



National Parks England Commission for Policy Communications Support

April 2019

INVITATION TO TENDER

Introduction

National Parks England (NPE) is seeking to commission either an agency or freelancer to increase the profile and coverage of the collective policy messages of the ten English National Parks that form National Parks England and the work of their Authorities.

This paper gives some background on NPE; outlines the tasks required; and how this is to be delivered.

Written expressions of interest are to be received to Paul.hamblin@nationalparksengland.org.uk by **00.01 Wednesday 15 May 2019**

Please feel free to get in touch if you would like to discuss the commission in advance of making your expression.

About National Parks

The ten National Parks in England have two purposes:

- **Purpose 1:** To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.
- **Purpose 2:** To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the National Park by the public.

In addition, National Park Authorities in pursuit of our purposes have a duty to seek to foster the social and economic wellbeing of the local communities within the National Park.

The Broads Authority was established under separate legislation and has an additional purpose and functions relating to the management of navigation for its waterways.

About the National Park Authorities (NPAs)

NPAs have a unique status within Government, being a hybrid between freestanding Local Authorities and Non-Departmental Public Bodies. Information about the National Park Authorities can be found on each of their websites. An easy way to access these is via the UK-wide NPA's

collective website <https://nationalparks.uk/> . This contains more information about National Parks UK. For more information on National Parks England see <http://www.nationalparksengland.org.uk/>.

The work of this contract concerns the ten English National Parks collective public affairs work only as the Welsh and Scottish National Parks are part of devolved arrangements. Currently there are nine National Park Authorities, and the Broads Authority which are collectively referenced as the 10 English National Park Authorities. The NPAs have increasingly been seen as delivery agents for a variety of Government initiatives – such as the Government’s 25 Year Environment Plan, and their expertise is increasingly sought after within Defra and other partner organisations. In 2016, for example, the Government launched an [8-Point Plan for National Parks](#) alongside NPE.

There is a long and productive history of collaborative working between the English National Park Authorities. Over the past few years the NPAs have made great strides towards gaining the recognition they deserve and towards widening their responsibilities in an appropriate manner. There is a hugely exciting agenda for NPE to help move the National Park Authorities further up the political agenda.

National Park Authorities collaborating at a UK Level

There are 15 NPAs across the UK (England 10, Wales 3, Scotland 2). The Communicators for the NPAs come together to promote the National Parks as places to the public, rather than the work of the Authorities as institutions to policy makers. The National Parks are establishing a Communications Unit in Norwich to lead on the delivery of a new brand for the UK’s National Parks.

Policy is a devolved matter and therefore addressed by the 10 English NPAs coming together through NPE.

About National Parks England (NPE)

National Parks England was established on 1 April 2006 and represents the interests of the nine English National Park Authorities and the Broads Authority. It is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and exists to support policy and practice by coordinating the views of the 10 Authorities.

It does this by:

- Providing a collective voice for the views of the English NPAs
- Raising the profile of the work of the authorities to policy makers, Parliamentarians and other decision makers
- Facilitating discussion amongst NPAs on issues of common concern
- Supporting the development and capacity of the NPAs to effect change
- Working in partnership with other bodies where this adds value

As the public affairs lead for English National Park Authorities collectively, NPE manages work to advance the interests of the Authorities with decision-makers, such as Government departments, public bodies, Parliament, and other key stakeholders. We seek to ensure a positive perception of NPAs and the Broads Authority with other stakeholders such as the media and NGOs. We also monitor the effective public policy changes on NPAs, anticipate changes, and advance our collective policy messages. The Authorities see NPE as central to their interests and as the focal point for representing the Authorities on policy and funding matters. Each Authority contributes funds towards NPE on an equal basis.

NPE is governed by the Board of Directors – comprised the Chairs of each of the National Park Authorities. The staff of NPE are ultimately responsible to the Board and the Chair of the Board. On a week to week basis, the NPE Executive Director liaises with a lead National Park Officer/ Chief Executive who is a Chief Executive of one of the 10 parks.

The Board have agreed a staff re-structuring, in part to unlock new resource to further our policy communications goals (see below). The full NPE team comprises an Executive Director (FT); Head of Policy (4 days); and an Executive Assistant (FT).

NPE is based in London to facilitate access to decision makers and to minimise travel time. Its office is based in Southwark relatively close to Parliament and Whitehall.

NPE's Business Plan and Priorities

The Authorities agree a set of collective policy priorities which exist in addition to their own Management Plans and to this end a three-year NPE Business Plan has been adopted 2018/19-2020/21. This helps guide NPE staff, and staff in the individual Authorities working on collective projects to have a clear sense of direction and priority.

