

Notice for Request for Qualifications (RFQ) Mobile Tensaw Delta Watershed Management Planning Mobile and Baldwin Counties, Alabama

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program seeks a qualified environmental or natural resource planning, engineering, or other similar firm to prepare a Comprehensive Watershed Management Plan (WMP) for the Tensaw-Apalachee (HUC 031602040505), Grand Bay (HUC 031602040403), The Basin (HUC 031602040203), Mittlin Lake (HUC 031602040202), Big Chippewa Lake (HUC 031602040106), and Farris Creek/Barrow Creek (HUC 031602040103) complex of watersheds in Mobile and Baldwin counties, Alabama. A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process will be used to select a firm who can develop such a conceptual engineering master plan based on new and available data. Statements of Qualifications (Statements) must be sent to the attention of Christian Miller and received no later than **3:00 p.m. CDT, Friday, August 23rd, 2019**.

Summary of Offering

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP), in partnership with the State of Alabama, has secured funding through the Resources and Ecosystems Sustainability, Tourist Opportunities, and Revived Economies of the Gulf Coast States (RESTORE) Act to develop WMPs for tidally-influenced watersheds along the Alabama coast. MBNEP has partnered with stakeholders to develop these WMPs, which will provide a roadmap for restoring or conserving watersheds and improving water and habitat quality in areas where resources could have been damaged by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill. These WMPs will chart a conceptual course for improving or protecting the things people value most about living along the Alabama coast, including:

- **Water Quality** – The coastal community continues to desire water that is drinkable, swimmable, and able to support aquatic and marine life.
- **Fish and Wildlife** – Fishery resources are valued as an industry, a primary recreational pastime, and a staple of the diets of residents and visitors.
- **Environmental Health and Resilience** – The coastal community relies upon coordinated actions to reduce vulnerability to and recover from the range of hazards we face, natural and otherwise.
- **Access** – Having access to coastal waters and natural resources is something about which people care deeply.
- **Heritage and Culture** – Preserving heritage and culture is important due to concerns that the bountiful waters that provided such pleasure through our lifetimes will not be available to our grandchildren.
- **Beaches and Shorelines** – They provide critical edge habitat to aquatic and terrestrial animals and recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

In addition to the six values identified above, these Plans should provide a strategy for conserving and restoring coastal habitat types providing critical ecosystem services and identified by the MBNEP's Science Advisory Committee as most threatened by anthropogenic stressors. These habitat types - freshwater wetlands; streams, rivers, and riparian buffers; and intertidal marshes and flats - were classified as most stressed from activities like dredging and filling, fragmentation, and sedimentation, all related to land use change. These habitats and the ecosystem services they provide are related to several, if not each, of the six identified values.

MBNEP's watershed planning process also conforms to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Zone Act Reauthorization Amendment (CZARA) Section 6217 (g) Management Measures. As the State lead on water quality, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management's (ADEM's) Alabama Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program (ACNPCP) must conform to Section 6217 (g) requirements to be compliant for funding under Section 306 of the Coastal Zone Management Act and Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. These 6217 (g) requirements include geographic scope of the program; the pollutant sources to be

addressed; the types of management measures used; the establishment of critical areas; and technical assistance, public participation, and administrative coordination.

The firm selected must be able to develop a comprehensive plan to maximize environmental health and public benefit by identifying actions to improve local governance of the environment; promote community ownership, knowledge, and involvement in watershed management; and restore and conserve priority habitats beneficial to those resources that were, or could have been, damaged by the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill.

An RFQ, instead of a more traditional request for proposals (RFP), process is being used to select a Planner, in recognition of the need for sustained collaboration between the selected **Respondent**, municipal and county officials, local stakeholders, and the MBNEP to successfully achieve the wide-range of planning needs described herein. Implementation funding is not currently identified in local, state, or federal budgets or from other sources. However, restoration projects identified in WMPs will be evaluated for future funding or other sources as appropriate and recommended by the Planner.

