



## **REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: EQUITY-BASED STRATEGIC PLANNING**

The 50-year old [Environment Council of Rhode Island \(ECRI\)](#) is at a crossroads. New leadership, changing demographics, and the drive to be more inclusive in environmental outreach and policy create an opportunity for change. Existing and new stakeholders agree: ECRI has great potential to become an organization that amplifies the voices of all Rhode Islanders. However, to achieve this goal, stakeholders must clarify ECRI's role and determine the best strategic direction for the organization. We are seeking an experienced strategic planner to guide us through this process, putting racial equity and justice at the center of our new plan.

### **Background**

ECRI was founded as a 501(c)4 in 1970 and has since served as a voice for the Ocean State's environmental advocacy community. As a council, ECRI has been a venue for organizations to come together in monthly board and committee meetings to collectively develop and support the advancement of environmental policies. ECRI's membership also consists of individuals, all of whom have a seat at the table in these monthly discussions.

As a 501(c)4, ECRI aims to involve members in civic engagement. ECRI members follow topics and provides inputs on policies at various state agencies, and produce a biennial [Green Report Card](#) to evaluate the Governor and General Assembly on their records on ECRI's priority issues. ECRI also hosts a legislative coffee hour with lawmakers at the start of each session and a lobby day in the spring that provides members and concerned residents a shared space to advocate for environmental protection and action.

In 1991, ECRI launched a 501(c)3, the ECRI Education Fund to educate Rhode Islanders about the health and protection of our environment through community conferences and school environmental programs. The Fund also offers fiscal agency sponsor services to environmental groups that lack 501(c)3 tax-exempt statuses, thus providing these groups with the additional capacity to seek charitable grants.

ECRI is the Rhode Island affiliate of the [National Wildlife Federation \(NWF\)](#), which will be engaged in the strategic planning process. NWF affiliates are autonomous organizations that take the lead in state and local conservation efforts and collaborate with the National Wildlife Federation to conduct grassroots activities on national issues.

### **Why equity-based strategic planning?**

ECRI is composed of volunteer members who steer the organization by participating in monthly board meetings. In recent years, board members have also been called on to conduct day-to-day tasks involved with management of the organization, including communications and program development. An organizational structure that relies on volunteer labor was identified as a barrier to active engagement at a 2018 ECRI retreat.

At the same time, the organization has begun efforts to reach out to new organizations to build a broader and more diverse tent. This has created occasional tension as some member groups feel ECRI is not as effectively executing work as it has in the past, even though outreach to underrepresented

communities increases the organization's volunteer capacity. In June, [ECRI's executive committee released a Black Lives Matter statement](#) acknowledging climate justice is racial justice, committing ECRI to racial equity principles to ensure our work is inclusive.

In preparation for raising funds for strategic planning, NWF staff and the current President of ECRI, Priscilla De La Cruz, conducted interviews with key ECRI stakeholders to discuss challenges and opportunities of the organization. One key takeaway from these conversations was the current decision-making structure, as well as efforts to lift up new voices in the movement, has both large, mainstream organizations and environmental justice groups feeling frustrated. Since anyone who attends an ECRI meeting, which lacks quorum requirements, can vote on an issue as a member and drive outcomes, larger organizations often feel outnumbered on policy decisions. On the contrary, environmental justice groups have felt certain aspects of ECRI's meetings and format make engaging intimidating and enable larger organizations to have the most say-so in decisions

Stakeholders also expressed near unanimous buy-in to engage in a strategic planning process to surmount these challenges and strengthen ECRI overall. Stakeholders largely agreed that ECRI functions best with specific tasks, such as negotiating climate policy or creating coalitions focused on discrete issues. Although membership is experiencing the challenges of building a larger, broader, and more diverse environmental movement, it recognizes the value of unifying a broad range of voices and effectively mobilizing a wide range of stakeholders to increase ECRI's potential to uniquely influence and pressure lawmakers to act on climate change and other environmental problems.

Last but not least, stakeholders agree adding more to ECRI's mission—including but not limited to lifting up underrepresented voices – will undoubtedly require more resources and time than ECRI currently has. The only ECRI paid staff is a part-time administrator that has a taxing workload to complete in only 10 hours per week, as ECRI serves as a fiscal agent for a handful of coalitions and collaborative efforts. Regardless of the specific outcomes of a strategic planning process, stakeholders want to secure more resources to improve the organization and build capacity.

