prepare informational materials targeted to fishermen and other stakeholders for project workshops, meetings and outreach.** The Project began with an initial outreach and engagement effort to inform fisheries about bycatch communication networks and the opportunities available through the project. Some general outreach is likely still necessary, but a key next step is targeted engagement with specific fisheries that show potential for successful bycatch network implementation, requiring more in-depth and customized materials.

- Deliverable: Develop or revise existing communication materials to target specific fisheries audiences. The project expects to engage approximately 5 -7 distinct fisheries in repeated meetings to discuss network implementation. It is likely that 1 to 2 documents will need to be tailored to speak to each group, and half of those groups will benefit from translation.
- Timeline: The opportunity to develop more specific materials will occur throughout the contract period of performance. Initial activity will include reviewing and as appropriate revising existing materials, which can begin upon contract execution.
- **Subtask 2: Participate as appropriate in fisheries stakeholder meetings.** The selected offeror for the communications specialist role should expect to have staff present at stakeholder meetings to ensure they are aware of participant engagement progress. This will be important in updating materials and messages.
- Timeline: Meetings are expected to begin in Fall 2023, with at least 1 multiday in-person meeting expected annually for the approximately 5 target fisheries. Additional remote meetings will also be held to facilitate continued stakeholder engagement.

## Fisheries Liaison Role

- **Task 2: Conduct project outreach and engagement with fishing communities.** The selected Contractor(s) will represent the project at meetings, workshops, and conferences. They will be expected to lead 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 and organize participation of these groups in project meetings and workshops.
  - Timeline: These activities are expected to begin upon contract initiation, once the contractor gains familiarity with existing efforts, and continue throughout the period of performance.
- **Task 3: Host and facilitate group meetings with fishermen and diverse stakeholder groups around the Gulf of Mexico region.** The selected Contractor(s) will organize and facilitate in person and virtual meetings and one on one conversations with a variety of stakeholder groups including fishermen, fishery managers, and scientists. These meetings will focus on engaging stakeholders to consider key questions on the design and implementation of future bycatch communication networks. Areas of consideration will include technology, data, willingness to communicate, network guidelines/organizational structure, incentives, and overall desires for the network. The selected Contractor(s) will also organize and facilitate these meetings and workshops that target development of bycatch network implementation plans with fisheries that are identified as having the highest potential for successful implementation. NFWF anticipates that approximately 5 fisheries groups will be closely engaged.
  - Deliverable: The Project Team expects that the Contractor(s) will host in-person workshop meetings with focused groups of fisheries representatives. NFWF anticipates at least 1 multiday in-person meeting annually for each of the approximately 5 engaged fisheries.



Additional remote meetings will also be held to facilitate continued stakeholder engagement.

- Timeline: Planning for meetings should commence soon after contract initiation, with the aim to begin holding meetings in Fall 2023 continuing throughout the period of performance as needed.
- **Task 4: Develop implementation plans for hotspot networks in various Gulf of Mexico fisheries.** Based on information and input gained through the stakeholder meetings, input from the Project Team, and research/literature review conducted, the selected Contractor(s) will write hotspot network implementation plans for a subset of the fisheries engaged by the project. NFWF anticipates that 2 or 3 fisheries, with an absolute maximum of 5, will show sufficient promise to warrant developing a full implementation plan. Research associated with this task may look into the environmental and socioeconomic characteristics of fisheries, discovery of available data or resources, and review of existing hotspot networks to inform the project team and stakeholder meeting participants. Ongoing summaries and results of research will be used to evaluate feasibility of networks in various fisheries and to drive the cooperative development of bycatch hotspot network implementation plans.
  - Deliverable: NFWF expects that the project will result in 2 to 3 implementation plans (and certainly no more than 5) describing the elements necessary to implement future hotspot networks including structure, data and technology needs, estimated costs. The exact elements necessary for inclusion in an implementation plan will be refined as stakeholder meetings take place. At a minimum implementation plans should contain the information necessary for a fishery to pilot a network and for NFWF and NOAA to evaluate the potential bycatch impacts of an implemented network. The contractor will work in cooperation with fisheries stakeholders and the project team to develop these documents.
  - Timeline: Work on this task will coincide with stakeholder meetings and be necessary through the period of performance.
- **Task 5: Participate as a member of the Project Team, including in the review and updating of the project management plan.** The selected Contractor(s) will participate as a member of the Project Team along with NFWF and NOAA, including periodic review and updating of the project management plan. Currently the project team meets biweekly to share updates on project progress and upcoming work.
  - Timeline: The Project Team will be active throughout the project. The review and updating of the project management plan is expected to occur at least annually.

## REQUIRED EXPERTISE

Communication Specialist:



- Expertise and experience developing and executing communication strategies for conservation and environmental restoration projects. Experience with fisheries or marine related projects involving stakeholder engagement preferred.
- Ability to effectively communicate technical information to a wide range of audiences including through design and production of printed materials such as infographics, fact sheets, etc.
- 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 using both excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Strong project management skills, including the ability to flexibly manage and adapt to changing project needs, both independently and as part of a team.
- 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 with varied stakeholders across multiple fisheries in and around the Gulf of Mexico. The section must demonstrate that those methods are robust and appropriate for conducting the 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%

## 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](mailto:Gray.Redding@nfwf.org) and [Hannah.Lam@nfwf.org](mailto:Hannah.Lam@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, UEI 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 **Hourly Rate tab** of the following NFWF [Contractor Budget Template](#).
3. **Evidence of Financial Stability:** The applicant shall provide proof with the RFP response 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

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| <b>April 7, 2023</b>  | Deadline for questions about the solicitation to NFWF. Offerors should submit questions regarding this solicitation via email to Gray Redding ( <a href="mailto:Gray.Redding@nfwf.org">Gray.Redding@nfwf.org</a> ) and Hannah Lam ( <a href="mailto:Hannah.Lam@nfwf.org">Hannah.Lam@nfwf.org</a> ). 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 <b>no later than 5:00 PM (EST), April 7, 2023</b> . |
| <b>April 12, 2023</b> | NFWF will post the questions submitted regarding the solicitation and responses on the NFWF website at <a href="https://www.nfwf.org/programs/bycatch-hotspots-initiative">https://www.nfwf.org/programs/bycatch-hotspots-initiative</a> .   |
| <b>April 24, 2023</b> | Deadline for receipt by NFWF of proposals. Proposals must be sent electronically as an email attachment to Gray Redding ( <a href="mailto:Gray.Redding@nfwf.org">Gray.Redding@nfwf.org</a> ) and Hannah Lam ( <a href="mailto:Hannah.Lam@nfwf.org">Hannah.Lam@nfwf.org</a> ) by <b>5:00 PM (EST), April 24, 2023</b> . Proposals must be provided in Word format or searchable PDF.  |
| <b>April and May</b>  | Interviews with selected finalists   |
| <b>June</b>           | Tentative NFWF Notification to Offerors  |

## 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/>