

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Biodiversity Project Mississippi River Network Evaluation

DATES: RFP release: May 20, 2013
RFP responses due: June 5, 2013

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ABOUT BIODIVERSITY PROJECT

Biodiversity Project was formed as a think-tank in Madison, Wisconsin, on the premise that environmental organizations could learn a lot from traditional marketing firms. Biodiversity Project studied environmental education efforts and conducted public opinion research. We began to understand the best ways to talk about complicated environmental issues, like loss of biodiversity, and how to actually connect audiences to these issues. We identified audience values that we could tap into and effective pathways for reaching the audiences. We turned this research into reports, white papers and trainings.

Over time, Biodiversity Project staff saw that just researching environmental values and audiences wasn't enough. We realized that we could provide a greater service by helping other nonprofits, coalitions and government agencies create strategic plans that put values-based education and social marketing methods into action. In short, we began to put our philosophy into action. While we still conduct public opinion research, we also design and implement full-scale campaigns, lead strategic planning for coalitions, design communications strategies, create web-based and print materials and train partner organizations on how to reach their audiences and measure results.

Biodiversity Project now employs six full-time staff, two part-time staff and technical consultants from our Chicago office. Staff members are communications and coalition-building experts experienced in writing, organizational planning, researching and managing complex groups and programs. With advanced degrees in writing, rhetoric, education, environmental science and urban planning, we offer both content and communications specialists. To maintain our unique niche in the nonprofit world, we frequently work with technical consultants who add graphic design, web design, brand management talents to our portfolio. For the first time we are looking for outside assistance with evaluation of one of our key programs, the Mississippi River Network.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Eight years ago a group of nonprofit organizations recognizing the need for river-wide cooperation to achieve large-scale, high-impact successes formed the Mississippi River Network (MRN). During its inception, the network engaged Biodiversity Project to conduct public opinion research and create a communication strategy. Following this initial work, Biodiversity

Project secured funding for the network and began to oversee and support the Network and organize the implementation of the public communication's campaign. Biodiversity Project has continued in this capacity for the past five years.

MRN pursues specific communications and policy outcomes to protect and restore the entire Mississippi River by building strong public support that ensures a significant reduction in agricultural pollution, an ever-increasing reliance on natural infrastructure, a process to reduce the impacts of flooding and greater riverside acreage set aside for restored habitat, recreation and River access. MRN members share resources and implement whole River strategies, including a successful ten-state public communications campaign that continues to grow each year. Complementing this campaign is a policy strategy to create political will among decision-makers to restore and protect our mighty River.

MRN Outcomes

We are in the middle of a two-year grant that is focused on three specific outcome categories: public will, political will and network Strength.

Public Will

A strong foundation of public support is integral to achieving our Mississippi River policy goals. Through grassroots support, we inspire decision-makers to take actions that protect the River. In 2008 we launched the *1 Mississippi* campaign, which has now grown to approximately 6,000 River Citizens. We continue this effort and have expanded our goal to recruiting a total of 10,000 River Citizens by June 2014.

It is not enough to simply reach out and identify citizens who are committed to the River. We wish to create an inspired, unified and active public constituency. To measure this, we conduct an annual survey of River Citizens via email that tracks their knowledge and engagement.

Beyond a recognition and understanding of the River's importance, it is imperative that the public uses their voice to reach out to decision-makers to change policy. Through the work of the Network's Policy Committee and the Policy Manager, we identify advocacy opportunities that River Citizens and our Members' members can take—such as supporting River-friendly policies or attending an event on the River. We aim to have 1,000 people take an advocacy action promoted by MRN or one of our partners by June 2014.

A final piece to our public campaign is media outreach. There is so little media attention devoted to the River reflecting the ecological benefits that it provides. We are working to correct this perception through more accurate media coverage. Each year, we intend to have the Network's message appear in at least ten internet or print articles or radio or TV spots.

Political Will

The Network has spent time over the last year identifying its top priorities and policy “asks” to achieve the protection the River needs. Broadly, these priorities include:

1. Promoting Farm Bill Conservation Programs and funding of these programs
2. Ensuring the Mississippi River is a national priority for federal agencies and the Administration by supporting targeted River-related programs and policies that help with restoration and water quality.
3. Promoting updated guidelines and a policy framework for decisions on federal water project planning that include natural (or green) infrastructure to improve flood management.

