

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
Boston Harbor Now for a Three-Year Program and Outreach Strategy
Deadline for Submission: **December 10, 2025, noon EST**

Boston Harbor Now (BHN) is developing a **comprehensive three-year strategic programming, communication and marketing plan** to guide our work across the Boston Harbor, Waterfront, and Islands for the next three years. The successful consultant will design and lead a process that identifies and prioritizes program impacts that increase visitation, foster belonging for diverse communities, and strengthen earned income and partnership opportunities. Guided by the insights from the [Boston Harbor Now Visitation and Equity Study](#) and other historic visitation data, the strategic programming plan will ensure programming is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to community needs. The plan should strengthen Boston Harbor Now's visibility and impact along the waterfront, fostering wellness and recreation, enhancing the maritime economy, supporting broader economic vitality, and building climate resilience and adaptation, especially the Boston Harborwalk. The consultant will also help define pathways for implementation, community engagement, outreach, and marketing, and establish metrics for evaluation, and ensure alignment with Boston Harbor Now's mission and five-year strategic plan.

Timing

Start date: January 20, 2026

Draft plan completed: May 31, 2026

Final plan completed: October 1, 2026

Budget

The anticipated budget for the project is \$60,000 - \$75,000.

Who We Are

Over a generation ago, Boston Harbor was quite literally a dump. A swim in the harbor meant a trip to the hospital. Spectacle Island was a smoldering trash pile. The industrial waterfront was suffering from decades of decline and disrepair.

Today, Boston Harbor is a shining example of the transformation that can occur after decades of advocacy, infrastructure improvements, and environmental stewardship. Decades of work and billions of dollars in public and private investment laid the groundwork for today's waterfront renaissance.

Boston Harbor Now, a nonprofit at the forefront of this transformation, envisions a vibrant, welcoming, and resilient Boston Harbor, Waterfront, and Islands for the benefit of everyone. Our mission is to ensure that these unique regional resources are accessible, inclusive, and properly adapted to the risks of climate change. We believe that these blue and green spaces contribute to our individual and community well being, and public and economic health.

Boston Harbor Now focuses on three pillars: Coastal Resilience, Access, and Equity. Boston Harbor Now works with public and private partners as well as community organizations and nonprofits to activate green and blue open spaces surrounding Boston Harbor by increasing people's awareness of and access to parks and public spaces through advocacy, planning, programming, communications, and engagement. We serve as the legislated non-profit partner of the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park, the City of Boston's partner on the Harborwalk and Moakley Park, and cochair the Green Ribbon Commission Coastal Resilience Working Group. Current priority projects also include the Stone Living Lab. For more information, please visit: www.bostonharbornow.org.

This work results in multiple benefits including the increased utilization of the Boston Harbor Islands National and State Park, waterfront and open spaces by an increasingly diverse audience, effective shoreline adaptation to prepare for climate change and sea level rise, improved equitable connectivity to, along, and across the Harbor, and thriving maritime based economy in Boston Harbor.

For more information about Boston Harbor Now, please visit: www.bostonharbornow.org.

Scope of Work

Boston Harbor Now seeks a consultant to develop a **comprehensive three-year strategic programming, communication and marketing plan** for the Boston Harbor, Waterfront, and the Islands. The plan will center on fostering belonging for diverse communities, expanding visitation, and building earned-income partnerships. Programming will highlight themes of **wellness, economic vitality, the working port, recreation, climate resilience and adaptation**, biodiversity and history and culture, while intentionally growing Boston Harbor Now's presence and influence along the Harborwalk.

Key Programming Questions to be Answered:

What types of programs best activate the Harborwalk and expand its role as a destination for residents, workers, youth, and visitors?

What kinds of programming partnerships (e.g., cultural, health, recreation, environmental, workforce development) will strengthen impact and broaden reach?

What current programs should be scaled back, retired, or redesigned to make space for new priorities?

How should we think strategically about programming that increases in visitation and repeat visitation to the harborwalk, harbor and islands?

What programming themes and formats will most effectively deliver public education and engagement on climate resilience, environmental stewardship, and adaptation for diverse audiences?

How can Boston Harbor Now balance free, public-facing programming with earned-income opportunities that support financial sustainability?

Is there value in connecting programming on the Harborwalk to the Harbor Islands?

How do we define our impact? What evaluation methods and success measures will best capture the impact of programming?

What communication, marketing, and outreach strategies will ensure that programs effectively reach and engage diverse audiences? What messaging in what format would most effectively communicate our impact?

Deliverables and Timelines

The consultant will develop a three-year Strategic Programming Plan that is designed to support advancement and fundraising efforts, including clear narratives and materials that can be shared with donors, partners, and sponsors. The plan will include:

1. Program Strategy & Implementation
 - Clear goals and priorities for program delivery.
 - Recommended program mix and phased implementation roadmap.
2. Audience Engagement, Marketing & Communications
 - Audience segmentation and priority communication pathways.
 - Integrated marketing strategy (digital, social, partner, and on-site).
 - Messaging guidance, campaign frameworks, and tools/templates to support execution.
 - Development-ready messaging to support fundraising, sponsorship, and partnership outreach.
3. Evaluation & Learning Systems
 - Outcomes framework and key performance indicators.
 - Data collection tools and workflows to track participation, belonging, and impact.
 - Process for applying insights to refine programs and communications
4. Staffing & Organizational Capacity
 - Recommended staffing structure, roles, and responsibilities.
 - Capacity assessment and phased staffing or partnership options.
5. Financial Plan
 - Three-year cost projections for programs, staffing, and marketing.
 - Funding and revenue strategies to support sustainability.

