

**TNC – THE NATURE CONSERVANCY (TNC)
REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL (RFP) TO
DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR PROJECT PRANA**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is the leading conservation organization working to make a positive impact around the world in more than 70 countries, with a new program in India. Founded in 1951, TNC's mission is *to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends*. With our core values of integrity beyond reproach, respect for people communities and culture, and commitment to diversity we aim at environmental conservation through lasting tangible results. Visit www.nature.org to learn more.

II. PURPOSE

It is the intention of TNC to solicit proposals for a four-year communications strategy and a first 18-month communications implementation work plan for the Project PRANA towards the achievement of the project goals expressed in the Theory of Change (TOC)¹.

THIS IS NOT AN ORDER.

III. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Indo-Gangetic plains of India are extremely fertile and provide food security for approximately 40% of India's population². The state of Punjab in the north-western region of India is among the highest producers of wheat and paddy in the country. Although Punjab comprise of 1.5% of the geographical area of the country, it contributes a major portion to the central paddy and wheat procurement pool to the Government of India. In 2019, Punjab was the highest contributor of both wheat and paddy³.

During the Green Revolution in the 1960s, Punjab witnessed a shift to a paddy-wheat dominant cropping cycle, with a rise of highly intensive agricultural practices in terms of land, energy, capital, nutrients, water, agricultural inputs, and farm mechanization. While this allowed Punjab to become the food bowl of the country, it resulted in negative side effects such as the over-extraction of groundwater, deterioration in soil-health, and the burning of crop residue which contributes to air quality concerns, among others.

The practice of burning paddy residue is prevalent across north-west India, particularly in Punjab⁴ as farmers have traditionally practiced this to clear the field for the next crop of wheat. While wheat straw can be used for cattle fodder, farmers across Punjab are unable to use non-basmati paddy residue for fodder due to high silica content. This, in combination with the use of combine harvesters, which leave longer standing stubble than manual harvesting, leads to 12 million tonnes of paddy residue being burned every year by more than 2 million farmers in Punjab alone⁵.

Crop residue burning results in severe negative repercussions on both human health and environment. 2.3 million premature deaths in India are caused by air pollution every year (Global Alliance on Health and Pollution, 2019), and pollution levels have been shown to

¹The TOC will be provided to bidders upon email request at rajeeb.dash@tnc.org

²Pal, D.K., Bhattacharya, T., Srivastava, P., Chandran, P., Ray, S.K. (2009). Soils of the Indo Gangetic Plains: Their historical perspective and management. Current Science 96, 1193-1202

³Department of Food & Public Distribution, Gol (2019), Available at <https://dfpd.gov.in>

⁴Lohan, S. K., Jat, H. S., Yadav, A. K. Sidhu, H. S., Jat, M. L., Choudhary, M., Peter, J. K., Sharma, P. C. (2018). Burning issues of paddy residue management in north-west states of India. Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews. 81, 693–706
SEPCA Report 2020

skyrocket in Delhi NCR during the burn season. Burning not only emits greenhouse gases, but also raises ground temperature, leading to further water use and driving a loss of soil nutrients and beneficial micro-organisms, including nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and sulphur and organic carbon.

Farmers feel pressured to burn given the limited alternatives and short time window available. Almost 90% of the paddy area in Punjab is harvested using combine harvesters⁶. Ground water conservation measures by the state government delays the paddy transplanting period to late June, resulting in delayed harvesting and an even narrower gap of only three to five weeks between paddy harvesting and sowing of wheat, thus not providing farmers opportunity to allow the paddy residue to decompose naturally in the field. Furthermore, farmers' favourite high-yielding rice varieties, such as Pusa 44, have longer crop cycles and leave a larger volume of stalks on the field, creating more resistance to change.