NPE's [Business Plan](#) has four strategic aims focused on:

- enhancing the reputation of NPAs;
- informing national policy decisions;
- securing resources for the work of the National Park Authorities; and
- maximising how we work together.

Integrating effective communications is vital to the achievement of all four aims.

Commission Summary

Objective: To increase the profile and coverage for (a) the work of the nine English NPAs and the Broads Authority that form National Parks England, and (b) their collective policy messages, through delivery of a targeted Communications Plan.

Audiences: Our primary audiences are national politicians, national policy makers/ officials and existing and potential advocates of National Parks. Obviously, others will be recipients of NPE communications, but it is the above audiences that we are targeting.

The key messages to convey:

- Agreed collective policy messages;
- Communications elements of certain Accords that NPE has with other organisations;
- NPE or collective National Park initiatives (that resonate with policy/political audiences) – like *Parks on a Page* or our Natural and Historic Environment publications);
- NPA good practice, achievements, track record and impacts which support and reinforce agreed policy positions; and
- Internal communications to NPA Members and Staff in the ten English Authorities.

Main roles and responsibilities

1. To work with the Executive Director on the development of a Communications Plan for NPE's policy communications, and to lead on its delivery, drawing on the expertise of NPA communications staff.
2. To advise National Parks England on the opportunities to further policy and reputational objectives through communications channels.
3. To act as the media desk for NPE. Maintain media distribution and contact lists for a variety of policy areas; proactively facilitating the development of relationships between NPE policy staff and national media outlets.
4. To work closely with the ten Heads of Communications in the English National Parks and the UK National Parks Unit based in Norwich.
5. Monitoring national media coverage (including social media) for issues of collective interest to National Park Authorities; alerting appropriate communications and policy staff to areas where a response may be required; and supporting the Executive Director and Head of Policy to develop lines to take.
6. Identifying and using effective and relatively low-cost ways of communicating National Park Authority good practice to policy audiences.
7. Responsible for development and maintenance of National Parks England's website and ensuring it effectively communicates NPAs as a source of expertise, advocates our policy priorities, and collective positions.
8. Grow, manage and monitor National Parks England's social media activity to ensure it reinforces our collective priorities, is well targeted, better engages our key audiences, and represents good practice.
9. Writing advocacy documents, letters and articles as requested and supervised by the Executive Director or Head of Policy.
10. To support the implementation of National Parks England launches/ events that further policy and reputational objectives.
11. In conjunction with other NPE staff, to prepare internal communications for NPA Members and Staff on NPE's activities and achievements and policy updates.

This list does not purport to be comprehensive but is provided in good faith and does not profess to include all likely roles.

What is required to ensure effective delivery

It is considered important that the service provided meets the following tests:

- **Skills** – We are looking for an agency/individual with excellent communications skills, both written and oral across traditional and digital communications. You must have experience of communicating and successfully achieving coverage of policy related issues.
- **Experience:** You must have demonstrable experience of:
 - working in public affairs communications;

- pitching to and achieving policy relevant media; and
- communicating across traditional and digital platform.
- **Capacity to deliver** – 2.5 days a week of policy communications support and willingness to take out of hours policy related media calls.
- **Responsive to external environment** – to be able to respond to the sometimes quick nature of the policy environment.
- **Understanding of the political landscape** – to be aware of the political sensitivities and nuances of the English policy arena and of working on behalf of public bodies.
- **Accountability for delivery**– to give the NPE Executive and Board the confidence the service is being provided to quality and time.

How the Agency/ Freelancer will interact with existing NPA/NPE staff

Embedded within the NPE staff team...

It is vital that the postholder is embedded within the NPE staff team so that, for example, communication elements can be incorporated into the framing of policy activity from the outset; and that NPE lines to take to the media adhere to agreed policy approaches. You would be expected to join weekly NPE team meetings, and attend monthly face to face meetings with the Executive Director and Head of Policy to direct and agree communications plans. A desk at NPE's offices is available for use if considered helpful.

Working closely with the NPA Communications teams...

Your main point of contact with the ten English National Parks will be through the ten Heads of Communications, the UK Communications Unit, and the Communications Steering Group. Your role will be to develop positive relationships with them, to liaise and work with them.

The individual NPAs have much expertise in key areas. It will be obvious from the above that a clear understanding of the skills, policies and priorities of the individual National Park Authorities is also vital for NPE to successfully carry out its role.

Part of the collaborative effort of the English National Park Authorities operates through a series of topic-based Working/ Professional Groups. These bring together NPA staff who are working in a similar policy area. There are approximately twenty groups.

Liaising with the UK Communications resource...

