National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
Request for Proposals, Virtual Conference Platform

Summary of Solicitation

From June 8-10, 2021, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation will host Capitol Hill Ocean Week (CHOW) 2021, its nationally recognized ocean and Great Lakes conference. There are 3 events that are part of CHOW: (1) virtual policy conference; (2) Ocean Awards Gala; and, (3) Capitol Hill Day. The Foundation is seeking an easy-to-use online platform that can support the 3 events. For the conference, the Foundation wants to provide a complete conference experience virtually, including live and pre-recorded sessions, exhibit halls, and audience interaction and networking capabilities. The conference is open to the public and free. For the gala, the Foundation intends to host an in-person gala in Washington, DC (hub) with satellite dinners/receptions held simultaneously across the country participating in the main gala remotely. The Foundation will sell tickets for the gala event. For Hill Day, the Foundation wants an online solution that allows for virtual group and individual meetings with members of Congress and their staff. Invitations to participate in Hill Day will be restricted.

Background

The Foundation is the national non-profit partner for America's national marine and Great Lakes sanctuaries. The National Marine Sanctuary System includes 14 national marine sanctuaries and two marine national monuments. These unique waters sustain critical habitats and ecosystems that provide homes to countless marine species. They preserve America's rich maritime heritage, and are living laboratories for science, research, education, and conservation.

Convened by the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation every June, Capitol Hill Ocean Week brings together national and global stakeholders to address pressing science, conservation, and management issues facing our ocean and Great Lakes. The conference includes high-level plenaries with ocean visionaries and breakout sessions for deeper discussions.

In 2021, CHOW will focus on concrete steps we can take collectively to strengthen racial and ethnic diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in marine and Great Lakes conservation, science, and policy. Therefore, an online platform that allows for participant engagement with speakers and each other is a critical component.

We are seeking a technology partner with a history of providing a successful platform for other, similar events and enthusiasm for exploring new and innovative programming ideas.

Project timeline: Start immediately on contract signing, with an event date of June 8, 9, and 10,

2021. Completed site will be available one week beforehand, with the ability to make minor adjustments.

Scope of Work

The Foundation seeks a technology partner who will work with us and our event consultants (Precon) to create an innovative hub for the nation's largest ocean and Great Lakes policy conference. The Foundation is open to exploring a single platform that includes most, if not all of the event requirements; or, building out an event ecosystem that may include a few different applications to bring the conference to life.

Primary Requirements
- Program
  - Ability to host plenary sessions with thousands of attendees, and up to 4 concurrent sessions at a time
  - Recorded and archived for future use (video on demand)
  - Ability to stream pre-recorded and live presentations. The Foundation anticipates pre-recording plenary and concurrent sessions. For the plenaries and some sessions, the Foundation would like to allow for live Q&A.
  - For the plenaries and all sessions, the Foundation would like to allow for live chat.
- Support and Preparation
  - Platform Orientation and training support for speakers and panelists (both pre-recorded and live sessions)
  - Program manager to assist with the planning, preparation, and build-out of virtual conference hall
  - Dedicated microsite to host event
  - Day-of technical support
- Communications and Audience Interaction
  - Social media integration with Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram
  - Interactive Q&A and polling with speakers and audience members
  - Ability to share slides and documents through the duration of the conference
  - In-session Live Chat function
  - Virtual Happy Hour and networking capabilities -- both open to the public and ticketed for smaller groups.
  - Virtual networking room
  - Virtual Expo hall, with individual "booths" that include video capabilities and the option to directly interact with attendees face to face or with short presentations
  - Ability to embed links to donation forms
  - Options for advertising, including pop-ups, banners, and/or side-bar ads
  - On-site registration
  - Closed-captioning of pre-recorded and live videos in English and Spanish
  - Translation of site text into Spanish

Potential Challenges and Opportunities

The ability of participants to network with speakers and each other is a hallmark of CHOW. This being the second year that CHOW is virtual, it is important to bring the same appeal of the in-person conference to the virtual platform. Building a robust experience for all attendees is key to this goal. The Foundation proposes to offer multiple options for engagement for all participants, with formal sessions, spur of the moment conversations, and promotion of our sponsors and partners. The look of the actual conference should be modern and appealing, well-designed and welcoming, and easy to use.

The quality of presentation and flow of the program are critical to its success. With most of the world currently working virtually, capacity for streaming and bandwidth will be an issue. We need a plan to keep everything moving smoothly, and contingency plans in case of interruption.

Panelists and speakers will be spread out across the country; considerable support will be needed to ensure that they and their audiences all have as great of an experience as possible. We seek to make participation at all levels seamless and easy. A plan for their engagement should include considerations for technical literacy and access.

There are many staff involved in the planning of this event. A clear delineation of roles, tasks to complete, and timeline will keep the team on track. The process for decision-making should have zero ambiguity.

Format:
- We are open to recommendations if the conference should be one full-day as in 2020, or two half-days.
- If recommending one full-day for the conference, please offer a recommendation if the gala should be on the same day or following day to allow for break in online fatigue.
- Hill Day will be the day following the conference

Proposals should include:
- A description of how the applicant would approach the scope of work sought including parameters such as timeline, who is involved, scope of involvement, and deliverables and milestones to be met.
- A list of project deliverables, including estimated timelines for each deliverable and overall project completion.
- A detailed project budget that includes the cost of the contractor's time, materials, supplies, and any other expected expenses to bring the project to a successful completion. No travel costs are expected for this budget.
- A brief history of your work, including examples of work for similar organizations. Please provide two sample deliverables from past projects with similar size and scope. Ideally these would take place in demo format on a live site.
- Credentials and qualifications.

Proposal Budget:

The Foundation will accept proposals up to a maximum of $36,000 for the entire scope of work.

Proposal Deadlines:

Please submit the above-requested documents no later than **11:59 pm ET on Friday, December 18, 2020**, to conference@marinesanctuary.org with the subject line: CHOW 2021 Technology Proposal. Please direct questions to Jamie Smith, Events Manager, at jamie@marinesanctuary.org. We are happy to arrange conference calls to discuss this RFP, provide additional information, and address questions.