TNC's EXPERIENCE IN CROP RESIDUE MANAGEMENT (CRM)

Project PRANA (Promoting Regenerative And No-burn Agriculture) is built on the foundational work undertaken by two existing TNC projects in India. The first, Project HARIT (Harnessing the power of Agricultural Residues and through Innovative Technologies), was launched in 2019 in partnership with Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA), International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT) and Precision Agriculture for Development (PAD). This three-year project is currently being implemented in seven districts of Punjab and Haryana. The project includes demonstrations of the Happy Seeder – a tractor attachment that enables direct seeding of wheat into paddy residue, as well as trainings, peer exchanges and mobile-based behaviour change communications in 850 villages. The second project, a collaboration between TNC and Syngenta Foundation India (SFI), which commenced in March 2020, seeks to develop a cohort of 150 agri-entrepreneurs in Patiala district of Punjab to provide residue management solutions to farmers, in addition to other services.

With the help of a Central Government subsidy introduced in 2018 to support equipment purchases, roughly 500,000 hectares of farmland was sowed using the Happy Seeder in 2018-19 and 2019-20 in Punjab, which is around 15% of total area under wheat cultivation in the state. Together with the foundational work undertaken by TNC, our partners and other institutions, Project PRANA's objective is to bring this CRM technology and others to scale, aiming for 250,000 farmers covering an area of 1 million hectares to adopt no-burn cropping systems within the next three to four years.

THE PRANA PROJECT

PRANA is a four-year project set in the north-west Indian state of Punjab. The PRANA project expects to deliver the following outcomes:

- At least 6 million metric tons of CO₂e mitigation through the elimination of burning on 1 million hectares of cropland (half the area currently burned)
- At least 250,000 farmers adopt zero-burning cropping systems
- 500 billion litres of water saved from enhanced soil health and agronomy
- Pilot financial instrument that incentivizes farmers to adopt no-burn practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions

The PRANA conservation plan has identified five building blocks within which project activities have been organized. These include:

⁶Ibid

- Highly Intensive Adoption Clusters (HIAC)
- Mid and low-touch field support
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Communications & branding
- Other collaborations

The Project PRANA overview deck and TOC, included as Attachments 1 and 2 respectively provide a comprehensive description of how and why the desired outcomes are expected to be achieved.

IV. COMMUNICATION GOALS

The Project PRANA communications goal is to influence the behaviour of targeted groups and effectively communicate the benefits of regenerative and no-burn agriculture through the most efficient messages and channels of communications. Our communications in Project PRANA would primarily be divided into two categories:

1. Communications with farmers, service providers and the agricultural community, i.e. behaviour change communication, and
2. Communications with other stakeholders including donors, governments, agricultural departments and universities, *Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVKs)*, partner organizations, corporations, media and civil society organizations.

All communications activities and materials will serve to support and complement the comprehensive in-field solutions and interventions offered to farmers in Punjab.

With this RFP, TNC is seeking to select a consultant (a firm) to develop a Project PRANA comprehensive communications strategy for the remainder of 4 years of the Project PRANA (ending June 2025) aligned with the TOC and project strategies for the multiple partner, multi-platform outreach and an implementation plan for the initial 18 months. The strategy and plan should:

- Encompass a holistic approach to communications for our primary target audience – farmers and the agricultural community in Northwest India - to influence adoption and support of regenerative and no-burn agricultural practices;
- Consider both below-the-line (BTL) and above-the-line (ATL) communications, as well as the process for how to get there, such as the research or assessments required, concept and message testing, etc;
- Support regular communication on progress and results of the project with other stakeholders at the state and national levels for advocacy and opportunities to scale learnings to other regions;
- Build on the learnings from existing and previous rural marketing and communications campaigns related to regenerative and no-burn agricultural practice adoption in India (HARIT, A-PAG, etc.) as well as leverage the findings and insights of early landscape analysis conducted and farmer feedback obtained by the Project PRANA team;
- The implementation plan for the 18-month project period should directly contribute towards the development of in-field pilots which will be scaled up in the forthcoming years of the project period.

