

Horsley Witten Group

Sustainable Environmental Solutions

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March 18, 2025

Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
VIA EMAIL

Elizabeth Stone
RIDEM – Office of the Director
elizabeth.stone@dem.ri.gov

Rachel Calabro
RIDEM – Office of the Director
rachel.calabro@dem.ri.gov

Re: MPA 584D Solicitations – 2025 Community Climate Conversations

Dear Selection Committee Members,

The Horsley Witten Group, Inc (HW) is pleased to submit this proposal to the Executive Climate Change Coordinating Council (EC4) to provide meeting design and facilitation services related to the State's 2025 Climate Strategy. Specifically, our services will be targeted to engagement of Environmental Justice and Low-Income Disadvantaged Communities (LIDAC) to build capacity within these communities to understand issues related to climate change and provide meaningful input into state-level policy.

HW is privileged to team with Roots 2Empower on this project, acknowledging their superior ability to convene and engage with the communities that are prioritized for this initiative. The work of Roots 2Empower is focused on enabling civic engagement through education and visioning, and they provide community members with the information needed to engage on pressing issues related to environmental injustice or climate action. While HW will serve as the prime contractor and Administrative Lead for this project, Roots 2Empower will serve as the Engagement Lead, designing and implementing community meetings over the course of the project.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions regarding our proposal or to schedule a time when we can meet with members of the EC4 or the Advisory Board to further discuss this proposal. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Horsley Witten Group, Inc.

Nathan E. Kelly, AICP, NCI
President

Team Introduction



HW is a full-service planning and engineering firm with offices located in Boston and Sandwich, MA; Providence, RI; and Exeter, NH. The firm was incorporated in 1988 and consists of a professional staff of over 70 planners, scientists, and engineers. Our staff brings decades of experience in the fields of land use, infrastructure, housing, open space preservation, resilience, community design, natural resource protection, low impact development, and renewable energy. We are a nationally recognized leader in community planning and have established long-term

relationships with the American Planning Association (APA), the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU), the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA), and numerous state and local government agencies.

With our diverse areas of expertise, HW brings a long history of public participation, outreach, and training to this project and is uniquely qualified to help local stakeholders balance smart growth initiatives and targeted land planning with economic development objectives. HW has assisted over 100 local jurisdictions in planning for more sustainable futures in their communities. Our planners work with communities nationally to develop customized community plans, and our portfolio includes over a dozen plans in the New England region (including Connecticut), as well as projects in Arkansas, Hawaii, South Carolina, Maryland, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean.

Roots 2Empower

Roots 2Empower was founded in 2020 with a vision to support personal growth, community wellness, and environmental stewardship in communities disproportionately affected by economic and social injustice. They recognize that climate change is not merely an environmental issue; it's a justice issue that is deeply connected to economic inequality, public health, and the need to build resilient and equitable communities. Roots 2Empower takes a holistic approach in their programming—bridging public education, connecting to the healing power of the earth, and building skills and community resilience.

The organization's environmental justice work is focused on enabling civic engagement through education and visioning. They provide community members (predominantly in Pawtucket, Central Falls, and South Providence) with the information they need to engage on pressing issues related to environmental injustice or climate action. Through this work, they deepen their understanding of the barriers that their communities face so they can better work to provide the support necessary to overcome and eventually remove those barriers. Food insecurity and financial insecurity come up often. Accordingly, Roots 2Empower provides food justice, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship workshops to increase access to healthy choices and social mobility, especially for formerly incarcerated individuals who may face increased challenges finding employment.

Key Personnel

The following key personnel will lead this project. Additional staff for support will be added as needed.

Roots 2Empower



Nicole DiPaolo – Lead Organizer and Facilitator. Nicole is a dynamic nonprofit leader who creatively applies her diverse skillset to amplify the impact of nonprofit organizations. With refined expertise in facilitating engagement for diverse audiences and objectives, she creates equitable and inclusive spaces that foster robust participation. Nicole believes policy outcomes are most effective when community-driven and rooted in collaboration and understanding. By integrating strategic thinking with people-centered communication, she leverages policy expertise in climate and clean energy, environmental justice, workforce development, and labor to craft innovative solutions.



