

## **REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS**

# **DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S HERITAGE AREAS PROGRAM**



Pennsylvania  
**Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources**

**December 17, 2025**

## REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

### DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR PENNSYLVANIA'S HERITAGE AREAS PROGRAM

#### *A 5-Year Strategic Plan and Management Structure for the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program*

On behalf of the Department of Conservation & Natural Resources' Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, Heritage PA seeks proposals for the development of a 5-year Strategic Plan and guidance documents that will inform the operation, management, and governance of the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program. The selected consultant(s) will analyze input from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the non-profit Program partner Heritage PA, individual Heritage Areas, key partners and stakeholders, and a collection of legacy Program documents, studies, and reports to develop a unified program vision, management strategy, and implementation plan.

Please find attached a description of the project, a list of consultant qualifications, and submission requirements.

**Please Note:** The project is divided into two segments--(1) Facilitated training that introduces an approach to network collaboration and collaborative conservation, and lays the foundation for the development of a shared program vision; and (2) Program assessment, strategic planning and development of updated program management and guidelines. Respondents may submit a proposal for a single segment of the project or both segments. Respondents are welcomed and encouraged to develop multi-disciplinary teams for their submission to provide the most competitive overall proposal. Each segment will be evaluated and awarded independently, by a selection committee consisting of representatives from DCNR, Heritage PA, and other key partners and stakeholders. Therefore, the response must be clearly structured and segmented. For each segment, detail your technical approach, list of deliverables, and a detailed cost breakdown. Failure to provide detailed information for each segment may result in disqualification of the proposal. The award may be made to one vendor for both segments, or to multiple vendors for individual segments, at the sole discretion of the Selection Committee. The evaluation will be based on the criteria specified in this Request for Proposals.

If you have any questions regarding the proposal submission or the content of the project scope, please contact Mindy Crawford at [mcrawford@preservationpa.org](mailto:mcrawford@preservationpa.org).

Submittals must be emailed to:

Mindy Crawford at [mcrawford@preservationpa.org](mailto:mcrawford@preservationpa.org)

and received

**NO LATER THAN 4:00 P.M. on February 2, 2026.**

## CONTEXT

DCNR's current management strategy for the PA Heritage Areas Program identifies DCNR, State-designated Heritage Areas, and Heritage PA as the primary components of the Program.

### A. DCNR Heritage Areas Program

Following a recommendation of the 1980 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), input and collaboration with the National Park Service, and subsequent years of studies, the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program (initially known as the Heritage Parks Program) was launched in 1989 under the former Department of Community Affairs, Bureau of Recreation & Conservation (BRC). Following a state agency reorganization, the BRC was transferred to the newly created Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) in 1995. Pennsylvania is one of only a few states that established, and still maintains, a state heritage area program: a source of pride for the Commonwealth.

The PA Heritage Areas Program is primarily funded through the "Heritage Parks" line item found within the annual DCNR state budget allocation. Of this funding, each Heritage Area receives a percentage for Management support while also competing for the remaining funding for specific projects and initiatives through annual grant applications to DCNR's Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2). DCNR is enabled to retain a percentage of the line item for administration of the Program. In 2022, DCNR created the PA Heritage Areas Program Coordinator position within BRC to better coordinate the management of the Program.

The Heritage Areas Program currently has five focus areas: Economic Development, Partnerships, Cultural (Heritage) Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, and Education and Interpretation. Each Heritage Area was designated using a prudent, thoughtful approach, which included a feasibility study, a management action plan, and an interpretive plan. These plans guide the work of the areas and were developed with a significant amount of relationship building, grassroots participation and input.

Earlier Program guidance documents also describe the Program as follows:

*State Heritage Areas are large geographic regions or corridors of the Commonwealth that span two or more counties. These areas contain a multitude of historic, recreational, natural and scenic resources of state and national significance that collectively exemplify the heritage of Pennsylvania. Through regional partnerships and public grassroots planning strategies, these resources are identified, protected, enhanced and promoted to strengthen regional economies through increased tourism, creation of new jobs and stimulation of public and private partnerships for new investment opportunities. This holistic and bottom-up approach to planning ensures that the legacy of a region - and the natural, educational and recreational values inherent to it - are preserved for future generations.*

*A Pennsylvania Heritage Area is a process as well as a product. It is both the means and the end to substantially enrich the quality of life in Pennsylvania and the communities and regions of the state where these initiatives are pursued. It is also about partnerships. The foundation*

*upon which a heritage area is structured involves building and strengthening regional coalitions of community leaders, non-profit interest groups, the private sector, state agencies and the federal government. Its success is dependent upon partners being able to erase governmental and institutional boundaries while planning, acting regionally and strategically.*