EPA's Nine Key Elements: (<http://www.mobilebaynep.com/images/uploads/library/9elements-WtrshdPlan-EpaHndbk.pdf>)

Respondents should delineate how the project team will address the following objectives in the development of the watershed plan. These **objectives** conform to the U.S. EPA's nine key elements (listed parenthetically) of watershed planning:

- Build partnerships, including identification of key stakeholders and solicitation of community input and concerns (1).
- Characterize the watershed, including creation of a natural and cultural resource inventory, identification of causes and sources of impairments, identification of data gaps, and estimation of pollutant loads (2).
- Set goals and identify solutions, including determination of pollutant reduction loads needed and management measures to achieve goals (2-3).
- Design implementation program, including implementation schedule, interim milestones, criteria to measure progress and success, monitoring prescription, information/education programs, and identification of technical and financial assistance needed to implement plan (4-9).

Background and Considerations for Mobile Tensaw-Apalachee Watershed Management Plan

The Mobile Bay Watershed covers 75% of the State of Alabama and portions of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Georgia. Up to 20% of the nation's freshwater flows through numerous sub-watersheds into the lower basin deltaic lands and ultimately into Mobile Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. The Tensaw-Apalachee Watershed complex, originally defined and initially funded for planning by the MBNEP, included three HUC-12 watersheds (Tensaw-Apalachee, Grand Bay, and The Basin watersheds) encompassing the lower delta.

Due to the complexity and size of the entire larger watershed system (Figure 1), a scoping exercise was commissioned to lay the ground work for the larger upstream watershed plan, including defining the area that could be covered to leverage and find efficiencies in planning (Moffatt & Nichol, 2018). Development of a comprehensive watershed plan for the entire lower basin, commonly referred to as the Mobile-Tensaw Apalachee (MTA) basin, presents an opportunity to connect watershed management issues in the upper basins (e.g. Alabama and Tombigbee river basins) as they relate to the health of the lower basin.

The final report for this exercise is available on the MBNEP website and is incorporated by reference

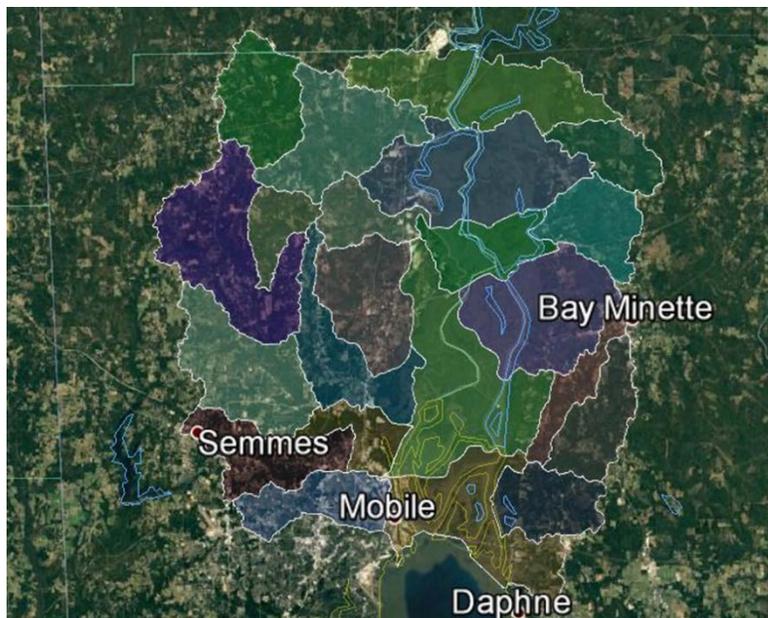


Figure 1. Map displaying all the watersheds surrounding the deltaic system highlighting the complexity in watershed planning for this area.

(http://www.mobilebaynep.com/images/uploads/library/MTA_Scoping_Report-Final_OCT_2017.pdf). One of the recommendations of that study was to segment the larger basin into groupings based on similarity of issues within the sub-basins.

Defining the Focus for Watershed Planning

The large river systems that flow through the deltaic wetlands and feed Mobile Bay are largely influenced by the larger basins upstream (Alabama River and Tombigbee Basins). They share similar identified threats and issues that require restorative actions to collectively make a positive ecological difference in the MTA and ultimately in Mobile Bay and Gulf of Mexico. It is no small task, considering the quantity and quality of the water that flows from upstream watersheds. There are some clear issues that have been identified by stakeholders that can be addressed.

