



## Facilitation Services for Portland Area Nitrogen Criteria Advisory Group Request for Proposals

### BACKGROUND

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) invites proposals to provide Facilitation Services for a newly created Portland Area Nitrogen Criteria Advisory Group.

CBEP mobilizes collective action to strengthen the Bay's ecological and economic vitality, fostering a shared commitment to Casco Bay. It focuses scientific expertise and financial resources on helping watershed communities address regional challenges such as water pollution, habitat degradation, and adaptation to climate change. Since 1990, when Casco Bay was named an "estuary of national significance," the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has supported CBEP's regional work through its National Estuary Program. CBEP is affiliated with the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine. Further information on CBEP is available on our website, <http://www.cascobayestuary.org>.

While nitrogen and phosphorus are essential nutrients for plant growth, elevated levels in coastal waters can trigger a cascade of negative consequences—such as algal blooms, low dissolved oxygen and fish kills. Excess nutrients can aggravate coastal acidification, which threatens shellfish and other marine organisms. It is also thought that nutrient enrichment will act synergistically with other stressors affecting the Bay, including climate change, to degrade ecosystem health, and threaten the value of the Bay to our communities. Although today Casco Bay shows only limited evidence for significant negative environmental impacts of excess nutrients, nutrient concentrations in portions of the Bay are high. More importantly, nutrient pollution is likely to increase in coming decades with population growth and changes in land use.

Maine currently lacks numeric water quality criteria for nutrients, so waters designated as impaired due to nutrient pollution must show both (1) a violation of one of Maine's narrative water quality criteria (such as marine life support) or quantitative criteria (such as dissolved oxygen), and (2) a link to elevated nutrient levels or relevant biological indicators.

### THE PORTLAND AREA NITROGEN CRITERIA ADVISORY GROUP

From 2017-2019, CBEP convened a broadly represented Nutrient Council to develop recommendations to policymakers, regulators, and funders on how to address nutrient impacts in Casco Bay. The Council produced a final report in 2019 entitled "Nutrient Pollution in Casco Bay, Maine: State of the Science and Recommendations for Action," which included a recommendation to develop numeric nutrient criteria. In response to this recommendation as well as a 2007 Maine Legislative Resolve, LR 1895, that identified the need for nutrient criteria development in Casco Bay, the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is pursuing nitrogen criteria for marine waters in the greater Portland Harbor area of Casco Bay.

DEP is the state agency responsible for development of criteria to address compliance with water quality standards under the Clean Water Act, and will be supported in the nutrient criteria development effort by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and a Nutrient Scientific Technical Exchange Partnership and Support (N-STEPS) program contractor. The compilation and analysis of existing data and recommended framework for criteria establishment and implementation will occur concurrently with meetings of the Portland Area Nitrogen Criteria Advisory Group ("Advisory Group").



CBEP and DEP are jointly convening an Advisory Group that brings together representatives of municipalities, wastewater treatment plant operators, stormwater professionals, environmental groups, government agencies and academic institutions. The anticipated size of the Advisory Group, while yet to be finalized, is approximately 15-20 participants. It will collectively:

- evaluate existing information, perspectives, and values;
- assess the feasibility of different approaches to establishing numeric criteria for nitrogen and response indicators in marine waters of the Portland area, and;
- identify the potential costs, benefits, and challenges associated with implementation of nutrient criteria.

An important goal of the Advisory Group will be to work together collaboratively to avoid both the long-term ecological harm and the political gridlock that emerges when nutrient pollution issues are addressed in a crisis atmosphere. CBEP anticipates supporting the Advisory Group by allocating staff time to planning logistics and supporting its deliberations. DEP, in close collaboration with CBEP, will staff the Advisory Group, participate in all meetings, and gather and summarize for the Advisory Group available scientific, technical, and other information as needed.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CBEP seeks proposals from individuals or firms able to provide neutral facilitation services to manage the development of consensus around nutrient criteria framework for the Portland area. The Advisory Group process will begin in December 2020 or early January 2021 with an organizational meeting between the facilitator/s and core CBEP and DEP staff. We anticipate that the work of the Advisory Group will then require quarterly meetings for one year during calendar year 2021. A brief meeting of the facilitator/s and core CBEP and DEP staff should occur before each Advisory Group meeting to establish an agenda, set goals, and anticipate challenges. The first meeting of the Advisory Group should be held no later than January 2021.