V. SCOPE OF WORK

TNC seeks a consultant (a firm) to develop Project PRANA's communications strategy and implementation plan, working in close coordination with TNC staff in country and globally, and involving relevant partners and stakeholders. The recommended suite of activities could include,

but is not limited to, some or all of the tactics listed below. The successful firm will evaluate all options and determine the most strategic and effective methods by which to achieve our project goal of 250,000 farmers in Punjab adopting no-burn cropping practices.

Day-to-day execution of the strategy falls outside the scope of this RFP. TNC will conduct a separate RFP process to select partners to support the implementation of Project PRANA's communications strategy.

TNC has already designed the building blocks of Project PRANA and conducted an initial, formative research and communications landscape assessment of Punjab and Haryana. This prior work will be shared with the successful bidder as background information.

Scope of work for this RFP includes:

- Communications strategy development:
 - Work with TNC conservation and communications teams to develop a communications strategy that is in alignment with Project PRANA's TOC and covers communications needs for all proposed activities. Communications strategy development may include but not limited to the following:
 - Narrow and refine the different target audience associated with the project.
 - Develop key narratives and initial messaging to influence targeted audiences to change their behaviour towards regenerative and no-burn agriculture and bridge information gaps among farmers— this should be based on research (primary/secondary) with partners, sector experts and relevant stakeholders.
 - Test the most appropriate messages, channels and behavioural triggers for different audience groups, including different farmer segments, machine service providers, etc.
 - Identify and detail tactics through which targeted audiences should receive and convey messages on the benefits of regenerative and no-burn agriculture, including but not limited to traditional and social media applications, peer-to-peer communication methods, events, use of local government extensions (KVKs), role of project partners, rural sales and marketing agencies and communications by service providers of CRM alternatives.
 - Determine the most effective channels and mediums of peer-to-peer (P2P) communications amongst farmers and the key messages to be created and given out.
 - Determine the national and state-level events, channels and media outlets to be used for promoting the project and celebrating champion farmers as success stories.
 - Identification of the specific influencers (agencies, individuals, media) to leverage and strategies to do so.
 - Identify the role that communications can play in delivering the project outcomes through amplification (increasing conversions reach through direct engagement) and extended (increasing conversions through indirect engagement) reach of the proposed activities;
 - Indicate the evolution of communications while engaging with various stakeholders over the project period on a year-on-year basis as well as a plan to capture learnings and evolve strategy implementation;

- Capture the opportunities and risks associated with project communications and include a risk mitigation plan.
- Implementation plan development:
 - Create a Gantt chart or a calendar of activities with a timeline for engagement with different stakeholders over an 18-month project period, including the list of activities to be undertaken, frequency/quantity of the messages, location(s), etc.
 - Identify the supporting marketing collaterals that need to be created, their dependencies on the source of information and an approximate time that would be needed to produce and prepare for deployment.
 - Create a media list enlisting all relevant publications and reporters writing on issues related to Project PRANA and an outreach plan to connect with them for relationship building. The implementation plan should also comprise of a media outreach plan to secure timely and effective placements in the most relevant channels and events for maximum impact for earned and paid media.
 - Identification of the partners that would be associated at different levels with the implementation of the communications strategies and the capacities that would be required for them to do so.
 - Create an approximate budget for the implementation of the strategy for 18 months with a breakdown of approximate costs for each activity.
 - Write a monitoring and evaluation plan setting benchmarks for success of the communications strategy, including performance indicators, regular reporting and content outline and their frequency.
 - Write a detailed learning plan to capture insights from various groups of stakeholders and adjust the implementation of the project accordingly.

VI. METHODOLOGY

Involve an evidence-based approach for strategy development including expert opinions to back up assumptions, incorporate learning from past success and failures to justify strategic decisions and recommendations made in the communications strategy.

