

Request for Proposals

Design Services for the Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

2026 State of the Bay Report

April 27, 2026

BACKGROUND

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (CBEP) fosters collective action to strengthen the ecological and economic vitality of Casco Bay, and to help watershed communities address regional challenges such as climate adaptation, water pollution and habitat degradation. CBEP mobilizes scientific expertise and financial resources to help sustain Casco Bay. Since 1990, when Casco Bay was named an “estuary of national significance,” the US Environmental Protection Agency has supported CBEP’s regional work through its National Estuary Program. CBEP is affiliated with the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine in Portland, Maine. Further information is available on our website: www.cascobayestuary.org.

The 2026 State of the Bay Report

Produced every five years, CBEP’s State of the Bay Report (the Report) offers an overview of the condition of Casco Bay, by reviewing a selection of “indicators”, recent research, and community actions. The information in the Report illuminates status and trends of the condition of the Bay and the Casco Bay watershed as well as documents community engagement with the Bay.

The Report will be released in fall 2026.

CBEP will publicize and disseminate the report and its contents via social media and the State of Casco Bay event planned for October 2, 2026, at USM’s Portland campus.

The 2026 State of the Bay Report is a semi-technical document aimed principally at partners and the public. While the behind-the-scenes analysis of status and trends are technically rigorous, the Report and ancillary products should be broadly accessible to readers from varied sectors and backgrounds. A key programmatic and design challenge is to make the report's content accessible to engaged but non-technical audience.

Examples of target audiences include, but are not limited to:

- Elected officials;
- Members of municipal boards and commissions;
- High school students studying marine issues;
- Community members interested in the health of the Bay.

While we will produce and share paper copies of the report, we anticipate that most access to the report and its contents will be online. We intend to produce the Report in both print and digital versions. CBEP is open to creative ideas for digital presentation of Report contents. The printed and digital versions need to be linked visually and reflect the branding and identity of CBEP. For CBEP Brand & Style Guidelines, please follow [this link](#).

Digital Accessibility

All content must comply with federal requirements for digital accessibility for products produced with federal funds and the related University of Southern Maine digital accessibility standards. This means compliance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA standards.

Additional Services

The awarded contract will include print management services for the 2026 State of the Bay Report and other related outreach materials, but does not include the costs of printing, which CBEP will pay directly to the printer.

Relationship with the State of the Bay Event

CBEP will host in-person State of Casco Bay events on October 2, 2026. We are collaborating with a local artist, Jordan Parks, to provide visual branding at the events and to prepare cover art for the Report. The goal is to create a common visual identity for written and in-person components of the 2026 State of Casco Bay. The successful bidder will need to provide the artist with specifications for cover art, and work with her to develop a clear State of Casco Bay 2026 visual identity.

Ownership of Products and Intellectual Property

Possession of all the text, maps, tables, and graphics prepared for these publications shall rest with Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, which shall have a royalty-free, non-exclusive, and irrevocable license to reproduce, publish, or otherwise use and to authorize others to use the publications and online content.

DETAILS

State of the Bay Report

The 2026 State of the Bay Report will include narratives describing the status and trends of environmental “indicators,” organized into about twenty chapters. The document will include supporting information including a Table of Contents, Introduction, List of References, Acknowledgements, etc. Editable content should be provided. The full report should not exceed 60 pages.

Each chapter narrative will have a mix of text, maps, tables, charts, photos, and infographics which combined will equal either two (for most) or four 8.5"x11" pages. CBEP will supply text, some photos, and draft tables, technical graphics and maps. The designer may also provide images, along with appropriate permission for their use.

To provide a sense of the scope (not necessarily design) of the State of the Bay Report, bidders may wish to look at past State of Casco Bay Reports, which are available online at <https://www.cascobayestuary.org/strategic-planning/state-of-casco-bay/>.

Our organizational branding and approach to communication have evolved since preparation of the 2021 report. Tools for digital communication have also changed. Bidders are not bound to design choices or methods for sharing content online in past State of Casco Bay reports. Bidders should consider design choices that address modern communications practices and the needs and priorities described in this RFP and in CBEP's brand guidelines.

The designer should create a final Report with clearly understood and visually pleasing indicator narratives, presented in an interesting and accessible format in both print and digital versions. The designer will need to prepare clear, accessible, and reader-friendly maps, figures, tables, and infographics.

Most indicators will include one or more technical graphics (tables, charts, graphs, maps, etc.). CBEP staff are developing preliminary graphics and maps using a variety of data analysis, statistical, and geographic information systems software. CBEP will share draft graphics and/or underlying data with the designer to facilitate production of final graphic designs. The designer will work with CBEP staff to identify file formats and other details to support efficient preparation of final graphics.