## **B. Pennsylvania's Heritage Areas**

There are currently 12 state-designated Heritage Areas in Pennsylvania, six of which are also designated at the national level. They include Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Area, Allegheny Ridge Heritage Area, Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, National Road Heritage Corridor, Oil Region National Heritage Area, Lincoln Highway Heritage Corridor, Schuylkill River Greenways National Heritage Area, Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area, Endless Mountains Heritage Region, Lumber Heritage Region, Susquehanna National Heritage Area, and PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor. Currently, 11 of the Heritage Areas' management entities have 501 (c) (3) nonprofit status, while Lackawanna Heritage Valley National Heritage Area is managed by an Authority. Each Heritage Area is guided by a Management Action Plan that focuses and informs a lived-in landscape conservation approach that is grounded in a unique sense of place, heritage, and authenticity.

## **C. Heritage PA**

Heritage PA, a 501 (c) (3) non-profit, is the statewide network and backbone organization. It provides leadership, advocacy, research, and shared capacity-building for the 12 designated Heritage Areas. Heritage PA connects their collective work to the public, policymakers, and funders—making the statewide impact of heritage visible and valued. The organization's membership is represented by leadership from each of the 12 state-designated Heritage Areas. Heritage PA is committed to advancing the important work of its members and is dedicated to advancing the heritage conservation movement in Pennsylvania and throughout the United States.

## **D. Project Guidance**

Heritage PA will facilitate this project while DCNR staff will be directly involved to administer. A Steering Committee has been assembled and includes representatives from Heritage PA, DCNR, and other partners. Other stakeholders may be included as suggested by the consultant team. This Committee will provide guidance and oversight in the plan development process.

This plan is financed with a grant from the Community Conservation Partnerships Program, the Heritage Areas Program Fund, under the administration of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. As such, all DCNR grant terms and conditions will also apply. It is expected that this planning process and the resulting strategic plan and Program guidance documents will position the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program for long-term sustainability and growth, and further successful development of a collaborative heritage conservation approach that benefits the Commonwealth and its residents.

## E. Background

In keeping with Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution, the Program was established within the Department to identify, protect, develop, enhance and promote the historical, recreational, natural, cultural and scenic resources of this Commonwealth and to stimulate community revitalization and economic development through regional heritage and natural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, tourism, and partnerships. As noted above, the five primary goals of the Program are: Economic Development, Partnerships, Cultural Conservation, Recreation and Open Space, and Education and Interpretation.

Across the Program, a broad diversity exists in number of staff, operations, missions and types of projects and programs undertaken by each Heritage Area. However, in every case Heritage Areas are guided by community needs, historical themes and stories, character-defining natural, cultural, and recreational resources, and organizational capacity.

Previous plans and studies regarding strategies for moving the Heritage Area Program forward have been undertaken and shall be reviewed in the process. Examples include but are not limited to the Evaluation of the Pennsylvania Heritage Parks Program, 1999; National Park System Advisory Board Report - Charting a Future for National Heritage Areas, 2005; PA Conservation & Natural Resources Advisory Council (CNRAC) Study, 2009; the PA Heritage Areas Program Manual, 2009; A History of the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas, 2014; Pennsylvania's Heritage Areas Program: The Next Five Years 2015-2020; *Heritage PA's Strategic Plan 2022-2027*, and the Pennsylvania Heritage Area Program Guideline Adoption and Approval Policy, updated 2023; Heritage PA: Guiding Documents, 2025.

Among the challenges that has faced the Heritage Area Program, and the 12 Heritage Areas, has been financial sustainability. Since as early as 1999, when there were only 9 state Heritage Areas, the Heritage Areas have been advocating for a program budget of \$5 million. This goal was finally achieved in the FY23-24 state budget. In the 15 years *prior* to the FY23-24 state budget, there had been a significant *decline* in the funding allotted to the Heritage Area Program ("Heritage Parks") line item within the DCNR budget, including no funding in 2009/2010. Through the advocacy of Heritage PA, the Heritage Areas line item has been raised and maintained at \$5 million dollars starting in FY23-24. Despite this recent increase in funding, incremental growth of the line item has been sought for the Program to maintain management capacity and project implementation, to increase regional partnerships, and to support potential program expansion through newly designated Heritage Areas.

Since there are few charitable foundations that fund operational expenses, the state-only designated heritage areas have relied upon the operational management funding provided via the PA Heritage Areas Program. Additional grants can be obtained by each Heritage Area for specific projects but often do not allow for administrative costs, limiting their capacity for growth. Heritage Areas have struggled due to lack of resources, which diminishes their ability to support robust development. Inconsistent funding has also hindered Heritage Areas planning efforts and flexible response to community needs.