Clare Kim – Lead Organizer and Facilitator. Clare is an educator, facilitator, and writer who has developed a highly skilled craft of teaching for K-12 students and adult learners. Her professional experiences and ongoing training in nonviolent communication frame her approach to environmental justice and climate resilience work. Clare dreams of steaming compost piles, robust public transportation, and accessible, playful third spaces.

Horsley Witten Group



Krista Moravec, AICP, Senior Project Manager. Krista is a professional planner with more than 22 years of experience working in the Northeast and USVI. She assists diverse federal, state, and local clients with visioning and master planning at a variety of scales, from larger regions to neighborhoods. Krista is an interdisciplinary planner and brings a comprehensive viewpoint to projects, recognizing the intersection of economic, environmental, and social elements and the need to balance the impacts and benefits of these conditions. Most of her projects involve public outreach and she has been instrumental in developing and coordinating materials, programs, and activities to ensure equitable participation by the entire community.



Nathan Kelly, AICP, President, Principal-in-Charge. Nate has 24 years of project management experience and has provided professional planning, zoning, site development, and facilitation services to more than 50 New England municipalities. Nate serves as Principal-in-Charge for projects ranging in value from \$10,000 to well over \$1M. In this capacity, Nate provides direct support to Project Managers, coordination assistance with subcontractors, oversight of contracting, support for budget management, quality assurance/quality control, and technical support in the areas of regulatory compliance, long-range planning, and

site development. Nate served as President of the Rhode Island Chapter of the American Planning Association from 2017-18 and is certified by the American Planning Association and the National Charrette Institute.

Project Approach

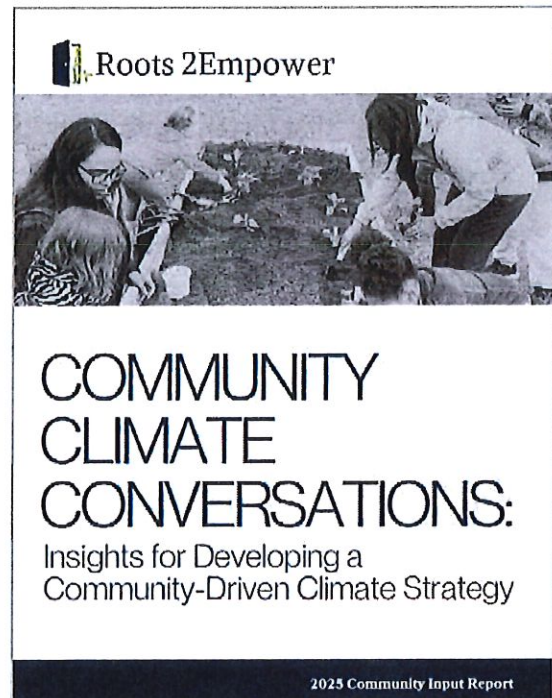
Background

In 2024, Roots 2Empower held seven community climate conversations speaking with 220 community members to prepare them to engage in the development of Rhode Island's 2025 Climate Action Strategy. The vast majority of these participants were residents of environmental justice areas, people of color, with household incomes significantly below the state median income. Core themes that emerged from their conversations include:

- (1) Environmental justice community members are eager to learn more about these issues and provide their input.
- (2) Existing opportunities within the state are difficult to access and perpetuate distrust in what is perceived as a lack of accountability and transparency.

Our proposal applies these learnings to remove barriers to participation through stipends, translation, food, childcare, and the location and format of the meetings.

The main goal of our team's work in this project is to increase pathways for engagement about potential climate mitigation and resilience strategies that the state will be proposing as part of the 2025 Climate Strategy. To ensure the state meets the requirements of the Act on Climate for populations most vulnerable to the effects of climate change influence the 2025 Climate Strategy and every five-year plan thereafter, our team must build pathways for communities to meaningfully participate in decision-making. While the scope of this bid is limited, we have designed our work to act as a model for future engagement efforts that can and must be expanded on in 2026 and beyond to remove barriers to ongoing participation. Climate adaptation and mitigation is long-term work, and communities must be at the table each step of the way shaping design and implementation to prevent further exacerbation of existing disparities and enable equitable access to the benefits and amenities of a regenerative economy.



The Community Input Report developed by Roots 2Empower will serve as important project resource. We anticipate it will inform both the process and content of the 2025 Climate Strategy.

To increase pathways for engagement we will focus on (1) raising awareness about state action being taken on adaptation and mitigation and the opportunities to engage; (2) providing education about climate resilience and adaptation measures to support meaningful engagement and (3) get feedback on what is needed to ensure negative impacts are avoided and positive impacts are harnessed.