Defining the watershed planning area became an important task as key stakeholders were interviewed and tried to focus and leverage the MBNEP efforts. Through discussions with the MBNEP and other stakeholders, we were able to group the watersheds that would best address the issues that have been identified in stakeholder interviews and the current approved funding sources for watershed planning (RESTORE Act and NFWF GEBF).

The preliminary scoping process undertaken by the MBNEP recommended six sub-basins be combined as a single complex and addressed as one watershed management plan called the Mobile-Tensaw-Apalachee (MTA) Watershed (Figure 2). This would start at the Baldwin and Mobile county lines where the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers flow into what is commonly called “the Delta” – the forested wetlands in which the Mobile, Tensaw, Apalachee, Blakeley, and Spanish Rivers flow. This would include the following ten HUC-12 watersheds from north to south: Farris Creek-Barrow Creek, Big Chippewa Lake, Mittlin Lake, The Basin, Grand Bay, and Tensaw-Apalachee River. Within this deltaic system, habitat type, land ownership, and strong influences of upper basins helped to define this grouping.

There are major land management and land use stressors that helped in defining the focus of the watershed planning area. In general, industrial influences from the watersheds *to the west of the Mobile River* can be addressed within those watersheds. Based on these considerations, the MBNEP chose to use the Mobile River as the boundary to group the watersheds to the west of Delta (including Cold Creek, Bayou Sara, Gunnison Creek, and Lower Chasaw, parts of Big Chippewa Lake, Farris Creek/Barrow Creek and Tensaw-Apalachee) for a separate planning effort. Likewise, to the east, the three Bay Minette Basins group well together, with similar issues to those faced in the D'Olive and Tiawasee Creek and Joe's Branch sub-basins with development pressures and should also be treated separately.

Thus, for this RFQ, we are focusing on issues within the 6 MTA HUC's which were recommended by the scoping report and include:

HUC	Watershed Name
031602040505	Tensaw River-Apalachee River
031602040403	Grand Bay
031602040203	The Basin
031602040202	Mittlin Lake
031602040103	Farris Creek-Barrow Creek
031602040106	Big Chippewa Lake

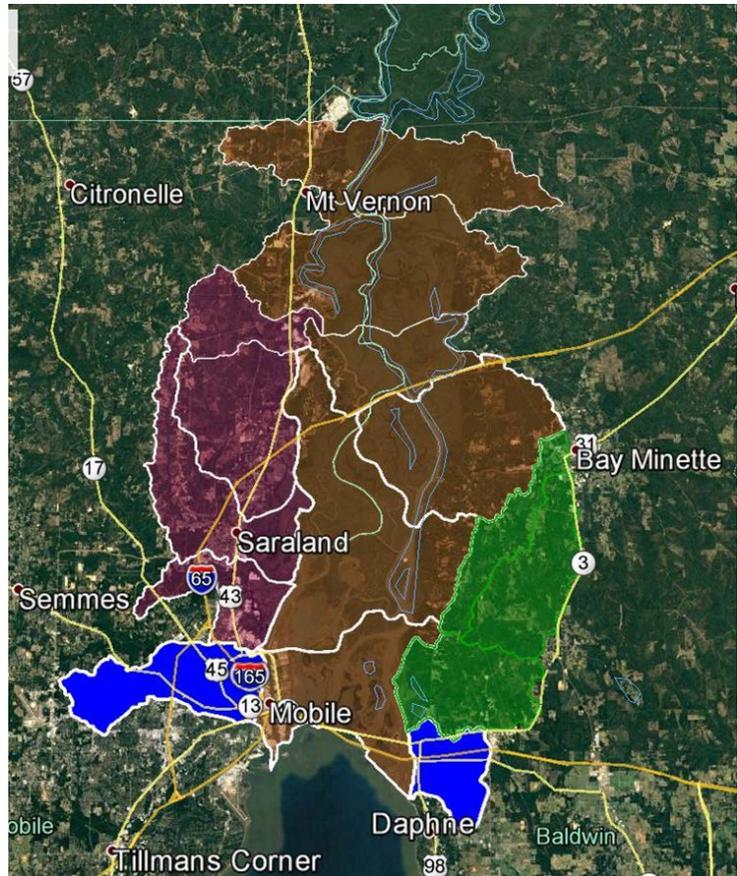


Figure 2. Groupings for watershed planning associated with the Mobile Delta for this solicitation. The proposed MTA Watershed Management Plan would include 6 sub-basins starting at the confluence of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers close to the Baldwin and Mobile county lines and extending to Mobile Bay (orange-brown). The green (east) highlighted area would group the Bay Minette basins and the pink (west) highlighted areas would include those basins west of the Mobile River to be offered in future solicitations. Planning in the blue highlighted basins has been completed.

