

Request for Proposals

Coalition Building, Meeting Design & Facilitation, and Vision Development for California Water Data Infrastructure Modernization

Issuing Organization: California Water Data Consortium

Proposal Due Date: February 27, 2026

Anticipated Timeline: The project is expected to begin in March or April of 2026 and be completed within 12 months

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Background

The California Water Data Consortium (the Consortium) is an independent, nonprofit organization created by a partnership of state agencies and others to co-develop durable solutions to California's most pressing water management challenges. The Consortium brings people and institutions together to exchange ideas, synthesize information, and design new ways to share and use water data in California.

California is entering a critical period for modernizing its water data infrastructure. Over the past decade, California has made meaningful progress in improving water data availability, interoperability, and use through new platforms, policies, and collaborations. As the state looks ahead, the next phase of water data modernization will require stronger vision, alignment, and messaging across agencies, policymakers, local and regional leaders, data producers, data users, and communities. It will also require a long-term commitment to fund and build state agency capacity to support a modern water data future – particularly as federal funding for water data collection and research is reduced.

This next phase of work must both **celebrate and learn from the successes of the past decade** and clearly articulate a vision, priorities, and partnerships for the decade ahead. The vision must address not only technical infrastructure, but also governance, stewardship, equity, trust, and long-term sustainability—particularly in the context of an upcoming transition to a new gubernatorial administration for California.

The Consortium seeks a qualified team to support a structured, inclusive, and forward-looking process to: (1) Strengthen and build a coalition of stakeholders invested in California's water data future; (2) Design and facilitate meetings and engagement activities that surface a shared vision, priorities, tensions, and opportunities; and (3) Draft a clear, compelling vision for the next decade of water data infrastructure modernization in California.

Project Objectives

The objectives of this project are to:

1. Establish and support a **coalition of California water data stakeholders** committed to a multi-year collaboration to develop, advance, and advocate for a shared vision and roadmap for water data infrastructure modernization.
2. Facilitate **effective coordination among State of California agencies**, while also engaging local, regional, Tribal, academic, nonprofit, and private-sector partners.
3. Design and facilitate an initial phase of engagement and communication that:
 - a. **Reflects on and celebrates progress made over the last decade** in California water data policy, governance, and technology.
 - b. **Identifies shared goals, unresolved challenges, and strategic priorities** for the next decade, with particular attention to:
 - i. **Developing a shared vision** for a modern water data future in California and
 - ii. **Positioning the vision** and recommendations for the incoming gubernatorial administration and ongoing legislative engagement.
4. Produce a **Year 1 vision-setting policy brief** that identifies immediate implementation opportunities, partners, and funding needs. The policy brief should be accompanied by an outreach/communication plan with shared talking points and materials to support coalition engagement around and messaging of the policy brief. Phase 1 work may be expanded by a **longer-term roadmap** developed in Phase 2 (Years 2 and 3).

Scope of Work

This request for proposals (RFP) is focused on **Phase 1 (Year 1)** activities: coalition building and development of a vision-setting policy brief. Continuation into Years 2–3 for roadmap development is **not guaranteed** and is contingent on performance, funding availability, and alignment with Consortium priorities.

The selected Contractor will work closely with Consortium staff and selected partners to complete the following tasks.

Phase 1: Coalition Design, Formation, and Vision Development

The Contractor shall support the Consortium in designing and launching a **durable, multi-year Coalition** focused on California water data modernization. Phase 1 will culminate in the release, outreach, and positioning of a policy brief that sets the Coalition’s vision for the next decade of investment in California’s water data infrastructure.

Activities will include:

- Developing criteria for identifying and selecting coalition participants to ensure balanced representation across sectors, geographies, and perspectives.
- Recommending coalition composition, purpose, operating principles, and a proposed multi-year engagement model.
- Conducting background research and targeted interviews to inform past decade successes in advancing water data infrastructure, ongoing challenges, and coalition priorities for the future.
- Developing outreach materials and engagement approaches to invite participation and ongoing engagement in the coalition.
- Organizing, planning, and co-facilitating coalition meetings, including meeting agenda, meeting facilitation materials, meeting notetaking and archiving, and other relevant support materials. Coalition meetings should include at least one (1) in-person workshop.
- Drafting and revising a policy brief.
- Developing and supporting an outreach/communication plan, including developing shared talking points, slides, and other communication materials to support coordinated messaging by Consortium staff and leadership, and coalition members to state agency leadership and decision-makers.
- Assisting with the scheduling and implementation of high-level briefings and other outreach activities to policymakers and thought leaders across the water management community.

Deliverables:

1. Coalition-building, outreach, and implementation materials and instruments, including membership criteria, proposed members, a coalition charter, including anticipated time commitment, invitations, surveys or other engagement instruments as proposed in deliverable 2.
2. A proposal for coalition building and ongoing engagement.
3. Meeting materials, including agendas, meeting notes/summaries, interview notes, and other relevant materials.
4. Draft vision-setting policy brief (for review and comment by Consortium staff and governing bodies, and coalition members)
5. Final vision-setting policy brief incorporating 3 rounds of feedback
6. Outreach plan and supporting materials (e.g. slides, talking points, etc.)

