



# Request for Proposals (RFP) for Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities Educational Resource Evaluation

## Purpose

[National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#), in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Habitat Conservation is excited to offer funding in support of evaluation and expansion of existing education and outreach resources for the *Deepwater Horizon* Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities (MDBC) restoration projects. Mesophotic and deep benthic communities are vast and complex seafloor ecosystems that are foundational to ocean food webs. Despite the depth of these resources, human activities and environmental perturbations can threaten the health and resiliency of these communities. The 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill off the coast of Louisiana led to the injury of 770 square miles of these habitats in Gulf waters. The MDBC restoration projects are working on restoring these habitats found below 50 meters deep. One of the MDBC projects includes education and outreach efforts and resources that engage and inform members of the general public, K-12 students and teachers, resources users, and stakeholders about the value and importance of MDBC, the restoration activities being undertaken as a part of the portfolio-wide efforts, and the actions that can be taken to protect MDBC. So far, these efforts and resources have included the successful rollout of multimedia content for web and social media, exhibits and displays at public venues such as museums and aquariums, livestream broadcasts from ships and coral labs conducting restoration activities, K-12 lesson plans and activities, engaging videos, a touchscreen interactive program, a children's book and animated series, and more.

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and NOAA are seeking science education and evaluation experts to expand upon educational resources that have been developed over the last 5 years, and/or implement evaluation mechanisms to measure the reach and impact of these resources.

## OVERVIEW OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

### Objective

The objective of the Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities Resource Evaluation competition is to hire a contractor (or multiple contractors) who will evaluate existing education and outreach resources for the MDBC restoration projects and/or expand upon these resources. Evaluation methods would include targeted implementation of educational resources and the utilization of qualitative and quantitative surveys to gauge effectiveness of materials across various audience types and knowledge levels.



In particular, the materials include:

1. A set of 3 educational carts that are currently on display at Moody Gardens in Galveston, Texas



- a. See more information about the educational carts here: <https://www.artistboat.org/gulf-in-depth>
2. Educational materials that can be implemented in classrooms and informal education settings, such as community programs, aquariums, or museums, either in-person or virtually.
    - a. See more information and all examples of existing education and outreach materials here: <https://marinesanctuary.org/mdbc/>

Contractors may include both of these target materials or a subset in their evaluation proposals. Please clearly list in your application which resources you are proposing to evaluate and/or expand upon. Multiple contractors may be selected.

## Scope of Work

### Desired Outcomes

1. Expand upon existing educational resources available for use to improve the public's connection to mesophotic and deep benthic communities.
  - o Any proposal including the expansion of existing resources must also include thorough implementation and evaluation plans for the new resources as well as some from the existing collection.
2. Coordinate and conduct engaging interpretation and educator workshop sessions in a variety of settings utilizing the educational resources.
  - o Track the number of individuals engaged in these education and outreach sessions
3. Evaluate effectiveness of resources and sessions through virtual and/or in-person assessments designed for various educational settings, including formal and informal.
  - o All assessments must include attitudinal and behavioral surveys of participants to gauge potential behavior and attitude changes along with an increase in knowledge resulting from the engagement with the educational resources.



- Formal settings, such as classroom and workshop sessions, should include formative and summative assessments.
4. Produce thorough evaluation report(s) that explain the evaluation methods and quantify impacts of educational resources on a variety of audiences, age ranges, and settings.
  - Please note that these reports will need to go through a review process. We encourage applicants to leave time in their timeline for this review.
5. Utilize the evaluation reports to create recommendations for changes or improvements to the resources.

The timeline of project activities should be clearly addressed in the applicant's proposal. Project proposals that do not address whether work can be completed within the noted timeline will not be rated as highly in the review process. Project duration should begin in August, 2026 and end by April 30, 2028, inclusive of time needed to complete analysis of evaluations and final report.

### **Budget Requirements**

Proposal budgets should not exceed \$100,000 each and applicants are strongly encouraged to submit scaled budget options as more than one proposal may be considered.