The designer (or an approved subcontractor) will be responsible for producing final maps with cartography and design consistent with the rest of the document. The designer will be responsible for producing finished maps and therefore will be responsible for selecting any geographic data necessary to produce visually pleasing background map layers. CBEP will provide the designer with geospatial data that reflects CBEP analysis. CBEP will provide feature-based geospatial data such as ESRI Shapefiles, unless we agree to another format in advance. We will provide raster-based data in mutually agreed-upon data formats (ESRI GRID, GeoTIFF, etc.).

Related Outreach Materials.

In addition to the State of the Bay report, which staff will present at the State of the Bay event on October 2, 2026, we are seeking related outreach materials to supplement the report. The materials could come in a variety of formats but should be designed for

display or distribution at the event as well as for broader outreach. Examples of outreach materials could include fact sheets, posters, or other products.

We encourage bidders to include in their bid (as a separate line item) a cost estimate for producing posters or other supporting documents based on up to ten State of Casco Bay chapters. We also encourage bidders to provide specifications of how they would invoice for preparation of any additional products, with appropriate per-piece or per hour rates.

Supporting Graphics Files

The designer will provide CBEP with electronic versions of final maps, tables and figures that can be readily adapted for use in other print publications and in presentations.

CBEP is commissioning work by a local artist for the report cover design.

RFP Timeline

| Step | Anticipated Date |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| RFP released | April 27, 2026 |
| Proposals due to CBEP | May 15, 2026 |
| CBEP review of proposals | Week of May 18th |
| Selection of Contractor | May 22, No Later than May 29 |
| Contracting | May 22 through June 5 |
| Kickoff meeting with Contractor | Week of June 8th |

Proposed Project Timeline

| Task | When |
|--|---|
| In person project kickoff meeting within two weeks of contract award | June 8, 2026 |
| Initial draft SOCB "Chapters" to designer | Selected chapters at the June 8 th kickoff meetings. |
| Coordination with CBEP staff on preparation of technical graphics. | Week of June 15th |

| Task | When |
|--|-------------------|
| Draft SOCB chapter layouts and discussion of online design options with CBEP Staff | Week of June 22 |
| SOCB chapter layout and online design options chosen | Last week of June |
| Chapters to designer in "Final Staff Draft" form as available from staff | July |
| Chapters returned to CBEP Staff in "Final Graphic Draft" form. | August |
| SOCB Report finalized | August 31, 2026 |
| SOCB Report to printer | September 4, 2026 |
| SOCB Report posted on CBEP website | September 4, 2026 |

SELECTION CRITERIA

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

- Understanding of the project
- Design philosophy (why and how)
- Proposed designs (what)
- Qualifications and experience of firm and individuals proposed to work on project, including subcontractor(s)
- Recommendations / conversations with prior clients
- Finalize by August 31, 2026
- Proposed fee(s)

The review committee may request a phone call or an online meeting for further information. If such a call is requested, it is likely to occur during the week of May 18th.

Approximate Budget

CBEP anticipates a design budget in the range of **\$20,000–\$30,000**. However, proposals will be evaluated in comparison to all submissions received. Proposers are encouraged to submit budgets that reflect their recommended level of effort and approach, while demonstrating efficiency and overall value.

Proposal Format

The proposal shall contain the following:

- Letter of transmittal including complete contact information; signed by an authorized representative of the firm
- Timeline for project completion
- Fee; Statement of hourly rates and estimated hours
- Statement of qualifications of the principal staff assigned to the project as well as the qualifications of the firm, 1 page maximum per person
- Identification and qualifications of any subcontractor(s), one-page maximum per subcontractor
- Examples of similar projects conducted by the firm
- References including contact information, one-page maximum per reference, no more than 3 references
- Any exceptions to the requirements of this RFP
- The total proposal package should not exceed fifteen pages

Submission Requirements

Please send proposals electronically to Natalie Bingham at Casco Bay Estuary Partnership, natalie.bingham@maine.edu no later than 5:00 p.m. EST on May 15, 2026.

Please submit any questions in writing to Natalie Bingham at natalie.bingham@maine.edu.

Contact phone: (207) 780-4306

Follow-up

CBEP plans to notify the successful bidder by May 29th.

A contract agreement will be entered into between Casco Bay Estuary Partnership (as part of the University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine System) and the successful bidder prior to work commencing. The successful contractor will be required to enroll as a supplier in the University of Maine System's eProcurement system, Maine Street Marketplace.

Timing of payments will be tied to the project timeline. Invoices should be submitted no more often than monthly. A portion of total funding may be withheld pending successful project completion.