Key deliverables and expected timelines are as follows:

January 2026

- Assess effectiveness and level of priority for all current Boston Harbor Now programs (Harbor, Waterfront, Islands).
- Gather input from key stakeholders, partners, and communities, including analysis of visitation, access, and earned income data.
- Identify Boston Harbor Now's strengths and gaps in relation to the broader Harbor landscape.

February 2026

- Produce a strategic programming review summary.
- Confirm or refine key programming questions (belonging, visitation growth, earned income partnerships, diversity/belonging/equity goals).
- Present potential program directions and criteria for prioritization.

March 2026

- Facilitate board, staff, and **community validation sessions** to confirm shared programming vision, mission alignment, values, and priority themes (wellness, recreation, economic health, working port, climate resilience).
- Draft preliminary pathways for expanding programming footprint on the Harborwalk and Islands.

April – May 2026

- Synthesize findings and prioritize programming strategies for the next three years.
- Develop detailed **implementation pathways**, including staffing, partnerships, funding, and communications approaches.
- Propose strategies to optimize communication, broaden community reach, and measure success.
- Create reporting templates and processes to guide implementation.

June – August 2026

- **Pilots select new programs** (e.g., Harborwalk activations, climate resilience events, wellness initiatives).
- Collect feedback and conduct preliminary **evaluation of pilot outcomes** to refine strategies.

September 2026

- Deliver draft FY26–FY28 Strategic Programming Plan, incorporating pilot results, community feedback, and evaluation framework.
- Review draft plan with board and staff.

October 2026

- Incorporate final feedback and prepare a plan for adoption.

Proposal Requirements

Boston Harbor Now is seeking proposals from qualified individuals or teams with demonstrated experience addressing the process and outcomes described above. The applicant selected will be responsible for completing all project work products and final deliverables. Applicants will incorporate Board and staff involvement and estimate expected levels of effort required for their participation.

Proposals must include a timeline and milestones of process and deliverables. The successful applicant will be responsible for scheduling and facilitating check-in meetings/calls including setting up an agenda in advance, sending meeting invites and writing up and distributing meeting minutes.

Submission Details

Interested applicants should submit, via email, their completed proposal that includes the following information:

1. Name and contact information for any participating consultants.
2. Statement of qualifications.
3. Client list highlighting specific accomplishments and examples of relevant completed strategies and their impacts
4. Clear description of proposed process, timeline and deliverables as described above.
5. Fee and budget broken down by task, including expenses.
6. Current resumes and bios of the project team that will be working on the project.
7. Three relevant references of clients whose plans have been completed.

Please email proposals by December 10, 2025 to Rebecca Smerling, Director of Programs at rsmerling@bostonharbornow.org. No calls or visits, please.

Commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging

Boston Harbor Now is an intentionally diverse workplace. We are intentional about hiring, developing, and retaining diverse individuals at all levels. We don't just accept differences - we celebrate them, we value them, we promote them, and we thrive on them for the benefit of our employees, volunteers, supporters, partners, and community. We recognize that people bring their personal histories to work and that we make better decisions when we include a wide range of experiences and opinions. Diversity refers not only to race and gender, but also to an array of human differences including: culture, ethnicity, geography, socio-economic position, ability, sexual orientation, background, perspective and more that exist in the community and are reflected in the workforce. We value using an equity lens to manage the organization and create spaces for conversations on equity and ongoing staff and board engagement and empowerment to redesign policies, practices, services and programs. Boston Harbor Now strongly believes that diversity plays an essential role in our mission, fostering innovation and

creativity, attracting the best candidates to our team, and enhancing our ability to serve.

Procurement Terms and Conditions

The successful bidder will bring **direct experience in program design, placemaking, and community-centered strategic planning**, ideally within the context of public spaces, cultural programming, and activation. The firm should demonstrate a track record of working with non-profit trustees, advisors, and staff to **initiate and execute strategic programming plans** that balance mission impact with financial sustainability.

Additionally, the bidder should have **significant experience collaborating with non-profit organizations** engaged in conservation, advocacy, recreation, and community engagement. Knowledge of urban waterfronts, parks, or public realm programming is strongly preferred.

The successful firm will contribute:

- **Analytical expertise** to identify priority programming areas and optimize resource allocation.
- **Facilitative leadership** to engage diverse stakeholders, including community partners, staff, trustees, and funders.
- **Communications skills** to frame strategies clearly, develop implementation pathways, and create accessible reporting tools.
- **Innovative placemaking insight** to connect programming with broader goals of inclusion, resilience, and economic vitality.
- **Design and facilitate an equity-centered process**—guided by the Boston Harbor Now Equity Study—to identify and prioritize programs that foster belonging, grow visitation, and strengthen earned income and partnerships.

Right to Reject/Cancel. Boston Harbor Now reserves the right to cancel this procurement, to waive any defect or technicality, and to advertise for new proposals, without notice or justification, where the rejection, cancellation, waiver or advertisement would be in the best interests of Boston Harbor Now.

Formal Contract Required. Upon award, Boston Harbor Now and the successful bidder will enter into a contract based on the factors described in this Request for Proposal. The services to be provided will begin and end on specific dates to be negotiated by the parties, not to exceed nine months. The contract value will not exceed the proposed amount, unless the time period and/or the contract value are modified by written, executed amendment to the contract.

No Liability for Costs. Each prospective bidder responding to this RFP agrees that it will have no claims against Boston Harbor Now for any costs or liabilities incurred relating to this RFP.

Indemnification. The successful bidder will indemnify and hold harmless Boston Harbor Now, its trustees, employees, agents and members from any and all liability resulting from the performance

of the services provided under the contract, including, but not limited to, the acts or omissions of the successful bidder, its directors, officers and employees, any and all sub-contractor(s) and their employees, and/or from any and all third party claims related to the contract.

Applicable Law. This Request for Proposal and any Contract subsequently executed shall be governed and/or construed in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.