### **Required Attachments**

See "Application packages" list below under "How to Apply" section

### **ELIGIBILITY**

- The applicant must not have a paid staff member serving on the Foundation's Board of Trustees.
- The applicant should be a U.S. organization or independent contractor in the United States or territories and cannot be a federal employee, federal government agency, or a foreign entity.
- The applicant should be able to provide a federal tax id #.

### **Desired Capabilities**

The experience and skills of the applicant may vary depending on the proposed resource, but the following are desired:

- Educational background and experience that includes knowledge of science/environmental education and communication best-practices in informal and/or formal settings
- Experience with the development and implementation of educational resources, including (but not limited to): lesson plans, experiential learning activities, and/or multimedia products
- Experience or background knowledge in marine biology and conservation, ocean exploration, environmental restoration, data visualization, and/or science communication
- Ability to identify a target audience (or audiences) and tailor educational content to the needs and context of that audience
- Knowledge of and experience evaluating educational resources to determine reach and measure whether educational objectives are being met
- Knowledge of and ability to align resource with standards such as the National Marine Educators Association's Ocean Literacy framework and/or the North American Association for Environmental Education's Guidelines For Excellence
- Experience working within Google Drive and commenting on/editing live documents



- As applicable, digital resources should meet [Section 508 standards](#), as much as possible. This includes captions for all audio/video content, alt text for all images, appropriate tags for content.

## HOW TO APPLY

Application packages should be submitted by 11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time on Friday, July 17, 2026. Please submit your application package to the Foundation through C-STAAR – the Foundation’s Collaborative System for Tracking Activities, Awards, and Reporting - using the following link: <https://marinesanctuary.smartsimple.com/>.

The C-STAAR platform will ask individual questions related to your project, answered through separate form fields, and will have some questions that allow for uploading additional materials or providing links to those materials. If your proposal is selected for funding, your agreement will be managed through the C-STAAR platform.

Please direct all questions regarding the submission of applications to the C-STAAR platform to [support@marinesanctuary.org](mailto:support@marinesanctuary.org) with the email subject line: RFP QUESTION\_MDBC Resource Evaluation: [Name of Your Organization].

Application packages should include:

- Brief overview of the organization’s qualifications
- Short proposal, including timeline, for how the organization would complete the activities outlined in this RFP and statement of work on the schedule provided;
- Detailed budget proposal;
- 1-2 examples of past implementation and evaluation of educational products
- PI and project team’s CVs and/or outline of qualifications and relevant past performance

All required fields of the application in C-STAAR must be completed before submission. Applications can be saved as a draft to return to and submit when completed. Any additional contributors to work on the proposal per organization must be invited and accepted into C-STAAR. Multiple users cannot work on the proposal simultaneously.

Determinations will be made by July 31, and applicants notified shortly thereafter.

## REVIEW PROCESS

### Evaluation Criteria

The technical review and evaluation process will be graded by the following point system. Each proposal will be subject to a technical review process and evaluated on the following elements, for a total of 100 points:

- Vision for how educational resources will be used and interpreted, , including target audience(s), implementation plan, and evaluation plan (40 pts.)
- Clear project timelines, including deliverables and metrics that will be reported back as part of the evaluation (20 pts.)
- Proposed budget, including detailed outline of how the budget will be allocated to achieve implementation and evaluation goals through purchase of supplies, staff time,



- travel, etc. (20 pts.)
- Qualification of the applicant (20 points)

## APPLICATION LOGISTICS

### Useful Resources

Applicants may find it useful to explore the existing education and outreach resources linked above in the Objective section as well as other content related to the Mesophotic and Deep Benthic Communities restoration portfolio to gain a deeper understanding of the ecosystems in question, restoration goals, etc. More resources can be found here:

- NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service Office of Habitat Conservation MDBC Homepage: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/southeast/habitat-conservation/mesophotic-and-deep-benthic-communities-restoration>
- NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science MDBC Homepage: <https://coastalscience.noaa.gov/science-areas/restoration/gulf-mdbc-restoration/>
- 2025 MDBC Public Webinar recording: <https://www.gulfspillrestoration.noaa.gov/2025/05/materials-may-6-mesophotic-and-deep-benthic-communities-restoration-webinar-now-available>
- MDBC Technical Publications: <https://repository.library.noaa.gov/gsearch?collection=noaa%3A44280&terms=MDBC>
- Web Stories:
  - [Restoration Lab Corals Return to the Seafloor for the First Time](#)
  - [Artist Boat, Moody Gardens exhibit sheds light on Gulf's depths](#)
  - [Heavy Lifting: Marine Debris Removal in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary](#)
  - [Inventory of Northern Gulf of Mexico Deep Seafloor Habitat Data and Maps Now Available](#)
- MDBC Restoration Cruises StoryMap: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/908a2d2000894c2b8a6daafb8163a357>

### Timeline

- Request for Proposal Submission Open
  - All proposals must be submitted from July 1 - July 17, 2026
- Technical Review of Proposals
  - Proposals will be reviewed and scored during July 20 - July 31, 2026.
- Notification, Agreements, and Release of Funds
  - All applicants will be notified of award status on or around August 3, 2026. A contract will be created for the proposed work. The contractor must submit monthly invoices to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.
- Period of Performance
  - The period of performance for the project may span from August 2026 - April 30, 2028. The project work should be implemented from August 2026 - January 2028, with the final report due by April 31, 2028.

Please direct all questions regarding this RFP to [RFP@marinesanctuary.org](mailto:RFP@marinesanctuary.org) with the email subject line: RFP TITLE QUESTION: [Name of Organization].



## ABOUT US

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation is the official non-profit partner of NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, supporting its system of 18 marine environments from Massachusetts to American Samoa and the Great Lakes to the Florida Keys. We protect these iconic places, care for marine wildlife and habitats, honor our nation's maritime history and cultural traditions, and promote the enjoyment of these public waters through a combination of coalition-building, private fundraising and federal support.

In a quarter of a century, we've expanded and deepened people's connections and access to our ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes, and built partnerships with coastal communities and businesses alongside the over 629,000 square miles of public waters that belong to all Americans.

NOAA and the Department of the Interior are leading efforts for the Deepwater Horizon (DWH) Open Ocean Trustees to restore deep-sea communities injured by the 2010 *DWH* oil spill. The education and outreach resources and evaluation efforts are made possible by a grant from the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation with funding from the NOAA Restoration Center.

## TERMS & CONDITIONS

This is a Request for Proposals (RFP) only. Issuance of this RFP does not in any way obligate the Foundation to make an award or pay for costs incurred by potential offerors in the preparation and submission of an offer. In addition:

- (a) The Foundation may cancel RFP and not award;
- (b) The Foundation may reject any or all responses received;
- (c) Issuance of RFP does not constitute award commitment by The Foundation;
- (d) The Foundation reserves the right to disqualify any offer based on offeror failure to follow RFP instructions;
- (e) The Foundation will not compensate offerors for a response to RFP;
- (f) The Foundation reserves the right to issue an award based on an initial evaluation of offers without further discussion;
- (g) The Foundation may negotiate with short-listed offerors for their best and final offer;
- (h) The Foundation reserves the right to order additional quantities or units with the selected offer or;
- (i) The Foundation may reissue the solicitation or issue formal amendments revising the original RFP specifications and evaluation criteria before or after receipt of proposals;
- (j) The Foundation may modify the specifications without issuing a formal notice to all offerors when the revisions are immaterial to the scope of the RFP;
- (k) The Foundation may choose to award only part of the activities in the RFP or issue multiple awards based on multiple RFP activities; and
- (l) The Foundation reserves the right to waive minor proposal deficiencies that can be corrected prior to award determination to promote competition.