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REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Develop and Conduct Stakeholder Engagement Plans for the Fishery Ecosystem Efforts in the Gulf

Proposal Submission Deadline: October 5, 2025

Term of Contract: 16-18 months

Maximum Funding Available for Work: \$285,000

The Gulf Council (Council) seeks a highly qualified contractor with social science and communications expertise to conduct stakeholder engagements for the Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The contractor is tasked with designing, planning, and conducting engagement efforts to both communicate the Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan and to systematically gather and synthesize information on ecosystem issues that are of concern to Gulf stakeholders. The Council anticipates the contractor will be hired by Fall 2025 and work should be completed, and final reports submitted by Spring of 2027.

Background

The Council is in the process of developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan to help inform fishery management decisions with consideration for emerging climate and ecosystem pressures. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan aims to create a framework and structured planning process to incorporate ecosystem approaches to fisheries management in the Gulf through the identification, prioritization, and examination of individual Fishery Ecosystem Issues. Fishery Ecosystem Issues are specific fishery management problems that extend beyond conventional single species management and can potentially be addressed with Council action. Developing a Fishery Ecosystem Plan centered around Fishery Ecosystem Issues is meant to advance a process for identifying ‘right-sized approaches’ for integrating ecosystem information into the management process to prevent long-term impacts on fish stocks while maintaining access and opportunities to fisheries resources consistent with the goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is currently working on a pilot Fishery Ecosystem Issue focused on red tide, a harmful algal bloom known to disrupt fishing effort and cause episodic mortality in some fisheries species. Other Fishery Ecosystem Issues that the Council and its Ecosystem Technical Committee have previously recommended for consideration are reducing regulatory discards, finfish depredation, and the effects of climate change on fish and fisheries.

Part of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan process includes identifying and prioritizing additional Fishery Ecosystem Issues for the Council to consider, particularly those that arise from stakeholder observations. Stakeholders are critical to the Council process, and this is no different

when identifying Fishery Ecosystem Issues, as stakeholders are often the first to recognize concerns on the water. Climate and ecosystem stressors impact distinct Gulf stakeholder groups in different ways, and effects can vary depending on region, target species, and community dependence on fishing. The Council seeks to understand the Fishery Ecosystem Issues that affect the wide diversity of stakeholders in the Gulf, including a concerted effort to engage with stakeholders who do not typically participate in the Council process and are outside of the Council's regular communications channels. Gaining a holistic understanding of Fishery Ecosystem Issues in the Gulf and the way that they impact fisheries social, economic, and ecological systems will aid the Council in developing informed management advice in a changing environment. The draft [Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan](#)¹ is available for more information on the broader Fishery Ecosystem Issue concept, but please note that the Fishery Ecosystem Plan is still in development and modifications are in progress.

Scope of Work

The Council is seeking a qualified contractor with social science and communications expertise for its Fishery Ecosystem Plan. The contractor will be responsible for two phases of stakeholder engagement and synthesis. In the first phase, the contractor will be tasked with developing and conducting engagements to communicate the Fishery Ecosystem Plan and to identify stakeholder-driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues of concern. The Fishery Ecosystem Plan is a new concept in the Gulf that is different from typical Council processes, and the contractor is expected to work closely with Council staff to develop approaches to communicate the goals and expectations of what the Council aims to achieve, considering lessons learned from Fishery Ecosystem Plan communications used by other regional management councils where appropriate. The contractor will be responsible for developing a plan to identify the appropriate stakeholder groups to engage, including approaches to reach communities that do not typically participate in the Council process. The contractor will also be responsible for developing the appropriate methodology to gather information on Fishery Ecosystem Issues of concern both in-person and with online tools, and coordinating and conducting the engagements. The contractor will document key outcomes and prioritize findings on stakeholder-driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues for the Council to consider.