A meeting summary that includes at least meeting outcomes, decisions, and task assignments will be prepared by the facilitator/s following each Advisory Group meeting, and should be included in the proposal cost.

While in-person Advisory Group meetings are desirable, meetings will be held remotely via a virtual platform if meeting spaces cannot accommodate the size of the Advisory Group due to covid-19 precautions. Participants will be given the option of calling in to meetings via the virtual platform, so remote participants are likely for each meeting even if in-person meetings are possible.

#### PROPOSAL FORMAT

**Proposals are due via email to [marti.blair@maine.edu](mailto:marti.blair@maine.edu) by midnight on Monday, November 23, 2020.**

The proposal shall contain the following:

- Letter of transmittal including complete contact information, signed by an authorized representative of the firm.
- Narrative describing proposed approach to organizing and managing a multiple-meeting effort to develop consensus around issues of marine nutrient criteria development and implementation in the Portland area. The narrative should lay out an approach for two parts of leading the process:
  - (1) Quarterly Advisory Group meetings, including agenda-setting, meeting facilitation, record-keeping, reporting progress, decision-making, and an overall framework for making progress;
  - (2) Supplementary services as needed to support facilitation of the Advisory Group, such as working with CBEP and DEP between meetings to ensure preparations for each meeting are complete, preparing supporting information, discussing issues of concern, and other requested assistance.
- Proposed project timeline.



- Project budget through December 30, 2021, divided into two tasks: meetings of the Advisory Group; supplementary services. Based on costs and available funding, CBEP may choose to award limited tasks. The budget should indicate hourly rates by task, estimated hours per task, and estimated travel costs. Travel costs should assume that in-person Advisory Group meetings may be held in Portland, and that core team planning meetings will occur virtually.
- Statement of billing rates and policies.
- Statement of qualifications of the principal staff assigned to the project as well as the qualifications of the firm, 1 page maximum per person. The statement of qualifications should include facilitation experience as well as any scientific or policy experience that will help the contractor attain credibility with the group and understand the complex issues involved.
- Identification and qualifications of any subcontractor(s), 1 page maximum per subcontractor.
- Examples of similar projects conducted by the firm, 1 paragraph maximum per project.
- References including contact information, in the form of a list of references or letters of reference, 1 page maximum per reference letter, no more than 3 references.
- Any exceptions to the requirements of this RFP.
- The total proposal package should not exceed 15 pages.

Prospective bidders are welcome to contact CBEP staff for more information or feedback before submitting a proposal.

- Curtis Bohlen, CBEP Director, 207-780-4306, [curtis.bohlen@maine.edu](mailto:curtis.bohlen@maine.edu)
- Marti Blair, CBEP Program Manager, 207-780-4306, [marti.blair@maine.edu](mailto:marti.blair@maine.edu)

## OUTCOMES AND PRODUCTS

The expected outcomes and products to be provided to CBEP, based on the tasks awarded, will include:

- Facilitation of four meetings of the Portland Area Nitrogen Criteria Advisory Group.
- Documentation supporting four meetings of the Advisory Group, including agendas, invitations, preparation of supporting information in advance of meeting, summarized notes of meeting discussions, list of attendees, list of follow-up actions, as well as any other necessary documentation.
- Meeting rooms set-up, both virtual and in person facilities.
- Supplementary services to CBEP, DEP, and/or members of the Advisory Group as necessary to support facilitation of the Advisory Group meetings including preparing supporting information, discussing issues of concern to the Council, and other requested assistance.
- Detailed, itemized invoices.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

The following criteria will be used in reviewing the proposals and selecting the firm:

- Understanding of the project.
- Methodology for conducting the project.
- Qualifications and past experience of firm and individuals proposed to work on project.
- References.
- Timeline and availability – the project needs to occur coincident with DEP’s project support from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and contractor, currently slated to be completed by the end of calendar year 2021.
- Fees and rates.
- Other criteria as identified by the review committee.

The review committee may request further information or an interview before making a final selection.



#### AWARD AND FOLLOW-UP

An announcement of award is anticipated by early December, 2020.

A contract agreement will be entered into between Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, University of Maine System, and the successful firm prior to work commencing. The successful contractor will be required to enroll as a supplier in the University of Maine eProcurement system, MaineStreet Marketplace.

A condition of the award is that Casco Bay Estuary Partnership and EPA award information be acknowledged in any reports, articles, press releases, newsletters, or other materials where descriptions of the project may appear. An electronic copy of CBEP's logo will be provided for this purpose.