

# Request For Proposals for Facilitation and Planning of Advocacy Strategy

## Friends of Acadia

Bar Harbor, ME

**Release Date:** April 8, 2024

**Proposals Due:** May 13, 2024

### Executive Summary

Friends of Acadia (FOA) is a dedicated and independent voice for Acadia National Park (ANP) and a leader among friends' groups nationwide in effective and appropriate advocacy practices. We have a history and track record of supporting policy initiatives that strengthen federal appropriations for ANP, and we fight threats to the park at the local, state, and federal levels. FOA carefully weighs each advocacy issue to determine whether it matches our mission, available resources, and the fundamental principles that guide our advocacy work.

FOA is soliciting proposals from consultants or firms to collaborate with FOA staff and board members in crafting a public policy and advocacy strategic plan that will steer our efforts for the next three years. The strategic plan should encompass priorities already endorsed by the FOA Board including the following:

- identifying and prioritizing climate-related advocacy actions,
- outlining engagement with federal authorities to increase appropriations and promote policies and procedures which benefit the National Park Service and ANP,
- establishing guidelines around new engagements and partnerships with local, state, and federal authorities as well as with civil society organizations, and
- providing guidance in dealing with threats to ANP (such as oversized cell towers, large aquaculture operations near park land, harmful legislation, and economic development projects that might negatively impact the visitor experience).

The final strategic plan must include a discussion of how various outcomes of the 2024 national election and the 2026 Maine gubernatorial election might affect the strategies and actions identified in the plan for each priority area, and it must include metrics for assessing success in each priority area.

### I. About Friends of Acadia

Friends of Acadia's mission is to preserve, protect, and promote stewardship of the outstanding natural beauty, ecological vitality, and distinctive cultural resources of Acadia National Park and the surrounding communities for the inspiration and enjoyment of current and future generations. Founded in 1986, the organization has approximately 4,300 members who share a common love for ANP and the desire to give back through philanthropic support, volunteer time, or advocacy. FOA is a dedicated voice for ANP and a leader among friends' groups nationwide in effective and appropriate advocacy practices.

FOA's work centers on four pillars:

- **Wild Acadia** – a suite of initiatives designed to help ANP's natural and cultural resources be more resilient to the effects of climate change.

- **Tomorrow’s Stewards** – a suite of programs to engage youth and future generations as supporters, stewards and change agents to protect and preserve the Park and provide leadership and support to the FOA mission.
- **Acadia Experience** – a variety of investments to identify, pilot, test, and support programs that create a rewarding visitor experience by reducing congestion in the highest visitation locations and by offering alternative options for a high-quality visitor experience.
- **Trails and Carriage Roads** – fundraising to enhance the grants that FOA makes to the park to rehabilitate and maintain ANP’s trails and carriage roads.

## II. An Overview of Friends of Acadia’s Advocacy Guiding Principles

FOA’s advocacy work is bounded by statements, “Advocacy Fundamentals”, approved by the board.<sup>1</sup>

These Advocacy Fundamentals are further supported by FOA’s “Projects Policy” that attempts to guide FOA staff in making decisions about whether to get involved with a project, campaign, or program.<sup>2</sup>

The FOA Board also maintains an Advocacy Committee, a body charged with making non-binding advocacy-related recommendations to the staff and board.

## III. Scope of Work & Deliverables

FOA is seeking a qualified consultant or firm to facilitate the formulation of a public policy and advocacy strategic plan. The resulting strategic plan will steer our advocacy efforts through 2028 in the following areas, endorsed by the FOA Board:

- identifying and prioritizing climate-related advocacy actions (selecting 3-5 top actions out of the many ways to take action on climate issues),
- outlining engagement with federal authorities to increase appropriations and promote policies and procedures which benefit the National Park Service and ANP,
- establishing guidelines around new engagements and partnerships with local, state, and federal authorities as well as with civil society organizations, and
- providing guidance in dealing with threats to ANP (such as oversized cell towers, large aquaculture operations near park land, harmful legislation, and economic development projects that might negatively impact the visitor experience).

