

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy



Announcement

Request for Proposals for the Untold Stories of Pennsylvania's State Parks & Forests Project Cultural & Historical Professional Services

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), with central offices located at 800 Waterfront Drive, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15222 is accepting proposals for a contract to provide cultural and historical research, reporting, interpretive education, and training services for the “Untold Stories of Pennsylvania’s State Parks & Forests” project.

This process is an open call for qualified contractors.

WPC is a tax-exempt organization. Proposal prices should be calculated **without** the applicable sales tax.

A mandatory virtual information session will be held by the project partners on September 21, 2022 from 9:30 to 11am.

Proposals must be received by 4:00 PM on September 30, 2022.

To register for the information session, please email Jeff Bergman, Senior Director of Community Forestry & TreeVitalize Pittsburgh, at jbergman@paconserve.org by September 20, 2022.

Project Summary

The “Untold Stories of Pennsylvania’s State Parks & Forests” project is a collaborative effort among Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC), The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC), and other partners that seeks to discover, interpret, and share the untold stories of under-represented and marginalized groups associated with lands currently operating as state parks and forests in Pennsylvania. Conventional white, Eurocentric historical information on Western Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests is readily available to the public through on-site interpretive material, published literature, and online resources. However, stories of historically under-represented people and communities related to these lands, particularly stories of women, Indigenous people, and people of color, are not as readily available. If researched and interpreted thoughtfully, these stories can help drive change toward more welcoming and inclusive experiences for all visitors to state parks and forests and may broaden interest in and accessibility to these public spaces through conveying a more thorough acknowledgment of land use history and pre-history. This project is being funded by the DCNR Community Conservation and Partnership Program and the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

Need for this Work

As the owner of state parks and forests in Pennsylvania, DCNR is committed to enhancing interpretive programming in these spaces to be more culturally relevant and inclusive. Part of this effort must include interpretation beyond the well-known history familiar to state parks and forests in Western Pennsylvania. The project partners need support from contracted consultants specializing in the research and interpretation of Indigenous peoples/tribes/nations, women, people of color, or other under-represented groups and their connections to the landscape. This project will increase the capacity of the partners to provide more inclusive interpretive content to all visitors of state parks and forests and increase accessibility to and the enjoyment of these wonderful public assets for a wider range of people.

Process

As the coordinating partner, WPC has convened a project committee consisting of staff from DCNR, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the Heinz History Center, the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center, Rivers of Steel, and Shippensburg University. The project committee is guiding the process through identifying the specific parks and forests for analysis, developing scopes of work, hiring consultants, and overseeing the research and reporting processes. WPC is hosting monthly meetings for the project committee and consultants to ensure goals and milestones are being reached.

This project will require thoughtfulness, care, grace, and humility from all participants. It will be important for this message to be communicated skillfully from the beginning and regularly throughout the project to avoid personal or group conflicts that could derail the project or lead to disputed results. This project will also require care and thought in hiring consultants who share these values and who are well-equipped to do the hard research and facilitate the discussions that will be required to produce compelling results. It will be important to conduct a very thorough search for consultant candidates.

Project Outputs and Outcomes

The consultant's research should result in a detailed annotated bibliography of sources, including original texts and documents, oral histories, census data, newspaper articles, tax records, and other sources and two narrative historical accounts representing experiences of under-represented and marginalized peoples and communities related to state parks and forests of western Pennsylvania. The consultants will also provide at least two trainings/presentations on their findings to the partners.

With available funding, the next phase of this project will be developing a comprehensive communication strategy and interpretive education programming on the findings of the untold stories research by the partners' communications staff members and a communications consultant. This work will include updates to DCNR's on-site interpretive materials, new virtual and in-person programming, new historical resources available on-site or virtually, and education and training for the project partners. When this new material becomes available, it will also be used to update information on WPC's website and will be included in future programs and presentations.

Sustainability

DCNR, WPC, and project partners have a long-term commitment to create more welcoming and inclusive experiences for all visitors to state parks and forests and other conserved lands in the western Pennsylvania landscape. This project seeks to create a model and framework to update and maintain history content and to research more untold stories after the conclusion of the project. For example, WPC is considering implementing a similar approach for its own properties.

Scope of Work for Contracted Professional Services

The project committee seeks contracted professional services for the research of "Untold Stories" as described above. The committee seeks a contractor(s) that has expertise in historical, anthropological, and archeological research and writing. Expertise in interpretive education is also strongly desired. The committee welcomes proposals from individuals, firms, or teams of independent contractors. The scope of work currently includes the following:

