

New York Sea Grant and Long Island Sound Study Request Proposals for an Environmental Justice Needs Assessment for the Long Island Sound Watershed

I. Project summary:

New York Sea Grant is soliciting qualified proposals for projects aimed at determining the environmental justice (EJ) needs of overburdened communities in the New York and Connecticut portions of the Long Island Sound watershed. This “EJ Needs Assessment” project is open to academics, consultants, and nonprofit organizations that specialize in research, surveys, analysis, and recommendations for environmental organizations. The project is meant to inform future environmental management programming of the Long Island Sound Study national estuary program, ensuring that minority and underserved communities are fully represented in local decision-making to meet the needs of these stakeholders.

II. Organizations:

New York Sea Grant (NYSG) is one of 34 university-based programs under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Sea Grant College Program. Sea Grant's mission is to enhance the practical use and conservation of coastal, marine, and Great Lakes resources to create a sustainable economy and environment. It works towards this mission by funding local marine research and putting it in the hands of educators and relevant stakeholders through multi-disciplinary extension and education programming. NYSG is a cooperative program between NOAA, Cornell University, and the State University of New York (SUNY) system with multiple partners, including the [Long Island Sound Study](#).

Long Island Sound Study (LISS) is a national estuary program formed in 1985 as a bi-state (Connecticut and New York) partnership consisting of federal and state agencies, user groups, concerned organizations, and individuals, all dedicated to restoring and protecting Long Island Sound. LISS follows and frequently updates a [Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan \(CCMP\)](#), which serves as the outline for restoration work on the Long Island Sound estuary and its watershed.

Long Island Sound (LIS/the Sound) is a critical estuary nestled between New York and Connecticut. The Sound is one of the region’s largest estuaries; with over 1,320 square miles, it is home to more than 170 species of fish, 1,200 species of invertebrates, and countless species of birds and other animals. The coastline stretches more than 600 miles and is home to more than 23 million people who live at least 50 miles from it. The watershed also includes major urban centers, including New Haven, Stamford, and parts of New York City. More than 23 million people live within 50 miles of the Sound with millions more visiting.

III. Background Information about the EJ Needs Assessment:

Environmental Justice (EJ) is an overarching principle of the CCMP. The EPA defines EJ as ‘the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.’

In the summer of 2020, a handful of LISS partners formed an ad hoc workgroup focused on advancing the conversation on environmental justice within LISS programming. The workgroup, which has since been formalized as the LISS EJ Work Group, identified the need for the LISS to more purposefully plan its efforts to ensure advances in diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) are properly met and prioritized within its environmental work.

This EJ Needs Assessment will be one of the first steps of a greater hands-on community engagement effort on behalf of the workgroup to create and strengthen relationships with grassroots groups and communities across the watershed and become more familiar with their needs and the challenges they face. It will also inform the administration of a newly funded EJ Small Grants program to help ensure it is properly designed, accessible, and relevant to the needs of local overburdened communities.

The work and performance of the contractor will be aided and overseen primarily by New York Sea Grant along with a LISS EJ Needs Assessment Core Team (“Core Team”). Since it is imperative that this project serves as a step in the development of lasting relationships among these communities and members of the LISS EJ Work Group, successful applicants will be required to closely coordinate with the Core Team so that LISS personnel can be included in the engagement with participating communities. (Note: Some initial LISS community engagement efforts and connections have already begun prior to the release of this RFP). Detailed instructions for submitting a bid in response to this solicitation are below. It is anticipated that the contractor will meet with the Core Team on a bi-weekly (every other week) conference call basis for the first several months of the contract period. This frequency may be adjusted as deemed necessary or desirable.

IV. Scope

NYSG and LISS’s ultimate goal with the results of this assessment is to be able to design effective tools and programs, as well as establish programmatic mechanisms and partnerships, that will better serve overburdened communities in the LIS watershed. Overburdened communities as defined by the EPA are:

“(…) minority, low-income, tribal, or indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that potentially experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks. This disproportionality can be as a result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors. Increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative or lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or places. The term describes situations where multiple factors, including both environmental and socio-economic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities”.

Better serving these communities includes, but is not limited to, ensuring: 1) equitable access to the Sound and its resources - including safe coastal access, 2) equitable representation and meaningful involvement in LISS decision-making processes, especially those that could affect them, 3) access to and awareness of resources and information they may need to safely enjoy LIS resources and protect themselves against LIS-related environmental hazards, and 4) local management decisions are made from an equity and justice perspective that improves people’s quality of life.

To work on this implementation, NYSG and LISS first need to better understand the needs and challenges faced by their overburdened stakeholders, and identify if, how, and where these needs and challenges overlap with LISS responsibilities as defined by the CCMP. This should be the main focus of the needs assessment.

Further, the assessment should aim to better understand 1) how overburdened communities relate to and use the Sound and its resources, 2) barriers to participation in LISS events, resources, and decision-making, 3) barriers to equitable and safe access to the Sound and its resources, and 4) environmental hazards and injustices disproportionately affecting overburdened communities.