Policy is a devolved matter and therefore addressed by the 10 English NPAs coming together through NPE. However, the 15 NPAs across the UK (England 10, Wales 3, Scotland 2) come together to promote the National Parks as places, rather than the work of the Authorities as institutions. There may be occasions where joint procurement of services would make sense (for example for media monitoring). The National Parks are establishing a Communications Unit in Norwich to manage the proactive work on behalf of the 15 National Parks and you will be expected to work closely with the Unit's members. You will also be expected to learn about the new brand for the UK National Parks and reflect it in NPE's policy messaging/ assets where relevant.

Conditions

- The contractor will be retained on a retainer equivalent to a 2.5 day a week staff resource (not including travel time, with precise day allocation to be agreed in advance).
- The contractor should be sufficiently flexible to take and act on out of hours calls from the media.
- The commission will be managed by NPE's Executive Director.

- In addition to contractor costs there is also a Communications budget totalling £6,000 per annum (with decisions over expenditure to be confirmed by the Executive Director).
- The contract will be for a fixed period until 1st April, 2021, after which time it may be extended by mutual agreement or subject to a retendering exercise as determined by the client. NPE reserves the right to cancel or vary the tendering process at any point.

Measures of success

NPE is seeking a range of desirable policy outcomes. These will be influenced by a wide variety of impacts and inputs that shape policy. As the lead organisation for English National Park Authorities public affairs work, we will use traditional measures to assess the impact of our policy communications – including extent of coverage for our policy messages, their comprehension by target audiences, and positioning of NPE as a trusted policy advisor.

Given the role defined for communications in the NPE Business Plan, success would be seen through:

- Delivery of a clear communications plan** - with key targets for coverage delivered.
- Clear messages have been developed** on policy priorities developed in the Communications Plan with targeted audiences and media identified.
- Identification of a database of key contacts and development of positive working relationships with key media used by policy makers.**
- Coherence across the network of English NPAs** with internal communications contributing to shared understanding of our goals, priorities, and activity.

To support this, it is critical that there is a good **underpinning infrastructure** such as a good up-to-date website, regular ongoing engagement through social media, a database of contacts and case studies, good relationships with the media, a well populated image library for all the Parks. In many cases this can be achieved through accessing existing assets held by individual NPAs and the UK Communications Unit. They have a plethora of assets and resources and you will be expected to work closely with the National Park Communicators group in order to avoid duplication of effort.

Key Deliverables

- An Annual NPE Communications Plan, prepared with the NPE Executive Director, that:
 - sets out clear measurable objectives;
 - clearly sets out the protocol for how all communications will be signed off before release;
 - identifies the media most used by target policy makers and parliamentarians and sets out how they will be targeted including developing media distribution lists, and networks established;
 - grow our presence and influence on social media and identify what if any other social media channels we should be using;
 - identifies a low-cost method for NPE to monitor national media coverage (including social media) for issues of collective interest to National Park Authorities
 - virtually launches a visual roadmap for the 5 big opportunities that NPE has identified in its submission to the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes;
 - includes a clear plan and assets to be produced to communicate collective achievements in our 70th Anniversary year.
 - includes a bi-monthly update to NPA staff and members on national policy developments, and NPE activity and achievements.
 - includes communication resources (online and offline) that promote NPA's good practice in key policy priority areas (such as agriculture, rural development, and health and wellbeing);

- identifies how NPE's website can communicate NPAs as a source of expertise, our policy priorities, our collective positions, with quality imagery demonstrating what NPAs do and achieve; and over time evaluate whether this can be achieved within the UK website model against clear criteria.

In addition, we would like you to:

- develop a media protocol that sets out how media queries will be monitored and dealt with, how Heads of Comms for relevant National Park Authorities will be liaised with;
- identify and fix short-term problems in navigation, imagery and content of NPE's website within the existing structure;
- manage external communications-related relationships with, for example, designers; and
- undertake a survey of NPA staff on methods for sharing learning, and levels of awareness of NPE activity.

Evaluation of tenders and award of contract

Tenders should address the measures of success listed above. Tenders will be evaluated/scored against the following criteria:

- Demonstrable skills across written, oral and digital communications (30%)
- Cost (25%)
- Experience of delivering public affairs communications at a national level (20%)
- Capacity to deliver across the working week, and degree of responsiveness to the external environment (15%)
- Experience of working with a geographically dispersed network (10%)

It is anticipated that short-listed tenders will be invited for an interview. The Panel will include the NPE Executive Director, Lead National Park Officer/ CEO, and a NPA Head of Communications.

Interviews will be held on Thursday 23 May 2019.

Contact for further information

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