In conjunction with FOA’s core advocacy team (Advocacy Committee Chair, President and CEO, Vice President of Conservation, and Government Affairs Manager), the consultant must:

- a. Design and implement a planning process that collects feedback and information from the FOA Board, staff, and partners (primarily Acadia National Park staff), identifying action strategies and objectives for each priority area;
- b. Work with the FOA Board, staff, and partners to develop metrics for success in each priority area;
- c. Discuss how various outcomes of the 2024 national election and the 2026 Maine gubernatorial election may affect the identified actions and strategies for each priority area; and,
- d. Collate, summarize, and refine the work into a coherent, comprehensive advocacy strategic plan.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Appendix B.

In addition to the development and delivery of the strategic plan, the consultant will work with FOA staff, Advocacy Committee, and partners to:

- a. Lead a discussion among FOA staff and Advocacy Committee members to assess the alignment of FOA's "Advocacy Fundamentals" and "Projects Policy" with the organization's updated advocacy goals and strategy.
- b. Guide the board and staff in a discussion to determine if there are other important opportunities for effective advocacy efforts outside of the four listed priority areas. If other opportunities are identified, the consultant should then help the group develop action steps, timelines, roles and additional resources needed, along with measurable outcomes to accompany action steps.
- c. Guide discussions with the board and staff to integrate the advocacy strategic plan into the organization's overarching planning documents, including the existing strategic plan, and the strategic communications plan.

#### **IV. Duties & Responsibilities**

FOA will rely on the expertise and guidance of the selected firm to facilitate development of the deliverables. However, the consultant is expected to proceed as follows:

- Review available and provided information on Friends of Acadia to understand its current mission and goals.<sup>3</sup>
- Develop planning activities in coordination with FOA's core advocacy team (Advocacy Committee Chair, President and CEO, Vice President of Conservation, and Government Affairs Manager).
- Work with the core advocacy team to facilitate partner engagement, discuss progress & setbacks, or review feedback throughout the process.
- Convene Acadia National Park, FOA, and local and potential partners/subject matter experts to scope and identify potential advocacy action priorities. Seek input from park officials and partners/subject matter experts about new ideas for programs and/or suggestions for policy initiatives.
- Work with FOA and partners to prioritize advocacy initiatives under the advocacy strategic plan.
- Work with FOA and partners to develop measures of success for each advocacy initiative.

#### **V. Budget**

Friends of Acadia has budgeted up to \$20,000 for the completion of this project.

#### **VI. Timeline**

- Proposals are received by May 13, 2024.
- Consultant is selected by June 7, 2024.
- The initial meeting between consultant and FOA's core advocacy team takes place before June 28, 2024.
- A draft outline of the planning process is submitted within two weeks of the initial meeting.
- The planning process gets underway by July 15, 2024.
- Information and feedback are collected from FOA and other pertinent stakeholders from July 2024 through mid-September 2024.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendices C and D.

- An initial draft of the strategic plan is due by August 22, 2024.
- The final plan and high-level presentation delivered to the Advocacy Committee on October 15, 2024.

## **VII. What to Include in the Proposal**

- Description of consultant's qualifications, including examples of similar projects and ability to carry out a strategic advocacy framework. For firms, please include previous work performed and corresponding results aligned with facilitating similar activities for organizations in the conservation space. Individuals contributing to the project should include their resumes which list previous accomplishments in developing organizational plans, managing group discussions and strategy sessions, and any relevant work with non-profit entities emphasizing advocacy, training, and peer-to-peer networking.
- Description of how you plan to undertake the proposed Scope of Work & Deliverables.
- Detailed budget with travel expenses and daily or hourly rates for the ongoing support as described in the Scope of Work & Deliverables.
- References from other clients.

## **VIII. Selection Criteria**

- Demonstrated ability to work successfully with organizations to develop measurable outcomes tied to our goals and/or programs: 35%
- Clarity of approach to the project (proposed steps, benchmarks, and outcomes of the strategic advocacy plan): 35%
- Knowledge of public policy and advocacy work, national parks, and/or conservation: 20%
- Proposed cost: 10%

## **IX. Helpful Links**

Friends of Acadia website: [Friends of Acadia - Conservation Organization in Maine](#)

Acadia National Park website: <https://www.nps.gov/acad/index.htm>

## **X. Questions**

All questions may be directed to Stephanie Clement at 207-370-2960 or [stephanie@friendsofacadia.org](mailto:stephanie@friendsofacadia.org).