Request for Qualifications Inquiries, Contact Information, Timeline

Potential **Respondents** interested in this RFQ should contact the MBNEP and request placement on the RFQ mailing list to ensure receipt of any amendments and other relevant information. Inquiries should be directed to: Christian Miller, cmiller@mobilebaynep.com 251-459-8871.

Proposed Time Line:

Solicitation Issue/Advertising Date	Friday, July 27 th , 2019
Pre-Submittal Conference *	Wednesday, August 7 th , 2019
Statement Receipt Closing Date	Friday, August 23 rd , 2019
Shortlist Notification	Monday August 26 th , 2019
Shortlist Interviews	Tuesday, September 10 th , 2019
Award Exclusive Negotiating Right	Monday, September 16 th , 2019

**Attendance at the Pre-Submittal Conference is mandatory for statement consideration*

Pre-Submittal Conference

The most current RFQ document with any edits or modifications will be available at the MBNEP website (www.mobilebaynep.com). A mandatory pre-submittal conference will be conducted at 10:00 A.M. on Wednesday, August 7th, 2019 at the International Trade Center located at 250 N. Water Street, Mobile, AL 36602.

Statement Contents

The Statement of Qualifications should be not more than **fifteen 8.5” X 11” single-sided pages, Times New Roman 11-point font (inclusive of the cover letter, conceptual approach, experience and background, and project team/level of participation)**, and should be divided by section, with Table of Contents (**cover pages and table of contents do not count against the 15-page limit**). All Statements shall be submitted in **electronic format** as a PDF. PDFs can be submitted on CD and mailed to **the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program c/o Christian Miller, 118 N. Royal St. Suite 601, Mobile, AL 36602** or emailed to cmiller@mobilebaynep.com

Statements submitted in response to this RFQ shall include a complete response to the requirements in the order presented below. Statements should provide a straightforward delineation of the **Respondent's** capability to satisfy the intent and requirements of this RFQ and should not contain redundancies or conflicting statements. An officer authorized to make a binding commitment for the **Respondent** making the Statement shall sign the Statement Form. Contents of the submitted Statements must include the following to be deemed responsive for evaluation:

A. Cover Letter

The Statement must include a cover letter that acknowledges receipt of all issued amendments to the RFQ. The letter should be addressed to **Roberta Swann, Director, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, 118 North Royal St. Suite 601, Mobile, AL 36602**, and include the following:

- The letter should indicate a primary contact for the Statement and that person's title, address, phone number, and email address.

- The letter should introduce the **Respondent's** Project Team. The Project Team is defined as the project lead plus any key team members who are critical for consideration by the evaluation team and include relevant professional certifications (e.g., Professional Engineer, Certified Wetland Scientist, etc.) for each.
- The letter should include a general statement of approach, distinguishing why the **Respondent** is the most suitable choice for this planning effort.
- The letter should include a statement asserting the Project Team is willing to complete the Project in a timely manner.
- The letter must include a statements that the firm is not in arrears in the payment of any obligation due and owing to the State of Alabama, including tax payments and employee benefits, that it shall not become so during the term of the agreement if selected; that the proposing **Respondent** will negotiate in good faith with the MBNEP, and that the firm grants to the MBNEP a non-exclusive right to use, or cause others to use, the contents of its Statement, or any part thereof, for any purpose.

B. Conceptual Approach & Methodology

Respondents are requested to demonstrate their understanding of this process by submitting a conceptual approach and methodology for project implementation. This narrative should articulate the **Respondent's** methods and approach for engaging both partners and area stakeholders to create a feasible WMP and conceptual implementation strategy that advances the intent of this RFQ. In addition, the **Respondent** shall include a project schedule of major planning milestones.

The narrative must include, at a minimum, a conceptual approach for: watershed characterization (including assessment of climate change vulnerabilities); stakeholder outreach and engagement; prescription of management measures, regulatory evaluation, and climate adaptation; long-term financing, prioritizing, and scheduling of implementation activities; and monitoring and evaluation of success.

