



New England Fishery Management Council

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Daniel Salerno, *Chair* | Cate O'Keefe, PhD, *Executive Director*

MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 18, 2026
TO: Executive Committee
FROM: Executive Director, Cate O'Keefe
SUBJECT: Council Stipend Policy

BACKGROUND

At the September 17, 2025 Executive Committee meeting, the Executive Director presented a proposal to implement half-day Council member stipends for webinar meetings with a duration of less than 5 hours. The proposal was considered as an austerity measure based on the highly uncertain funding environment with a range of possible budget cuts up to 30% for fiscal year (FY) 2026. The Executive Committee approved the proposal, the Council was informed of the new policy during the September 2025 Council meeting, and the policy was implemented on October 1, 2025.

Following the federal government shutdown from October 1 through November 12, 2025, and Continuing Resolution that held Council funding flat through January 30, 2026, the FY2026 NOAA budget included FY2026 funding for the Council at a nearly flat level without reduction. Based on the funding, the Executive Committee requested an analysis of cost-savings associated with half-day stipends and virtual Council meetings.

STIPEND POLICY ANALYSIS

Council staff analyzed the potential cost-savings associated with the half-day stipend policy (Table 1). All 2025 meetings that were eligible for stipend compensation were filtered to webinar-only meetings with a duration of less than five hours, resulting in 15 meetings qualifying for half-day stipends. The number of eligible Council members for daily stipend compensation was applied to each of the 15 meetings and multiplied by the 2025 daily stipend rate (\$575.60), then compared to the half-day rate (\$287.80). The analysis showed a potential cost-savings of ~\$22K if the half-day stipends were in place for the full calendar year. Projecting these savings to 2026 resulted in a slight increase, assuming a similar number of qualifying meetings and the increased daily stipend rate (\$581.36).

VIRTUAL COUNCIL MEETING COST COMPARISON

Council staff compared the costs of the January 2025 and 2026 Council meetings (Table 2). The 2025 meeting was held in Portsmouth, NH over three days with a total cost of \$48,731, and the 2026 meeting was conducted virtually over two days with a total cost of \$14,688.

Table 1. Stipend cost analysis for 2025 qualifying meetings.

Activity	Date	Number Eligible for Stipend	Full Day Stipend (\$575.60)	Half Day Stipend (\$287.80)
Executive CTE	1/6/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
Habitat CTE	1/13/2025	5	\$2,878.00	\$1,439.00
Scallop CTE	1/14/2025	5	\$2,878.00	\$1,439.00
Herring CTE	1/23/2025	5	\$2,878.00	\$1,439.00
Executive CTE	4/3/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
SSC	4/4/2025	12	\$6,907.20	\$3,453.60
SSC	4/9/2025	12	\$6,907.20	\$3,453.60
Herring CTE	4/11/2025	5	\$2,878.00	\$1,439.00
Executive CTE	6/12/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
Executive CTE	7/31/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
Groundfish CTE	9/3/2025	7	\$4,029.20	\$2,014.60
Executive CTE	9/4/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
Dogfish CTE	9/16/2025	2	\$1,151.20	\$575.60
Executive CTE	11/13/2025	3	\$1,726.80	\$863.40
Scallop CTE	11/20/2025	5	\$2,878.00	\$1,439.00
			2025 Full Day Total	2025 Half Day Total
			\$43,745.60	\$21,872.80
			Projected 2026 Full Day Total	Projected 2026 Half Day Total
			\$44,183.36	\$22,091.68

Table 2. Cost comparison of January 2025 and 2026 Council meetings.

JANUARY MEETING	2025 (3-day)	2026 (2-day)
Meeting Room Rental/Public Outreach	\$5,981	\$0
Travel Costs - Council (lodging, transportation, meals & incidentals)	\$12,756	\$470
Travel Costs – staff (lodging, transportation, meals & incidentals)	\$9,272	\$266
STIPEND - Council	\$20,722	\$13,952
TOTAL	\$48,731	\$14,688

RECOMMENDATIONS TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The estimated savings from the half-day stipend policy (~\$22K) should be considered in the context of incentives, alternative use of funds, current funding status, and Council member input, including the following tradeoffs:

- Incentives
 - Half-day stipends may disincentivize preparation for Committee meetings where input is critical and may impact overall interest in applying for Council membership.
 - Conversely, half-day stipends may disincentivize logging into meetings without actively participating.
- Alternative use of funds
 - \$22K is a “small” amount of savings that does not go far for core needs (e.g., salaries, benefits, operations), and near-term (2026-2027) work priorities are well-established with an expected surplus of funds.
 - Conversely, \$22K is an additional resource to support external contracting and unexpected work tasks (e.g., EO14276, Risk/Value Matrix).
- Current funding status
 - The Council is currently “fully funded” with a surplus.
 - Conversely, funds could be “banked” for possible funding reductions.
- Council member input:
 - There has been some dissatisfaction voiced about the half-day stipend policy.
 - Conversely, there was no negative feedback at the time of implementation.

The estimated savings from a virtual Council meeting is substantial (~\$35K) and there may be benefits to conducting the annual January/February meeting remotely in future years. For 2027, the Council will meet in-person in Portsmouth, NH in order to facilitate robust discussion around Inflation Reduction Act projects. For 2028 and beyond, the Council may consider remote meetings to align with objectives.

Based on the above considerations, the Executive Director recommends to the Executive Committee:

- Revert to full-day stipends for all eligible meetings: implementation April 1, no retro payments.
- Continue to review available funding to determine cost-saving measures, where needed.
- Provide periodic reminders about funding uncertainty, when needed.
- Alert Council members that Stipend and Travel Guidance updates will be distributed April 1st:
 - Reminder that meal reimbursements should be for actual meal costs and reflective of GSA travel policies (i.e., breakdown for breakfast, lunch, dinner).
- Continue to consider webinar vs. in-person meeting needs:
 - Committee meetings with updates and tasking only (i.e., no motions/votes).
 - Opportunities for virtual Council meetings (e.g., Jan/Feb).
 - Joint meetings with AP and Committee members