Account for a period of no more than three months for the development of the strategy and implementation plan comprising of up to 40 days of secondary research, expert interviews, interviews with relevant stakeholders, brainstorming sessions, etc. followed by up to 20 days for field validations and primary research⁷, and about 25 days for submission and review of draft and final communications strategy and implementation plan. The consultant can propose a methodology different from this. The project should be completed latest by 10th Nov 2021.

VII. DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

The primary deliverables for the firm include:

- An inception report.
- A detailed 4-year communications strategy for Project PRANA (draft and final) that includes measurable objectives, strategies and tactics for each of the goals.
- An 18-month implementation plan for Project PRANA (draft and final) that must include communications and engagement activities that are prioritized and phased in over the duration of the plan.

The duration of the engagement is for up to three months. All activities associated with the project should be completed latest by 10th Nov 2021. Regular meetings and calls should be organized with TNC team to discuss the progress achieved and challenges.

⁷ Disclaimer: Field activities and primary research are subject to the COVID-19 restrictions in India and the states of Punjab and Haryana. Discussions with the TNC team are required before initiating any of these activities and/or research.

Timeline for each of the deliverables is as follows:

Sl. No.	Name of Report	Due Date
1	Submission and approval of the inception report after completion of desk/secondary research, expert interviews, interviews with relevant agencies and stakeholders. The report should include the broad strategies that can be adopted by TNC for communications with different stakeholders. The report should also include the list of stakeholders to be interviewed during the field validations and primary research as well as the questionnaire.	24 th Sep 2021
2	Submission and approval of the findings of the field validations, primary research, and message testing.	14 th Oct 2021
3	Submission for review the draft communications strategy and the implementation plan.	25 th Oct 2021
4	Submission for approval of the final communications strategies and implementation plan with any kind of changes incorporated.	8 th Nov 2021

VIII. TEAM COMPOSITION

The bidder is expected to put together a technical team of communications professionals to deliver the assignment. Below are the desirable experience, skills and competencies of the team:

- Proven experience in planning, implementing and managing a 360-degree approach to communications for the development sector.
- Ability to use secondary data to conduct a specific contextual analysis and identify gaps that need to be filled in order to develop the strategy and plan.
- Familiarity with relevant stakeholders, institutions, government policies and structures and geographical context.
- Proven experience in a similar project capacity, and in synthesis and preparation of strategic information for decision-makers.
- Experience in the agricultural sector and/or rural marketing in Punjab will be highly appreciated.
- Team members should be fluent in English and Hindi written and spoken. Knowledge of Punjabi would be an added advantage. In case there are no team members with knowledge of Punjabi, then elaborate on how these needs will be met.

IX. PRE-BID QUERIES AND CLARIFICATIONS ON THE RFP

To clarify technical queries on the RFP, an email with the queries can be sent to Mr. Rajeeb Dash at rajeeb.dash@tnc.org by no later than 11:59 p.m. IST **18th July 2021**. All queries will be replied through email. TNC will use its best effort to answer questions by **23rd July 2021**. Answers to all questions will be shared with all bidders.

X. SUBMISSION OF PROPOSAL

Last date for the submission of proposal is **30th July 2021** by 5:00 p.m. IST. Technical and financial proposals must be submitted in softcopy to Rajeeb.Dash@tnc.org. Submission of the proposal to any other individual will result in the disqualification of the proposal.

TNC will make its selection of winner bid and notify the successful bidder by **9th August, 2021**. The successful bidder should start work no later than **16th August, 2021**.

The decision will be communicated to all participants.

XI. RESTRICTED COMMUNICATIONS

It is the policy of TNC to avoid situations which: (1) place it in a position where its judgment may appear to be biased; (2) create an appearance of conflict of interest with respect to rendering an impartial, fair, technically sound, and objective decision prior to selection; or (3) give an unfair competitive advantage to competing bidders. Therefore, to ensure an ethical evaluation process, all inquiries or other communications regarding this RFP shall be exclusively directed to TNC's authorized person and location specified in the Section IX of this RFP. Bidders are hereby expressly instructed not to communicate with TNC staff, officers, or employees regarding this RFP. This prohibition is also applicable to Bidders' affiliates, officers, employees, agents, consultants, and subcontractors.