- Consultation on the specific geographic scope of the current, funded phase of the project. Potential geographic locations include areas in the Laurel Highlands, Moraine and McConnell’s Mill State Parks, Presque Isle, and the Clarion and Allegheny River Corridors. The committee seeks guidance on narrowing the geographic focus to locations where we can maximize outputs relative to the investment.
- Consultation on research topics/themes. The committee expects recommendations on themes/topics from the contractor(s). To date the committee has discussed the following as potential topics:
 - Problematic naming
 - Economic forces affecting dispossessed ethnic, racial, religious minorities
 - Telling known stories better
 - African American Civilian Conservation Corps
 - African American settlements
 - The Underground Railroad
 - Transportation in a very broad sense—waterways, Underground Railroad, forced migration of Indigenous peoples/tribes/nations
- Attending monthly project committee meetings (First Thursday of every month from 3:00 to 4:00pm through June 2023) to give updates on research and project milestones.
- An extensive annotated bibliography of sources, including original texts and documents, oral histories, and other sources on the themes and topics identified by the project committee and consultants. These sources will be a standing agenda item for review at the monthly project committee meetings. This will be a central output and should be as exhaustive and detailed as possible.
- Two robust narrative historical accounts representing the experiences of under-represented and marginalized people and communities related to state parks and forests of western Pennsylvania. These narratives should be focused on the two topics that emerge with the most breadth, depth, and relevancy to the goals of the project.
- Two trainings, including presentations, on the results of the research for the project committee and partner staff members
- Recommendations on next steps, including specific concepts for interpretive education that can be further developed in subsequent phases of the project. The concept recommendations should include on-site interpretive materials, new virtual and in-person programming, new historical resources available on-site or virtually, and education and training for the project partners

Overall Timeline and Outcomes

- The RFP for professional services will be circulated on September 6, 2022
- The mandatory virtual information session for potential proposers will be held September 21, 2022 from 9:30 to 11am (register by emailing jbergman@paconserve.org by September 20, 2022)
- Proposals will be due by 4:00pm on September 30, 2022
- Consulting contract will be awarded by October 31, 2022
- Project committee meetings—monthly through June 30, 2023
- Research on focal geographies and topics/themes underway November 2022 through April 2023
- Final outputs including the annotated bibliography, trainings and presentations for the committee and staff, communication and interpretation concepts--April 2023 through June 30, 2023.

Submission Requirements

Cover Letter: The cover letter shall state the consultant name(s) and contact information and clearly identify the primary contact person for the project. Identify the attached document is for “Untold Stories of Western Pennsylvania State Parks & Forests Project”.

Qualifications:

- Experience conducting cultural and historic research
- Experience producing reports and interpretive materials suited for multiple audiences
- Experience in engaging diverse communities
- Experience in storytelling, cultural interpretation, and interpretive education

To best express qualifications, the contractor shall provide:

- A brief narrative describing all involved consultants and explaining the team’s approach to the project;
- The resumes of the personnel and sub-consultants, to be assigned to this project;
- Specific job experience and references for similar projects;
- Examples of recent comparable research projects

General Submittal Information:

Proposals must be **emailed** as one PDF to jbergman@paconserve.org by 4:00pm on September 30, 2022.

General Requirements:

1. **VENDOR'S REPRESENTATIONS:** The vendor, by making a proposal, represents that (a) the vendor has read and understands the proposal documents, terms and conditions, and the proposal is made in accordance therewith; and (b) the proposal is based upon the materials, equipment, systems, or services specified.
2. **SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS:** The proposal and other documents required to be submitted with the proposal shall be submitted via e-mail. Proposals shall be delivered prior to the time and date for receipt of proposals. Proposals received after the time and the date for the proposal opening will be returned. The vendor shall assume full responsibility for timely delivery for receipt of proposals.
3. **MODIFICATION OR WITHDRAWAL OF PROPOSALS:** Prior to the time and date designated for receipt of proposals, a proposal submitted may be modified or withdrawn by notice to the party receiving proposals at the place designated for receipt of proposals. Such notice shall be in writing over the signature of the vendor and shall be received prior to the designated time and date for receipt of proposals. A modification shall be worded so as not to reveal the amount of the original proposal.
4. **OPENING OF PROPOSALS:** Proposals shall be opened by WPC shortly after the time and date proposals are due.
5. **REJECTION OF PROPOSALS:** WPC shall have the right to reject any and all proposals, in whole or part; to reject a proposal not accompanied by data required by the proposal documents; or reject a proposal, which is in any way incomplete or irregular.
6. **ACCEPTANCE OF PROPOSAL (AWARD):** It is the intent of WPC to award a contract to the vendor who can demonstrate the necessary experience to work on these buildings. WPC shall have the right to waive informalities or irregularities in a proposal received and to accept the proposal, which in the WPC's judgment, is in the WPC's own interests.
7. **SUBCONTRACTING:** The awarded Agreement may not be assigned and the services may not be subcontracted by the Contractor without the prior written consent of WPC.
8. **TAX EXEMPTION:** Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is exempt from federal and state taxes and will not pay or reimburse such taxes.
9. The selected contractor may not make any permanent changes in a key project team member without written notice to WPC reasonably in advance of the proposed change. The notice will include a justification with sufficient detail to permit evaluation of the impact of such a change on the scope specified within the Request for Proposals. Any permanent change in key project team members will be made only by written modification to the contract paperwork.