### **Definition of success**

If the strategic planning process is successful, ECRI, its key stakeholders, and members will:

- Develop a common understanding of language and the importance of equity and justice work and what it means for the organization;
- Set five-year strategic goals to create a shared vision and timeline for ECRI's work that could include plans for staffing, communications, capacity building, and fundraising;
- Identify barriers that prevent frontline community members from engaging with ECRI;
- Have clear steps to center equity and justice as part of the organization's structure and culture;
- Have a clear and transparent decision-making processes and process for engaging the board in budgeting, fundraising, and oversight of office functions and technology;
- Understand the importance of strategic planning for organizational development, and develop a common understanding around ECRI's strategic purpose and role;
- Have a plan for providing the organization with the resources necessary to achieve its mission;
- Inspire members to step up into key leadership roles within the organization.

## **Timeline**

### *ECRI-led pre-work for strategic planning – Started October 2020*

- Continue engaging ECRI members and non-members and actively seek feedback that will help inform a strategic planning process;
- Start doing 5-10 minutes strategic planning and briefings at each board meeting to foster engagement;
- Form strategic planning committee and begin to meet monthly to help ECRI expand and achieve key milestones throughout the strategic planning process by November 2020;
- Continue consistent and intentional outreach to non-ECRI members working on intersecting efforts and in frontline or environmental justice communities;
- Facilitate a discussion about climate mobilization, capacity building, and racial equity at December and January board meetings.

### *Grounding sessions – January 2021*

- Bring ECRI members together to agree on common language, conversational norms, and the importance of the work we're going to embark on in equity-based strategic planning. A number of ECRI member groups are already starting this work in a self-organized equity and justice training hosted by the Rhode Island Foundation and RI Equity Foundations Environmental Cohort;
- Begin reviewing bylaws, structures, decision-making processes, and roles including ECRI's role as an affiliate of NWF, in order to have a better understanding of the possibilities for organizational transformation (see list of ECRI background documents on page 3).

### *Stakeholder outreach – February, March, April 2021*

- Strategic Planning committee works with consultant to conduct stakeholder interviews and workshops. We are open to the best way to handle stakeholder outreach – individual interviews, group work sessions, or a combination of these above;
- By March 2021, leverage NWF resources with local funders to ensure ECRI is capable of executing the new strategic plan.

### *Draft strategic plan – May 2021*

- Conduct follow-up conversations with stakeholders who provided feedback and engaged in the strategic planning process to solicit input on draft plan.

### *Feedback on draft – June, July 2021*

- Present preliminary strategic planning findings at ECRI's Annual Meeting in June 2021.

### *Finalize strategic plan – August 2021*

- Finalize strategic planning report that includes action items for the chosen strategic plan period as well as an executive summary or summary handout to easily share with stakeholders and post on ECRI's website;
- ECRI's executive board submits final report to NWF by August 2021.

## **Desired experience and competencies**

The ideal consultant(s) will have demonstrated experience:

- Strategic planning, preferably with largely volunteer-led organizations and/or in environmental justice;
- Managing diverse stakeholder input;
- Creating processes, meetings, conference calls that are inclusive and safe for people with marginalized identities;
- Working with environmental, community, and racial justice organizations in New England.

## **Items to include in your proposal**

- Proposed scope of work;
- Your description or definition of racial equity and justice, and your thoughts on why centering equity is important;
- Breakdown of consultancy costs and budget;
- Examples of relevant work and past clients.

## **Proposal submissions**

Please submit your proposals or further inquiries to Priscilla De La Cruz, ECRI President, [priscilla@greenenergyconsumers.org](mailto:priscilla@greenenergyconsumers.org) and Zach Cockrum, National Wildlife Federation Director of Conservation Partnerships, [Cockrumz@nwf.org](mailto:Cockrumz@nwf.org) with a proposed scope of work and budget by January 11, 2021.

## **ECRI background documents**

- [ECRI bylaws](#) and [Ed Fund bylaws](#)
- [ECRI process on position and actions published in 2010](#)
- List of [members](#) and executive committee [officers](#)
- [More ECRI history](#)
- [Outcomes of ECRI's 2018 Retreat](#)
- [Black Lives Matter Statement](#)
- [ECRI's op-ed published in ecoRI news: Earth Day and Pandemic Remind Us of Need to Build Resilient Communities](#)
- [Video recording of our June 2020 annual meeting: Building Resilient & Equitable Communities After COVID-19](#)
- [Strategic plan survey results](#) - *to be provided later in December or upon request*
- Non-ECRI related documents related to local equity in environment and climate justice initiatives: [City of Providence's Climate Justice Plan](#) and [Framework For A Racially Equitable and Just Providence](#), and [PVD Tree Plan](#)