In the second phase, the contractor will be tasked with developing and implementing methods to evaluate the impacts of select Fishery Ecosystem Issues on Gulf stakeholders following Council prioritization. Understanding the social and economic impacts of Fishery Ecosystem Issues is an important step toward building resilient fishing communities in the face of environmental stressors. The individual Fishery Ecosystem Issues to be examined will not be determined until the first phase of the project is complete, and specific questions to be investigated will be tailored to the issue at hand, but examples could include assessing perceived changes in fishing opportunity, access, and time spent at sea, effects on revenue and costs, and ability to switch to alternative economic opportunities. The contractor is expected to work closely with Council staff throughout the project and refine approaches based on feedback from staff, the Council, and the appropriate advisory bodies.

¹ The Council contracted LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc. to develop a draft Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan, which was submitted to the Council in 2022. The Council has approved of the draft as a framework for continued development of the Gulf FEP.

Statement of Work – Services Expected from Contractor

The contractor will be responsible for all work products outlined below and is encouraged to contribute additional products and suggestions in the proposal to perform this work. The contractor is responsible for meeting in-person at the Council office soon after the contract is executed to discuss and finalize the work plan and monthly thereafter (virtually) with the staff Ecosystem Analyst and other technical staff to ensure the scope of work is appropriately addressed. Anticipated responsibilities and work products should include but not be limited to the following:

Phase 1

- Develop a communications plan to identify and engage with relevant stakeholder groups in the Gulf, including stakeholders who are outside of the Council’s established communications networks and do not typically participate in the Council process. If appropriate, the contractor may build upon the [stakeholder assessment](#) previously developed in support of the Gulf Fishery Ecosystem Plan.
- Develop a structured process to identify stakeholder-driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues (climate and ecosystem concerns relevant to fisheries management), which could include focus groups or participatory modeling, but the contractor is encouraged to propose and design effective approaches in coordination with Council staff.
- Work closely with Council staff to develop approaches to effectively communicate the goals and expectations of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, including in-person engagements and online resources.
- Implement the plans developed above – conduct engagements with representative Gulf stakeholder groups to introduce the Fishery Ecosystem Plan and identify stakeholder-driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues, including at least one in-person engagement in each Gulf state.
- Contribute to the development of online tools to solicit and prioritize Fishery Ecosystem Issues from additional stakeholders.

Phase 2

- Develop and implement effective methods to evaluate the social and economic impacts of priority Fishery Ecosystem Issues on Gulf fishery participants using established qualitative and/or quantitative measures. Analytical methods may include, but are not limited to, surveys*, interviews, focus groups, participatory modeling, statistical analysis, and economic assessments. The contractor is encouraged to propose and design effective approaches in coordination with Council staff to ensure relevance and applicability.

Synthesis and reporting

- Contribute to review of Fishery Ecosystem Plan chapters associated with stakeholder engagement and communications.
- Document and synthesize key outcomes of each project phase in draft updates and a final report to the Council, Ecosystem Technical Committee, and Outreach and Education Technical Committee.
- Anticipated timeframe for reports and in-person meetings to present findings to the Council and its advisory bodies:

- December 2025 | Outreach and Education Technical Committee – Present Phase 1 stakeholder communications plan and approach for identifying stakeholder-driven Fishery Ecosystem Issues.
- April 2026 | Council Meeting– Present results of Phase 1 stakeholder engagement efforts and submit draft report on Fishery Ecosystem Issues identified by stakeholders.
- September 2026 | Ecosystem Technical Committee – Present Phase 2 approach for evaluating social and economic impacts of priority Fishery Ecosystem Issues.
- April 2027 | Council Meeting – Present results of Phase 2 analysis of impacts of Fishery Ecosystem Issues on stakeholders and submit draft report on social and economic impacts of priority Fishery Ecosystem Issues.
- May 2027 | Final report submitted.

*Please note that [Paperwork Reduction Act](#) (PRA) restrictions apply, and the contractor will need to seek the appropriate clearance to conduct surveys (with consideration for the project timeline). Otherwise, the contractor should propose alternate methods that do not require PRA clearance.