Geographic Scope: This assessment should focus primarily on coastal communities of the Long Island Sound watershed ([See LISS Boundary Map](#)). However, given that this boundary as currently defined by LISS is not based on usage of the Sound, the selected contractor should focus on identifying overburdened communities that likely use the Sound or could be affected by LISS management decisions *even if they live outside the LISS Boundary*, and propose how they will include these groups in the assessment. (Note: This is particularly the case in the Long Island region, where the boundary excludes certain inland areas where people live who still access the Sound as their local waterbody).

V. **Tasks and Deliverables:**

Below is an outline of the broad tasks we envision for this assessment. Within these tasks, applicants are encouraged to submit a study format that supports collaboration and learning from overburdened communities. The designed methods should be complementary, not duplicative, of the existing NYSG and LISS efforts to engage with these community groups.

Tasks:

1. Conduct Exploratory Phase
2. Design the Study Methods
3. Draft the Study Questions
4. Study Implementation and Data Collection
5. EJ Needs Assessment Report and Presentations

Task Description:

Task 1: Conduct Exploratory Phase

The exploratory phase should investigate existing efforts and information to begin shaping the needs assessment format, design, and topics. Examples of tasks within this phase may include exploration and compilation of similar and/or relevant assessments in the region (e.g. LISS Sustainable and Resilient Communities Needs Assessment and Gap Analysis), relevant mapping of demographics data, exploration using existing tools (e.g., EJ Screen, Neighborhoods at Risk, SVI indices, etc.) to identify environmental justice issues and risks, and compilation of potential contacts and relevant news coverage.

Outputs:

- ***Identification of Overburdened Communities:*** This is meant to be an internal informal list or synthesis document for use by the contractor and LISS for this assessment. It may be a map, list of neighborhoods, spreadsheet, etc. It should include information on how ‘overburdened communities’ were defined for the purpose of the listing. This output should include a list with contact information of local groups and community leaders who may benefit from LISS’s resources and could help shape LISS programming. It is meant to serve as a contact list both during the survey and for LISS staff afterward. (Note: LISS already has 2 lists initiated that the contractor could work from and finalize).
- ***Summary of initial findings:*** This can be provided as a memo and/or a presentation of observations outlining initial findings, such as lead EJ topics to explore, known demographics, etc.

Task 2: Design the Study Methods

To develop the study, the contractor shall design, manage, and conduct the following subtasks:

1. **Formative Community Engagement:** A community-based study mechanism(s) with tasks and performance measures (e.g. number of community members interviewed; focus groups conducted per state, etc) to shape the study. These methods, tasks, and measures should aim to help define specific topics that require further exploration in the next research steps, identify other communities that should

be included in the study process, and shape the study design and implementation.

2. **Draft Methodology:** Examples of study formats include surveys (mixed methods, online, etc), focus groups and interviews, participatory action research methods, etc. The contractor shall outline and describe the methodology that will be used to conduct the study and collect and analyze the study data. This must include locations to be included in the distribution method(s) (if applicable), study format(s), the languages of communication, and the method for archiving the raw results. The methodology should also describe how the study in English and other languages will be piloted appropriately to reduce confusion, ensure appropriate translation, and maintain clarity, as well as avoid duplicating other survey/study efforts. It must also detail how the study will meet saturation (i.e. minimum amounts of respondents per region, etc) to make reliable inferences about the different population types. Measures should be taken to avoid duplicative efforts by coordinating with other LISS-related staff in a manner that complements existing efforts to engage with these communities.

Outputs:

- **Documentation of Community-Based Study Mechanism:** Provide the list of participants, the community that is represented, questions discussed, and a summary of lessons learned from the community-based study mechanism.
- **Methodology Report:** Documentation regarding the selected study format, the community outreach methods and geographic focus, and data analysis and validation methods. Additionally, this shall include documentation regarding the safe storage of and analysis methods for the raw study results. A memo and report out to the Core Team for input and approval is sufficient at this stage; however, this information should be included in the final project report.

Task 3: Draft the Study Questions

The contractor shall draft study questions to address the main objectives as described in the scope section above, as well as topics shaped by previous steps in the research process. The study goals and questions should be refined according to input collected from the community in Task 2, as well as relevant actions identified in the CCMP. The draft study questions should be able to capture relevant information that may currently be completely unknown, but also target the known specific EJ-related topics where information is lacking. This task includes piloting and revising the study questions as described in the preceding methodology. The Core Team will provide feedback during the drafting process for the contractor to incorporate into the final study. The study should be designed to be in the most accessible format (i.e., limited web access, language barriers, etc).

Outputs:

- **Draft Study Questions:** Provided to Core Team for feedback.
- **Final Study Questions:** Final survey submitted to the Core Team in an agreed-upon format(s).