The policy brief is expected to be **concise, visually accessible, and suitable for senior decision makers** (anticipated length approximately 10-15 pages, excluding appendices).

Phase 2: Roadmap Development (Informational Only)

While proposals should be limited to the scope and activities of Phase 1, applicants should be aware that the Consortium may conduct additional work that would build upon

the outcomes of Phase 1. Specifically, subject to future funding and Coalition commitment, Phase 2 would extend this work by developing a longer-form Roadmap that outlines clear, actionable implementation steps to advance its vision over the coming decade.

Applicants are not expected to propose activities, budgets, or timelines for Phase 2. However, proposals should reflect an understanding of this longer-term intent and demonstrate an approach and expertise that would be compatible with a multi-phase, implementation-oriented effort.

Potential Phase 2 activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Continued facilitation of Coalition and interagency coordination.
- Refinement of priorities informed by early implementation experience.
- Development of technical appendices to supplement the Roadmap, as needed.
- Development of a long-term implementation roadmap addressing governance, investment, sequencing, and accountability.
- Outreach to legislators and senior decision-makers as needed to help advance Roadmap findings and recommendations

Expertise and Qualifications

Teams responding to this RFP must demonstrate:

- Deep expertise in **California water management**, including institutional, legal, and operational contexts.
- Strong knowledge of **data governance, data management, and modern data infrastructure**.
- Demonstrated experience facilitating coordination among diverse stakeholders, including **State agencies**. Experience navigating differing and overlapping mandates, authorities, and timelines.
- Experience supporting or informing **policy and legislative processes**, including communicating with legislators, state agency leadership, and other decision-makers and translating technical and stakeholder input into policy-relevant products (proposal must include samples of past work with clear explanations of individual team members contributions to the work).
- Experience **designing and facilitating complex, multi-stakeholder processes** to achieve specific outcomes.
- Excellent **written and oral communication skills**.
- All contracting teams applying for this work must certify that they are not currently under suspension or debarment by any state or federal government agency, and that neither Consultant or any of its proposed subcontractors are tax delinquent with the State of California.

Additional qualifications include experience working with public agencies, managing collaborative consultant teams, and producing accessible public-facing documents.

Budget and Contract Structure

This is anticipated to be a time-and-materials contract with a not-to-exceed budget of \$120,000. Proposers should provide:

- Hourly rates by staff role;
- Estimated hours and costs by task;
- A total proposed budget.

Proposal Submission Requirements

Please submit proposal via email to tmoran@cawaterdata.org and amiller@cawaterdata.org no later than end of day February 27, 2026.

Proposals should include:

- A narrative describing the firm's approach to the scope of work and relevant experience;
- Biographies of key personnel;
- A detailed budget;
- Descriptions of two to three comparable projects (and links to relevant reports or other resulting materials), including references and a narrative articulating individual team members' roles in project outcomes.

RFP Timeline

- **February 5, 2026:** RFP published
- **5 pm February 27, 2026:** Proposals due
- **Week of March 2:** Consortium proposal review and outreach re: proposal team interviews
- **Weeks of Mar. 9 and March 16:** Team interviews and follow up (please ensure team availability)
- **Weeks of March 23 and 30:** Contracting
- **Work begins no later than Apr. 13.** Year 1 is expected to conclude within a year of contract start.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Relevant Expertise and Experience

- Demonstrated expertise in California water management institutions, policy, and practice;
 - Demonstrated understanding of data governance, data management, and modern data infrastructure;
 - Experience facilitating coordination among State agencies and other public-sector entities.
- 2. Policy and Strategic Capacity**
- Experience informing or supporting policy, administrative, or legislative processes;
 - Ability to translate technical and stakeholder input into clear, compelling, policy-relevant products;
 - Demonstrated understanding of executive transitions and legacy-oriented policy framing.
- 3. Approach and Methodology**
- Quality and clarity of the proposed approach to coalition-building and engagement;
 - Soundness of the proposed approach to developing the Year 1 vision-setting policy brief;
 - Ability to balance celebration of past successes with forward-looking priorities.
- 4. Facilitation and Collaboration Skills**
- Demonstrated ability to design and facilitate inclusive, productive, multi-stakeholder processes;
 - Experience working in complex, collaborative environments with multiple agencies and partners.
- 5. Project Team and Management**
- Qualifications and roles of proposed team members;
 - Demonstrated ability to manage timelines, deliverables, and collaborative processes.
- 6. Budget and Value**
- Reasonableness and clarity of the proposed budget;
 - Alignment of proposed level of effort with the project scope.

Draft for discussion purposes only. Content, scope, and dates subject to revision by the California Water Data Consortium.