Contractor Skills and Desired Experience:

1. Familiarity with the U.S. Federal fisheries management system, including a basic understanding of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other Applicable Laws.
2. General understanding of commercial and recreational fisheries and stakeholder groups in the Gulf of America.
3. Ability to work independently to review, assess, and synthesize materials to meet deadlines.
4. Strong written and verbal skills. Demonstrated ability to organize, synthesize, and compartmentalize information into clear categories of information.
5. Demonstrated experience facilitating and conducting both social and economic analyses using approaches such as focus groups, participatory modeling workshops, surveys, economic assessments, or other relevant approaches.
6. Demonstrated experience communicating and engaging with fisheries stakeholders.
7. The successful candidate will not have a conflict of interest, defined as any financial or other interest which conflicts with actions or judgments and could impair objectivity and/or create a competitive advantage for individuals or relevant organizations.

Applicants should submit the requested information to the Gulf Council by email by 11:59 pm on October 5, 2025. Requests for additional information can also be accepted at this email address: RFP.socialscience@gulfcouncil.org

How to Apply: Your complete application package should include: 1) cover letter, 2) resume/ curriculum vitae, 3) a proposal with the following items outlined below; and 4) contact information for two references or previous clients. Send to:

By regular mail:

Dr. Carrie Simmons
Executive Director
Gulf Council
4107 West Spruce Street, Suite 200
Tampa, Florida 33607 USA

By email: RFP.socialscience@gulfcouncil.org

Proposal Guidelines: Applicants should submit a proposal of no more than 15 pages. The page limit applies to the proposal only; cover letters, resumes/CVs, budget, and references do not count toward the page limit. Proposals should include the following elements:

Executive Summary: A summary of the proposed statement of work and timeline of deliverables, and brief summary of the applicant's qualifications.

Proposed Scope of Work: A detailed plan for addressing the statement of work described above. This should include a summary of potential work products, a brief summary of how the project will be managed, and a list of all personnel who are expected to work on the project.

Qualifications of Applicant: A brief summary of the qualifications of the applicant and other team members. Curriculum vitae should be included for all individuals who will work on the project.

Milestone Chart: Proposed timeline of accomplishments and deliverables, with consideration for the anticipated timeframe described in the statement of work. All work must be completed, and a draft report must be presented to the Council at its April 2027 meeting. Final edits must be completed, and a final report submitted to the Council by May 31, 2027.

Proposed Budget: A detailed budget, including the basis for charges (e.g., hourly rates, fixed fees) and a breakdown of expenses by category (e.g., salary, supplies, travel, subcontracts). Please note that the Council has budgeted separately for contractor travel to the Council office and to Council/Technical Committee meetings, as well as for 5 in-person stakeholder engagement meetings for Phase 1 of the project (1 day each, 1 per Gulf state, including travel and meeting space). This information may be included in the proposed budget but does not count toward the maximum funding described above. Additional travel and meeting space for stakeholder engagements beyond 5 meetings for Phase 1 should be appropriately detailed in the proposal and budget. In-person engagements may also be necessary for Phase 2 but are the responsibility of the contractor and should be appropriately detailed in the proposal and budget. Indirect costs are only allowable with an approved current federally negotiated indirect rate agreement.

References: Names, full addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses for two references for whom the applicant has provided similar services to those requested or are familiar with the applicant's work and the quality of the applicant's work products.

Proposal Evaluation Criteria and Next Steps: Proposals will be evaluated based on proposed approach and budget to complete work products, and demonstration of the skills and experience

as described in the ‘Contractor Skills and Desired Experience’ section above. Applicants can also list other relevant experience. The Council may request additional information as deemed necessary or negotiate modifications to an accepted proposal. After a consultant is selected for funding, a formal contract will be provided to the consultant.

Disclaimer

1. This project is being funded by federal funding authorized under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act through NOAA Fisheries Service and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council NOAA award number NA24NMF441C0003.
2. Proposals and their accompanying documentation will not be returned but retained as part of the Council’s administrative documents.
3. All applicants included in the proposal must disclose any conflicts of interest and/or pending civil/criminal/fishery legal actions. Applicants that appear on the Sam.gov debarment and suspension list will be disqualified.
4. The Council reserves the right to accept or reject any or all applications received, negotiate with all qualified applicants, cancel or modify this request for proposals in part or in its entirety, or change the application guidelines, when it is in the best interest of the Council.