

## Request for Qualifications – Communications and Creative Services

Issued March 29, 2024

The York River Stewardship Committee is seeking a firm or individual to provide consulting assistance and creative services to develop branding and cohesive communications materials and strategies.

### Background and Context

Southern Maine's York River and its tributaries were designated by Congress into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in December 2022, because of the quality and significance of the river's ecological, historical, and cultural resources. The national river designation provides a coordinated structure, technical assistance, and annual funding for local river and watershed protection initiatives. With the Partnership Wild and Scenic River designation for the York River:

- The [York River](#) joins a national network of 228 rivers that have been designated into the [National Wild and Scenic Rivers System](#) as one of 18 [Partnership Wild and Scenic Rivers](#), a subset of designated rivers that do not flow through federal parks or other federally owned lands.
- The York River Stewardship Committee was formed in mid-2023. It includes town-appointed volunteer representatives from the four watershed communities: Eliot, Kittery, South Berwick, and York, Maine; plus representatives from the National Park Service and Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve.
- The Stewardship Committee is tasked with implementing the [York River Watershed Stewardship Plan](#), engaging partners, building awareness and appreciation for the river, and facilitating river conservation and stewardship for the benefit of current and future generations.
- Communities (town departments, town boards and committees), local nonprofit conservation and preservation organizations, civic groups, river users, and waterfront and watershed landowners are integral in the partnership program – having contributed to the river's suitability for Wild and Scenic designation and having key roles in preserving the river into the future.
- The York River Stewardship Committee receives annual federal funding for project/program implementation through the National Park Service, as appropriated by Congress.
- The Committee has a part-time Watershed Program Coordinator, who is responsible for general programmatic and committee communications and outreach and will use the communications products and mechanisms to be developed. She writes content for and regularly updates the Stewardship Committee's [website](#).

### Challenge/Needs

We are looking to work with an individual or group that will guide us and lead the development of our branding and communications approaches. We currently have no branding, so it's a clean slate. As a publicly funded, local volunteer committee named by Congress to protect our nationally significant river in partnership with the National Park Service, we have a complex identity. Are we a partnership program; are we a committee; or are we a designated Partnership Wild and Scenic River? – We are all of the above, *but what do we convey through branding and messaging to best promote, facilitate, and engage others in long-term river protection?*

What we think we need is listed below. However, a prioritized work scope will be finalized in coordination with the selected firm/individual. All items below may not be included in the final contract, and/or other needs/tasks not listed below could be added. Identified communications needs include:

- Development of committee-supported communications strategy
- Branding/design: coordinated set of design elements and products

- Development of a logo and usage guidelines
- Designed templates for several recurring outreach/communications products (e.g., letterhead/correspondence, annual report, newsletter, program or event flyer, presentations, email updates, profile for social media platforms)
- Communications mechanisms and products
  - An updated look for the website [www.YorkRiverMaine.org](http://www.YorkRiverMaine.org) with integrated branding and some new graphic elements, and recommendations for and implementation or addition of new features and plugins to improve basic site functionality and utility
  - Recommendations for and design of production-ready materials/products (e.g., banner, display, maps, brochure, etc.) for tabling at community events
  - Identification – and, to the extent allowed with timing and funding, development and/or implementation – of other communications planning, mechanisms, products, capacity, or committee member training needed to set the program up for long-term success and efficiency in general communications and outreach
  - Identification and establishment of communications methods or mechanisms that will allow the program to easily integrate any *future* issue-based outreach campaigns or targeted materials and messages to meet a specific objective (e.g., promoting environmentally friendly yard care practices by waterfront landowners, promoting a series of community events to celebrate the river, etc.). At this time and through this Request for Qualifications, we are not looking for content, materials, or strategy for a specific issue-based campaign.

#### Additional details

- A contract agreement through Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve, the fiscal agent for the York River Stewardship Committee, will be executed with the selected consultant for services; the Watershed Program Coordinator will be the contract manager and will help facilitate coordination with the York River Stewardship Committee. The York River Stewardship Committee is the decision-maker for approving communications strategies and branding.
- The York River Stewardship Committee meets in person monthly and can devote a portion of its monthly meetings to work with the hired communications consultant (2-4 separate one-hour sessions as needed). Committee members can be surveyed or provide additional input outside of the meetings – likely best accomplished by email or online.
- The newly formed Outreach Subcommittee (a subset of YRSC members) also meets monthly and can devote meeting time for coordination with the consultant.
- Communications mechanisms, platforms, or templates designed or recommended should be easy to use or implement by the Watershed Program Coordinator or York River Stewardship Committee members; close coordination with the Watershed Program Coordinator is expected during the review, selection and set-up for any online media or templates.
- Costs for new subscription services or basic software for the committee's ongoing operations and communications will be arranged and paid separately, not through the consultant's contract agreement. Currently, the program maintains an annual subscription with DreamHost for website hosting services (WordPress) and has a Microsoft 365 Business Standard subscription.
- Once the contract is initiated, the overall project duration ideally is in a range of 3-5 months, given the frequency of committee meetings. The Stewardship Committee would like products and approaches developed as soon as possible but recognizes that working with a volunteer committee could add time to the process.

## To apply

Submit your application proposal via email to [jh.yorkriver@gmail.com](mailto:jh.yorkriver@gmail.com) by **noon on April 23, 2024**. The application ideally is a PDF attached to the email. Hyperlinks to example products, websites, or other media may be included in the PDF. Materials submitted will be shared with a subset of the York River Stewardship Committee that will serve as a review team for applications. Application materials will be treated as confidential information. In your application:

1. Provide a concise explanation of why you are a good fit to help the York River Stewardship Committee with branding and communications.
2. Provide a task-based work scope that describes the approach, level of effort, cost, and anticipated products or deliverables for each bullet and sub-bullet listed above under “Challenge/Needs” (i.e., your work scope should treat each bulleted item as a stand-alone, discrete task for the purposes of the application). Identify key personnel for each. You may also add other tasks, services, or products you think would be beneficial, for consideration by the review team. The total for your task-based work scope, including any additions to the items listed under “Challenge/Needs,” should not exceed \$15,000. *NOTE: It is possible and acceptable for you to scope out only a subset of the bullets/sub-bullets in your response, as applicable to your skills and capacity for the project work. Be clear in your application about what you propose to address or not address from the bulleted list of needs we have identified.*
3. Highlight some branding and communications services and products that you have provided or developed for clients in the past six years.
4. Describe your skills and experience in reviewing options, making recommendations, and helping initiate or improve the use of online media, social media, or other outreach mechanisms to meet client needs.
5. Highlight examples of work that you have completed with town boards or committees, civic groups, nonprofit organizations, or municipalities to develop communications plans, develop branding, implement an outreach initiative, or promote a public benefit program (not a product or service for sale, not a member or customer recruitment campaign). Briefly describe how you worked with the group, as well as the products developed.
6. Provide contact information for two former or current clients willing to speak with us about what makes you a great candidate for this project.

## Timeline

- March 29 – Request for Qualifications issued
- April 23 (noon) – Applications due by email (receipt will be acknowledged by email)
- April 24-May 22 (anticipated) – Application review; possible reference checks; review team may conduct a brief interview or request additional information from any or all applicants
- May 31 (anticipated) – Decisions made and all applicants notified
- Early to mid-June (anticipated) – Scope of work, timeline, and contract developed and finalized
- By July 1 (anticipated) – Project begins

## Questions

Contact Jennifer Hunter, Watershed Program Coordinator for the York River Stewardship Committee, at [jh.yorkriver@gmail.com](mailto:jh.yorkriver@gmail.com) if you have questions.