## Appendix A

### Advocacy Fundamentals

In our advocacy for Acadia National Park through Friends of Acadia, the Advocacy Committee is anchored by these fundamentals:

1. We are FOA-driven and disciplined. Our advocacy is framed by and supports the strategic priorities of Friends of Acadia. We know that the energy of the FOA staff and volunteers is a precious finite resource.
2. We advocate with passion for a place we love. We bring distinct professional experiences and different political perspectives to our advocacy, but we are united by our love of Acadia National Park.
3. We are Acadia-focused. We act as conservationist on many fronts, but in our advocacy through Friends of Acadia we focus our robust experience on one goal: the best possible future for Acadia National Park.
4. We must work widely as advocates to protect Acadia. Serving Acadia requires us to work on many fronts, at times simultaneously. We seek to muster the range of capabilities required.
5. We work as non-partisans. Acadia belongs to the American people – all of us. We believe that people from all political perspectives appreciate the value of the national park we champion, and we advocate in that spirit.
6. We seek solidarity with partners in coalitions. Much of our advocacy, especially at the federal level, is effective only if Friends of Acadia works as a valued partner in coalitions committed to conservation of our national parks.
7. We base our advocacy in science as appropriate. Acadia is a complex eco-system. Science can often clarify the best course for conservation of our park. We embrace our responsibility to understand and communicate relevant science in our advocacy.
8. We respect the distinct interests of the communities that surround Acadia. Acadia National Park was created from lands held by the people of several distinct Maine coast communities whose cooperation made a great gift to the American people. Our advocacy must understand and respect the bond and boundaries between Acadia and these surrounding communities.
9. We affirm Acadia as a Maine asset. Acadia National Park is an anchor of the Maine economy and brand. Maine decisions matter for Acadia. We advocate for Acadia as good citizens of Maine.
10. We champion public responsibility for conservation of our national parks. Acadia has a proud history of support through private philanthropy and citizen volunteerism. We take pride in that history, but are adamant in our conviction that we, the people of the United States, through our federal government, have a perpetual responsibility to assure the conservation of Acadia unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

## Appendix B

### Projects Policy

Adopted by the Board of Directors on May 27, 2016

Before undertaking a new project or program, whether initiated from within FOA or as a request from the park, a community partner, or individual donor, Friends of Acadia staff will consider the following questions:

1. Is the project consistent with the mission and strategic plan or fundraising initiatives of Friends of Acadia?
2. Will Friends of Acadia's participation in the project/program provide a significant benefit to Acadia National Park or the surrounding communities?
3. Are there other organizations, agencies or local communities that might be better positioned, or whose missions are more appropriate, to taking on the project? Is there a support role that Friends of Acadia could take to assist the lead group?
4. Are there adequate financial and staffing resources under the appropriate budget year to enable Friends of Acadia to become involved in the project/program in a meaningful way?
5. Is there a clear path for implementation and does each partner have the resources to commit to what they intend to do for each project, including adequate staff, resources, and infrastructure (e.g. office space) with the partner organization to implement the project? If the project is a partnership with Acadia National Park, is there an identified staff person who will serve as the manager or park contact, including responsibility for reporting?
6. Will there be any long-term detrimental impacts to Friends of Acadia, the park or local communities resulting from Friends' participation in the project/program?
7. Will there be any long-term detrimental impacts if Friends of Acadia does not become involved in the project/program?
8. A record of the decision will be kept for each project reviewed, including those on which FOA declines a role.

In situations where the answers to these questions are not clear, staff will consult with the Executive Committee, other appropriate committees, and park staff for their guidance and recommendations.