To reach these goals, we are creating a groundswell of support among both the public and the policymakers who represent them. In particular, we target the local, State and Federal policymakers located along the River and ask them to pledge to protect the Mississippi River.

1. Promoting Farm Bill Conservation Programs
2. Adopting an Executive Order creating a national commitment to protection and restoration of the Mississippi watershed
3. Finalizing and implementing Principles and Requirements for water project planning and decision-making as required under the Water Resources Development Act

To reach these goals, we are creating a groundswell of support among both the public and the policymakers who represent them. In particular, we target the local, State and Federal policymakers located along the River and ask them to pledge to protect the Mississippi River.

Network Strength

Since its inception in 2005, the Network has grown in member size and strength. This broad and diverse coalition of organizations dedicated to improving the Mississippi River helps define the watershed’s unique characteristics and the serious challenges it faces. Put together, this collaborative effort helps to create a national identity for what is truly America’s river. It is important, therefore, that the Members remain active and engaged in the Network’s mission.

One simple way that Members show their support for the larger MRN efforts is through sign-on letters. When originated by MRN, we expect at least 75% of our Members to sign on and demonstrate their support. To measure the engagement of our Members, we hold an annual survey and gather feedback on the utility of our efforts. In our annual survey of Members, at least 75% of our Members stated that their participation or membership is beneficial to their organization.

The three committees established by MRN—Steering, Policy, and Public Communications—were developed to meet distinct and complementary needs. It is essential to their function that

they meet regularly with strong attendance from the members. Having at least half of the committee members attend each meeting ensures that our members' time is respected and well-spent. Furthermore, each committee selects a chair from among its members who will guide the work with MRN's best interests in mind. Staff at Biodiversity Project provide support, but it is the leadership from our three committees that sustains MRN's efforts and ensures the direction is sound.

SCOPE OF WORK

Based on goals and objectives outlined in our grant proposals (and described briefly above) Biodiversity Project has an active evaluation process for the Mississippi River Network. However, we are eager to have an independent evaluation of the Network, the campaign and our evaluation methods themselves. Specifically we are looking for assistance with three items:

1. Through outside interviews with members and others involved, provide an independent assessment of how well the Network is achieving goals and how members perceive the network and its value. Gathering any insight into member's thoughts about the future of the program is also very important. A final, detailed report with recommendations is required.
2. Evaluate the success of the public outreach campaign *1 Mississippi*. The campaign has reached, and surpassed in some cases, the quantitative goals and we have a system for collecting data to measure the qualitative goals, but an independent assessment of the effectiveness of this program is needed.
3. Review and revise all of our current evaluation methods and assist in developing more effective and comprehensive evaluation systems.

Additional information

- Location: Biodiversity Project is located in Chicago and ideally we would like a consultant who we could meet with us in-person at least several times throughout the project. However, there are minimal funds available for travel. Please consider this when bidding on this project.
- Schedule: All proposals are due by close of business on Wednesday, June 5, 2013. Two to three proposals will be chosen for further consideration and those consultants will be invited for an interview during the week of June 13, 2013. The final selection will be made approximately one week after the interviews. The selected contractor must be willing to start immediately. Some aspects of the project need to be completed in time for our annual meeting in mid-October. The final deadline for deliverables is December 1, 2013.
- Costs: Please keep in mind that we are a nonprofit organization working within a limited grant budget.

Proposals should be brief (approximately 6-8 pages) and include:

Qualifications:	Information about the experience of company/consultant
Past Relevant Experience:	Descriptions of 2-3 previous projects similar in scope to this RFP. Extensive work with nonprofits and/or coalitions is preferable.
Project Approach:	Explanation of how you would approach this project and general timeline for the project with specific deliverables.
Budget:	Please provide a detailed budget for each of the three parts of the projects as described above. Please include information about hourly rates as well.
Submittal:	Please submit electronically by Wednesday, June 5, 2013, to JBrowning@biodiverse.org
Questions?	Please email all of your questions to JBrowning@biodiverse.org