Overall Approach

Our overall approach to the project will occur in three phases as follows:

Initial Orientation and Coordination

The ongoing development of the 2025 Climate Strategy is a complex undertaking on an accelerated schedule. At the outset of this project, our team will coordinate with the EC4 and their consultants to review the broader process and ensure our work is complementary, coordinated, and provided ample access. This coordination will begin with a meeting dedicated exclusively to the consultants and potentially liaisons to the larger EC4. During the meeting we will review the larger project timeline, proposed engagement strategy, and anticipated milestones to ensure our work can inform important decisions and policy deliberations along the way. At a minimum, our team will deliver a memorandum summary of early coordination meetings outlining our summary of understanding and any recommendations the EC4 or their consultants may consider.

Project Meetings

Based on our initial coordination, our team will begin this phase by delivering a written comprehensive engagement plan describing all necessary logistical arrangements and other needs for items like staffing, transportation, childcare, food and various supports. As part of our engagement approach, our team will promote these events with the municipalities, labor unions, and health equity zones (where applicable) as well as libraries and community hubs to ensure we engage a diverse audience

This phase of the project will then involve the meeting performance called for in the RFQ including all preparation, setting up the space, materials development, facilitation, documentation, and written summaries. The intentions of these meetings are to both invest in community members' understanding of climate mitigation and resilience strategies as well as elicit feedback on what they are excited or concerned about (building on previous Community Climate Conversations). Design of the meetings remains to be determined, but our team will draw from its experience with the previous Community Climate Conversations to ensure a successful approach. More personal/intimate techniques like small groups discussion are anticipated. Topics of discussion may be identified, in part, through meeting discussion. However, likely topics may include carbon sequestration, flood/heat management, energy efficiency in buildings, and carbon emissions reductions in transportation.

Our team proposes a total of five meetings, four being in person and one held virtually. The in-person meetings will be held in geographies strategically selected to capture the diverse climate

needs and perspectives of Rhode Islanders while emphasizing those most impacted by environmental disparities. The locations we are initially considering for in-person meetings are Woonsocket, Burrillville, Providence, Newport. These can be confirmed at the outset of the project during the Initial Orientation and Coordination phase described above.

Feedback on Policies and Strategies

Roots 2Empower, with assistance from HW, will play an integral role in reviewing products developed as part of the larger 2025 Climate Strategy. Through attendance at Advisory Committee meetings and direct coordination with EC4's consultants, our team can review and provide input through a variety of channels. This will ensure the integration of perspectives both from the previous Community Climate Conversations, and those occurring as part of this project.

Fee Breakdown

Our team proposes to use the funding allocated for this project as described below. Changes may be made to these allocations based on the needs of the project with approval from RIDEM. Note that costs related to stipends or enlisting the support services of other local community groups are not easy to predict. Our team will require flexibility in identifying individuals eligible for stipends and other local partners during this process who may require compensation. However, our team will not exceed the overall budget for this project.

HW Allocation

HW should be considered the **Administrative Lead** for this project and will use approximately \$20,000 of the project budget for the following purposes:

- Contract management and overall budget oversight. HW will be the prime contractor under RIDEM contracting.
- Administrative project documentation and invoicing.
- Administering and dispersing all funds related to meeting support services.
- Coordination with other consultants related to the Climate Strategy.
- In-person and virtual meeting support including, but not limited to, attendance at meetings, note taking, meeting logistics, meeting support materials, and stipend management.
- Coordination of foreign language services for meetings.
- Review of policy proposals for the 2025 Climate Action Plan and drafting comments/responses.
- Attendance at Advisory Committee meetings.

Roots 2Empower Allocation

Roots 2Empower should be considered the **Engagement Lead** for this project, acting in a subcontractor role to HW. The remaining \$60,000 of the budget will be allocated to Roots 2Empower for the following purposes:

- Coordination with other consultants related to the Climate Strategy.
- Direct engagement and recruiting for attendance and support at community meetings from/by community partners.

- Initial communications regarding meeting support services and stipends (then managed by HW).
- In-person and virtual meeting leadership including, but not limited to, meeting design and facilitation.
- Review of policy proposals for the 2025 Climate Action Plan.
- Attendance at Advisory Committee meetings.