## Appendix C

### Descriptions of Key Partners

1. Partnership with ANP – Friends of Acadia’s (FOA’s) primary and foundational partnership with Acadia National Park (ANP) is key to the organization’s success. FOA personnel, at all levels, are in daily communication with ANP leadership and staff to advance mutual objectives. The National Park Service is not allowed to lobby Congress and may be constrained at times in advocacy work. FOA has signed a Philanthropic Partnership Agreement with the National Park Service and is subject to federal and state laws concerning non-profit organizations and advocacy work. While FOA is independent from the National Park Service and reserves the right to differ respectfully, we work in partnership with the park to achieve its policy needs. While Park officials are not able to conduct lobbying activities, they can furnish pertinent information and supporting documentation to assist FOA in being better advocates for the park.
2. The Schoodic Institute – The Institute is ANP’s primary partner in science and education. It supports scientific research of importance to the park, provides professional development for educators, and trains the next generation of conservation stewards. FOA and the Schoodic Institute have partnered when advocating for federal funds to support national parks and ANP.
3. Downeast Transportation – Downeast Transportation is a non-profit organization that provides transit services throughout Hancock County and in Acadia National Park through the fare-free, propane-powered bus system, the Island Explorer. Friends of Acadia annually contributes operational funding for the Island Explorer in partnership with L.L.Bean. FOA also supports Downeast Transportation through occasional letters of support to decisionmakers, such as the Federal Transit Administration, for grants that will help enhance the bus system. Downeast Transportation is a cooperating agency for Acadia National Park and receives financial support from the park through the transportation fee paid by park visitors as part of their entrance passes.
4. FOA’s Advocacy Committee – The Committee is comprised of FOA staff, board members, and several community members. It meets on a semi-annual basis, reviews policy issues, and makes non-binding recommendations on potential advocacy actions.
5. Government Affairs Manager Position – Based on the recommendation of a 2022 strategic “refresh,” FOA developed a position description, advertised for, and hired a part-time, one-year conditional government affairs manager. This new staff member assumed their role in February 2024 and is supervised by the Vice President of Conservation. The incumbent’s role is to build more enduring relationships with local, state, and federal authorities along with like-minded civil society partners. The incumbent will also assist in implementing and advancing the resulting advocacy policies as developed through this exercise.
6. Participation with National-Level Alliances – Much of what FOA accomplishes in the advocacy arena is through partnership with other organizations. We participate in several national coalitions that discuss and develop plans of action on federal issues. These include:
  - The National Parks Second Century Action Coalition, a national coalition, led by the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), which advocates for federal funds for

park operations, natural and cultural resource preservation, affordable housing for park employees, and the reduction of the deferred maintenance backlog. NPCA organizes and leads an annual day of advocacy on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. to advance legislation and appropriations on the above issues. When possible, FOA staff participate in this event to lobby the state's Congressional delegation.

- The National Park Foundation (NPF) serves as the official nonprofit partner of the NPS and is dedicated to promoting projects that protect natural resources, historical sites, and places of cultural significance within the park service. NPF orchestrates and spearheads an annual day of advocacy in Washington, D.C. FOA staff and partners participate in NPF's annual day of advocacy on Capitol Hill and engage with Maine's Congressional delegation to raise awareness about the need for federal appropriations to support national parks and ANP specifically.
- The Public Lands Alliance (PLA) serves to connect nonprofit partners of America's public lands. FOA's personnel have long-attended PLA's annual gathering to connect with other organizations in the conservation space and occasionally receive updates from them regarding activity on Capitol Hill.
- The Friends Alliance is a non-profit organization whose mission is to "enhance support for national park sites by creating a space for collaboration, creativity, and support of philanthropic partnerships between the National Park Service and their official non-profits." While the Friends Alliance does not typically lobby Congress, it offers a forum for discussion among Friends organizations regarding challenges and barriers that philanthropic partners face when working with their parks.

2. State and Local Coalitions – FOA also partners with various state and local organizations to fight threats to Acadia and/or accomplish other strategic priorities.

- For the last several years, FOA partnered with Frenchman Bay United (FBU), NPCA, and others to fight American Aquafarms. FOA funded some of FBU's work to study nutrient circulation tied to the proposed salmon pens, ultimately leading to the project's defeat.

3. FOA Members and Donors –

- FOA may call upon well-connected donors from time-to-time to secure meetings with decision-makers, make calls on behalf of FOA, or fund campaigns.
- FOA uses its suite of social media tools and e-news to highlight any public policy issues that are important for members to engage with us or on their own.