C. Experience and Background

Given the unique nature of the Project and its importance to local stakeholders, it is essential to fully understand the experience and capabilities of all key members of the Project Team. **Respondent** should include the following information about the Project Team:

- Describe your team's experience in specific projects relevant to watershed and community-scale engineering and planning projects (including public/private developments) relative to stormwater management, site preparation, stream modification and diversion, or environmental restoration.
- Demonstrate the ability and experience of key individuals on the **Respondent's** proposed Project Team to complete projects of the scale and complexity envisioned in this RFQ on budget and on schedule.
- Provide up to three examples of projects that incorporated LID/green infrastructure concepts, climate adaptation, cultural preservation, and public access into implementation activities.
 - Due to the large extent of Federal and State conservation lands, please provide additional examples of key team members' experience in working with conservation stakeholders, including land trusts and conservation agencies.
- Provide details of any experience engaging diverse communities of stakeholders in projects that incorporated concepts of climate change, sea level rise, community resilience, and adaptation planning.
- Describe key Project Team members' involvement in previous projects, including project conception and financing, through the design and implementation phase, and leading to project completion and assessment.
- Provide details of any experience working in the Mobile Tensaw Delta area and surrounding communities in Mobile and Baldwin counties, AL.
- Relate how past projects have successfully engaged diverse communities of stakeholders and created community ownership of the project.
- Please provide the names and phone numbers of references for at least **two** completed projects for which the Project Team acted as Consultant and that may be considered comparable to the Project envisioned in

this RFQ. For each reference, indicate the contact person's role in the completed project and the period of their involvement.

- Respondents should identify with specificity any other relevant organizational, consulting, or other available resources that will be committed to the Project.

D. Project Team / Level of Participation

Given the complex nature of the Project, the Evaluation Team and MBNEP must understand the roles of key Project Team members, their availability to complete specific Project tasks in a timely manner, and the overall organization and decision-making process of the Project Team.

- Identify key Project Team members with responsibility for leading main Project tasks, including the percentage of time each is expected to commit through the duration of the planning process.
- Include an organization chart of the Project Team showing lines of communication, clearly-defined roles, availability, and decision-making hierarchy.

Selection of Planner

Statements will be reviewed by an Evaluation Committee composed of representatives from the MBNEP, state and federal agencies, and other Watershed stakeholders. The MBNEP reserves the right to contact **Respondents** with requests for clarification or additional information or to arrange other follow up activities it deems appropriate. Selection of a Planner will be based on: the quality, clarity, and thoughtfulness of the submitted Statement and its compatibility with the RFQ's stated objectives, statements of intent, and submission requirements, plus the results of information gathered from interviews with short-listed **Respondents** and client reference checks.

The following criteria, corresponding to the categories set forth in the submittal instructions will be used to evaluate **Respondents'** Statements. The weighted score for each category is indicated in parentheses:

A. Cover Letter / Comprehensive Project Team (5%)

1. Completeness of information on proposed Project Team.
2. Succinctness and ingenuity of the statement of approach.
3. Timeliness of approach.

B. Conceptual Approach & Methodology (50%)

1. Strategy for addressing the EPA's nine key elements.
2. Overall approach to literature review, field assessment, and data analysis, including willingness to generate additional data sets, when necessary, to supplement existing water quality, ecosystem, cultural, and demographic data.
3. Strategy for using available watershed data and modeling, including, but not limited to, build-out, water quality, and climate change vulnerability assessments to achieve project goals.
4. Demonstration of innovative methods for soliciting, assessing, and using community input, comments, and suggestions during project development and for working with diverse stakeholders to achieve project goals, including strategies for addressing concepts related to community resilience and adaptation planning.
5. Strategy for identifying implementation activities to support the six things people value, Section 6217 (g) management measures, and EPA's nine key elements, including but not limited to identification of opportunities to celebrate culture and connect community to water resources and install best management practices for improving habitat and water quality.
6. Innovative approaches for long-term financing, including strategies for partnering/leveraging resources and cost/benefit analyses for best management practices.
7. Innovative approaches for driving regulatory change.
8. Strategy for monitoring system changes effected by management measures and generating measurable results that incorporates a meaningful volunteer monitoring program.