Task 4: Study Implementation and Data Collection

The contractor shall coordinate the project implementation between the contractor's staff and NYSG/LISS team members as appropriate. If the selected study format(s) require community forums or any similar sort of participatory research or community engagement, NYSG/LISS project leads can assist with coordination and will attend these forums to speak on behalf of the NYSG/LISS. The contractor shall collect and collate the raw results into a single database/spreadsheet or other data management system identified in the

approved methodology report.

Outputs:

- ***Raw Study Results:*** Provide the Core Team with the raw results cumulated into a single database/spreadsheet or other data management system identified and in the approved methodology report.

Task 5: Draft EJ Needs Assessment Report and Presentations

The contractor shall prepare a draft study report and submit it to the Core Team for review. The report should detail the assessment process and should include an executive summary, methodology, raw data, data analysis, primary findings, and recommendations for NYSG/LISS. The contractor shall allow for a minimum of 2 weeks for review from the Core Team. Upon the close of this review, the contractor shall submit a final report. Should there be any additional issues to resolve, the contractor shall resolve those within 15 days of the contract end date.

Outputs:

- ***Draft Report:*** Provide the Core Team with a draft report that documents any data analysis such as significant trends and themes, provides a summary of the methodology used, highlights new information learned that may be critical to better serve overburdened communities in the region, and provides recommendations for potential future NYSG/LISS implementation activities and collaborations. This report should also include any deviations from the established survey methodology.
- ***Final Report***
- ***Presentations:*** The contractor will present their results to the LISS Management Committee, Citizens Advisory Committee, the Environmental Justice Work Group, and the Sustainable and Resilient Communities Work Group (some of these presentations could be combined). In addition, the contractor will present the results of the Needs Assessment to the contributors under Task 2.1.

VI. Coordination with LISS Core Team

The contractor shall plan and conduct a kick-off meeting to coordinate the expectations of the Core Team, and to provide initial insight and recommendations. This kick-off shall occur within the first month of the project.

During the first meeting, the team should agree on a schedule for the contractor and the Core Team to regularly meet throughout the project. The contractor should provide agendas and summary meeting notes for each meeting.

The Core Team will work closely with the contractor throughout the process providing feedback on all deliverables, helping shape the project, coordinating any public-facing events, and providing relevant LISS resources to the contractor as needed. Existing LISS-specific data resources the contractor will have access to include an EJSCREEN LISS EJ Mapping Tool, a LISS Strategic Communications Plan (including a list of surveyed stakeholders), and an informal Sustainable and Resilient Communities Needs Assessment (in-the-works discussions around climate resiliency).

VII. Anticipated Project Schedule

Project completion must be no later than July 1, 2023.

VIII. Application Bids must include:

- 1) DEIJ Statement
- 2) Cover Letter
- 3) Project narrative describing your approach to conducting the needs assessment described above. Include recommended research question(s) for the provided timeline. Provide an explanation of how you will carry out the project tasks in a detailed and concise way. Where possible, provide specific sub-tasks, methods, and/or processes to be implemented. Describe the specific outputs you will produce to meet the task requirements described above. Include the expected date of completion of major tasks. Note the QAPP process could extend the timeline.
- 4) Budget broken out by task, with the total budget request not to exceed \$143,000. You must provide pricing for each deliverable and each item within the task to be considered for the award. You must provide a price reasonableness statement. Note that the selected proposal will not be chosen solely based on budget.
- 5) Documentation of qualifications for the project leader, project staff, or organization. Applicants should submit project reports or materials from previous projects that demonstrate an ability to work with overburdened communities, as well as experience with social science research, tools, techniques, and/or implementation. Experience with community outreach, especially in underserved communities, and language expertise in this context is preferred but not a required qualification.
- 6) Three References of Clients or Partners with which a similar service was performed in the last three years in a facility of similar size, scope, and complexity and in a satisfactory manner. Reference listing should include business name, address, contact name of an individual, contact telephone number and email, type of relationship, and years of service for each reference. SUNY Stony Brook reserves the right to contact, make inquiries, and visit any of the supplier's current and/or past customers listed by the bidder.

Bid and all components must be uploaded to New York Sea Grant's proposal portal located at:

<https://seagrant.sunysb.edu/articles/r/23487>

The selected bid recipient will need to supply the following:

- W-9 form.
- Proof of Liability Insurance, Workers Compensation, and Disability insurance coverage.
- Cost reasonableness statement.

For questions, please email Jimena Beatriz Perez-Viscasillas at jbp255@cornell.edu

Deadline for receipt of Bids is 8/26/22 at 5pm EST.

The Core Team will host an informational webinar regarding this request for bids on 7/27/22 at 10:00 am EST. This is open to all interested parties. To attend please register at:

<https://cornell.zoom.us/j/92129106821>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar. A recording of this webinar will be available at <https://seagrant.sunysb.edu/articles/r/23487>

Learn more about the Long Island Sound Study at www.longislandsoundstudy.net