XII. EVALUATION OF PROPOSAL

All proposals will be evaluated by the TNC's Technical Committee on technical and financial parameters. The Technical Committee may request further information from the bidder relating to the proposal submitted.

The proposal should comprise of two separate parts – (1) technical proposal; and (2) financial proposal.

The technical proposal shall contain the following details:

1. Proposed work plan, methodology and approach;
2. Profile of the consultant (descriptions and references for comparable projects completed recently);
3. Profile of the team members who will execute this project (biographies of all staff to be assigned to this project and their proposed time allocation);
4. Complete project budget, including professional fees and expenses, a proposed action plan in accordance to the deliverables and payment schedule.

The financial proposal shall contain the following detail:

- a. Legal status of the firm
- b. Registration number
- c. PAN & GST number
- d. Tax return and audited accounts for last 3 years
- e. Cost estimate and break-up
- f. Proposed terms of payment

Proposals will be evaluated based on experience (30%); technical proposal to address the scope of work (40%); and cost (30%).

Successful and unsuccessful bidders will be notified in writing. TNC shall not be obligated to provide any of the details of the evaluation.

XIII. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Upon completion, TNC will retain the right to own and/or use all documents developed for this project. All information provided or disclosed by TNC during the project is confidential and proprietary to our organization. All existing research reports and assessments shared by TNC with the consultant should be maintained with strict confidentiality and cannot be used of any other project unless agreed by TNC in writing.

XIV. PRICING AND PROJECT PAYMENT

This RFP is being solicited as a fixed price contract. Specify the length of time the bid is good for. This must be a minimum of thirty (30) days. Bidder’s price proposal should include, at a minimum, the following:

- Total fixed cost to deliver services outlined above (itemize each component).
- Payments would be made against the submission of the primary deliverables based on the agreed upon final timeline.
- Withholding tax will be deducted wherever applicable.
- All envisaged travel costs (including tickets, accommodation, transportation, etc,) must be included in the financial proposal.
- All payments will be made by crossed Account Payee cheque, Demand draft or through online Bank payments.
- The bidder shall in its bid describe the insurance coverage it currently maintains, including its commercial general liability, automobile, worker’s compensation and any umbrella policies, by providing a certificate of insurance. The bidder awarded the contract shall be required to name TNC as an additional insured.

XV. TNC'S OBLIGATIONS

TNC does not incur any obligation or liability whatsoever by reason of issuance of this RFP or action by anyone relative thereto.

XVI. BIDDER'S OBLIGATIONS

Bidders must analyse and respond to all workstreams of this RFP providing sufficient information to allow TNC to evaluate the proposal. Bidder, by submitting its proposal, agrees that any costs incurred by the bidder in responding to this RFP are to be borne by the bidder and may not be billed to TNC.

XVII. CONTRACTUAL COMMITMENT OF PROPOSAL

The contents of submitted proposals will be considered obligations of the successful bidder. No information should be submitted that is not intended to be incorporated into the proposal and any contract which may result from such proposal. If there is any inconsistency between the terms herein and any contract documents, the terms of the contract documents shall prevail.

XVIII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

It is the policy of TNC to identify actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest in any situation in which TNC has a significant business interest. To eliminate any conflict of interest or perceived conflict of interest, it is necessary for each bidder to complete the attached Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form and send with your RFP response. This relates to people who will be working, directly or indirectly, to respond to this RFP, as well as those who may be doing the resultant work if the bidder receives the contract. The information will be kept confidential and given out only on a “need to know” basis.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. PRANA overview deck
2. TOC, to be provided upon email request (rajeeb.dash@tnc.org)
3. Conflict of Interest Form

Below are the additional attachments which will be shared with the successful bidder to facilitate the analysis and development of the strategy:

4. Project PRANA implementation plan

5. Communications Landscape Assessment