9. Approach for promoting completed WMP and engaging locally-elected and State officials in adopting plan recommendations.
10. Strategy for completing the work in a timely manner.

C. Experience and Background (25%)

1. Diversity of expertise of key team members.
2. Years of experience in undertaking similar planning efforts by key team members.
3. Demonstrated team experience working in local watershed community.
4. Demonstrated team experience working with public entities to structure and implement watershed-scale LID projects, stream modification and diversions, environmental restoration, cultural preservation, community resilience and adaptation, and expansion or provision of public access.
5. Demonstrated team experience engaging diverse communities.
6. Demonstrated team experience in completing projects of the scale and complexity envisioned, from project conception through completion and assessment, on budget and on schedule.
7. Provision of at least two references.

D. Project Team / Level of Participation (20%)

1. Roles, availability, and time allocation of key Project Team members are clearly defined and reasonable.
2. Provision of organizational chart of key Project Team members that clearly delineates roles/responsibilities, lines of communication, and decision-making hierarchy.

Short List Consideration

The MBNEP reserves the right to accept, reject, and/or interview any or all qualified **Respondents** and intends to select a limited number of **Respondents** for interviews. **Respondents** short-listed for interviews will include those who submit Statements initially judged by the Evaluation Committee to be reasonable. Short-listed **Respondents** selected for interview shall be notified of the time, date, and location for oral presentations. Upon completion of the interview process, MBNEP reserves the right to immediately enter negotiations with a selected **Respondent** and execute the standard MBNEP Professional Services Contract.

Once it has completed this solicitation process, the MBNEP will be available to debrief **Respondents** who were not selected. The MBNEP will not share information from Statements made by other **Respondents**.

Supplemental Materials to this RFQ

Additional resources are available on the MBNEP's website: <http://www.mobilebaynep.com/library> .

Disclaimer

This RFQ is conducted under applicable provisions of *2006 Alabama Code – Section 41-16-72 - Procurement of professional services*. Please note that Statements in response to this RFQ are sought only from experienced consultants and developers of large-scale environmental planning and construction projects. **Respondents** who submit a Statement of Qualification are responsible for becoming fully informed regarding all circumstances, information, laws and any other matters that might, in any way, affect the **Respondent's** submitted Statement.

Respondents are responsible for acquainting themselves with all available information and documented conditions of or affecting the watershed. The MBNEP, federal, state or local agencies, Mobile and Baldwin counties, local municipalities, and participating individuals make no representations about the environmental conditions, or presence or absence of contaminated materials within the watershed referenced in this solicitation.

MBNEP, federal, state or local agencies, Mobile and Baldwin counties, local municipalities, and individuals assume no responsibility for any interpretations made by **Respondents** based on information provided in this offer or through any other sources. The MBNEP and its employees and/or agents shall not be liable at any time for any costs associated with or related to this Request, which are incurred by any **Respondent** to the RFQ, subsequent amendments, or cancellation.

MBNEP reserves the right to reject all proposals, negotiate further with any entity submitting proposals, or seek additional proposals. Selection is estimated to occur on or before **Monday, September 9th, 2019**.

Non-Discrimination. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, gender, pregnancy, national origin, genetic information, veteran status, or disability in its hiring or employment practices nor in admission to, access to, or operations of its programs, services, or activities.

Open Trade. By submitting a proposal, the Submitter represents that he/she and the business entity he/she represents is not currently engaged in the boycott of a person or entity based in or doing business with a jurisdiction with whom the State of Alabama can enjoy open trade, as defined in Act 2016-312.

Non-Commitment of Funds. Any contract related to this proposed project is subject to the availability of funds and/or the needs of the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program and therefore the MBNEP, at its discretion, may or may not issue a final contract as a result of this RFQ. Further, even in the event an initial selection is made by the MBNEP, no selection is final until full execution of a written agreement detailing an agreed upon scope of work. If the MBNEP deems, at its sole discretion, that a satisfactory agreement cannot be reached in accordance with an initial selection; the MBNEP reserves the right to proceed with efforts to make another selection based upon proposals submitted pursuant to this RFQ.

Open Records Act. All responses received will be subject to the Alabama Open Records Act, Ala. Code § 36-12-40, (1975), as amended, and may be subject to public disclosure upon request.