## Appendix D

### Recent Advocacy Campaigns

With the support of the Board and FOA leadership, we have, on occasion, led or partnered with like-minded organizations to advance and/or push back on threats to ANP. We anticipate needing to engage around more threats in the future. Some examples include:

1. American AquaFarms – In 2022, FOA joined the fight early to defend Acadia against the industrial-scale aquaculture proposal to lease two 60-acre sites near Bald Rock and Porcupine Island in Frenchman Bay. FOA stood with the NPS, Frenchman Bay United, area fisherman, local municipalities and businesses, and other stakeholders who urged state and federal regulators to stop the proposal.
2. Park Appropriations – FOA annually requests more robust appropriations for park operations and other priorities. See the February 2024 Congressional Briefing statement for an example of FOA’s messaging and style.<sup>1</sup>
3. Freeman Ridge Cell Tower – In 2019, a 195-foot cell tower was proposed on Freeman Ridge in Southwest Harbor, near the border with ANP. The proposed 195- foot tower would have been higher than the existing tallest cell tower on Mount Desert Island. FOA and partners expressed concern about the potential negative impact on the public experience offered by Acadia’s hiking trails, which are on the National Register of Historic Places. FOA requested that the tower applicant prepare a scenic assessment. FOA also kept local members involved in the regulatory review and prepared our own projection of what the tower would look like on the park’s landscape. The proposal did not move forward.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix E – Congressional Briefing FEB 2024

## APPENDIX E

Friends of Acadia  
& Schoodic Institute

# BRIEFING STATEMENT

February 2024



Friends of Acadia and the Schoodic Institute are grateful that the Maine Congressional delegation continues to champion important programs that benefit Acadia National Park.

### **Please support the Senate’s funding levels for the FY ‘24 Interior Appropriations Bill**

The latest continuing resolution for the Department of the Interior extends through March 8, 2024. Extension of a continuing resolution through the remainder of the fiscal year could result in as much as a 9.4% cut to the National Park Service. We support passage of a Department of Interior appropriations bill that preserves funding levels proposed in the Senate and avoids damaging policy riders.

- \$2.95 billion for Operations of the National Park Service (ONPS)
- \$233 million for National Park Service construction.
- \$15 million for Centennial Challenge
- \$14.9 for Housing Improvement Programs
- \$3M increase in base funding for Research Learning Centers

**Centennial Challenge and Housing Improvement Program funding will help support Acadia’s Housing Partnership.** Friends of Acadia is currently raising \$10M+ in philanthropic contributions to leverage appropriations from these programs to help Acadia construct new employee housing. An estimated 130 additional beds are needed for seasonal trail workers, interpreters, law enforcement rangers, Summit Stewards, and Island Explorer bus drivers.

**\$3M Base Funding Increase for Research Learning Centers (RLCs) will support valuable education and science activities in Acadia** and across the 17 RLCs in the National Park Service. This funding will help support Acadia’s RLC operations, including providing multi-day outdoor education programs for hundreds of Maine’s middle school students and advancing the science needed to help Acadia’s forests, wildlife, and intertidal zone respond to rapid change.



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**Please support the continuation of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (LRF)**

The LRF has been a tremendous success at Acadia and other national parks in tackling significant deferred maintenance projects.

The **reconstructed/improved maintenance building** at Park Headquarters is scheduled to open in December 2025. We are grateful that the Maine Congressional delegation helped secure a \$1M grant from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for rooftop solar panels and twelve electric vehicle charging stations on site. This will be matched by \$500K+ from Friends of Acadia and the National Park Foundation for the solar panels and purchase of two electric vehicles.

The **project to improve the Schoodic water/wastewater systems** will be completed in August 2024 and provides the basis for the Acadia's Research Learning Center campus to continue serving thousands of people each year at conferences, education programs, and other activities.

The **next priority project for the LRF at Acadia is to renovate overnight accommodations at the Schoodic Shores housing** on the research learning center campus (\$15M for 80 units). Renewing the LRF through legislation will enable Acadia to continue to address critically important infrastructure projects.

**Disaster-relief Funding Welcome for Acadia and its Gateway Communities**

Back-to-back storms on January 10 and January 13, 2024 caused devastating damage to Acadia National Park and the surrounding communities. Many areas of the park were affected, including the Ocean Path where 1,000 feet of the two-mile trail washed out. Seawall Picnic Area suffered scattered rocks, downed trees, and a washed-out road.

The Loop Road at Schoodic was closed during the storm due to flooding surf, undercutting, and boulders being deposited on the road, and Rockefeller Hall suffered roof damage. The overall repair estimate is still being assessed. Federal funds to help Acadia National Park and surrounding communities recover will be essential for restoring Maine economy.

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