Another challenge has been the lack of strategic program and brand awareness of this flagship public-private partnership program within DCNR. Having been conceived and launched years before the creation of DCNR, the Program has often struggled to have its multi-disciplinary conservation voice heard within an agency that has evolved to focus and specialize primarily in *natural resource* conservation and its related connection to outdoor recreation, despite the agency's stated purpose to also serve as a cabinet-level advocate for heritage conservation. The later development of overlapping agency landscape programs has also created some confusion inside and out of the agency and Program.

Pennsylvania's General Assembly passed legislation in support of the Program in 2016 that sought to more formally establish the Program under the DCNR and sets forth a framework for program implementation. However, this framework, and subsequent Program implementation guidance, has not always been sustained or refreshed, thus creating the need for this unique opportunity to strategically evaluate and strengthen the entire Program structure.

## **SCOPE OF WORK REQUESTED**

### **Overall Objectives:**

- 1.** Establish a shared vision and assemble a strategic plan to guide the further development, implementation, and administration of the Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program.
- 2.** Define roles and responsibilities of key Program partners, including DCNR, Heritage PA, and Heritage Areas, and potential collaborative stakeholders such as other state agencies, non-profits, and federal tribal organizations.
- 3.** Develop a "Program Manual" to guide Program management and Heritage Areas towards best practices.
- 4.** Establish an evaluation tool and schedule to measure Program and Heritage Area success.
- 5.** Provide a realistic phased implementation plan aimed at moving all Program partners forward with a unified vision over the next 5 years.

### **A. Segment 1: Training for introductory approach to network collaboration shared program vision primer**

- ***Programmatic Learning Session:*** Conduct a facilitated in-person learning workshop session for members of Heritage PA, key DCNR staff, and Heritage Area managers, that introduces an approach for collaborative networks. The consultant selected to complete Segment 2 of this project will be expected to attend this session for continuity and ease of transition.

- ***Vision & Values:*** Develop a proposed shared vision and common values for the Heritage Areas Program that will help inform Segment 2.
- ***Perceived Needs & Challenges:*** Identify needs/challenges that could/should be addressed with the strategic planning effort.

***Deliverables:***

- Detailed meeting notes
- Post-meeting analysis for transition to next step of the strategic planning process with Heritage PA, DCNR staff, and the consultant selected to complete segment 2 of the project.

**B. Segment 2: Program assessment and strategic planning**

- ***Data Gathering:*** Gather and analyze existing program and organizational documents, policies, funding history, historical/legacy documents, etc. Heritage PA and DCNR will assist the selected consultant in identifying and obtaining relevant documents. Individual conversations or facilitated meetings with stakeholders and partners may also be used to gather input and perspective.
- ***Communications:*** Recommend a communication strategy and statewide voice for the PA Heritage Areas Program, DCNR, and Heritage PA that will advance and strengthen the Program and its recognition among the public, legislators, the administration, and key state agencies.
- ***Programmatic Analysis:*** Analyze program guidelines and policies to ensure they support the actions of individual Heritage Areas and overall Program management and implementation.
- ***Program Evaluation Tool:*** Devise a realistic tool to measure program success. Consider existing heritage program measurement tools found in other states or regions and the National Park Service. The tool should quantify the success of individual Heritage Areas, program administration, and the success of the program as a whole. Include benchmarks/guidelines and a process for regularly assessing the performance of current heritage areas, as well as a process for accepting new heritage areas into the Program. Review and assess the evaluation matrix developed as part of the Program's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan.
- ***Analysis, Recommendations, and Action Plan:*** Analyze all gathered information (including Segment 1 post-meeting analysis and notes), formulate recommendations, and create a detailed action plan to guide Program implementation over the next 5 years. The action plan should identify roles and responsibilities of all participating partners and a rough order of magnitude with suggested funding sources. Identify "early implementation" action steps.

***Deliverables:***

- Draft reports: A minimum of 2 drafts should be provided for review and comment prior to production of a final report
- Final Report:
  - Executive Summary in a reproducible digital format (public facing summary)
  - Final report in a reproducible digital format
  - Hard copies of the final plan (25 copies)
  - Digital files of all final work products and data related to the scope of work with the final plan and executive summary suitable for upload and display on Heritage PA, DCNR and other websites.
- The consultant selected to complete Segment 2 of this project will be expected to attend the Segment 1 session.

**PROJECT BUDGET**

The total budget available for the full project, inclusive of both segment 1 and 2, shall not exceed \$80,000. While there is not a firm funding limit for each segment, based on the tasks anticipated for each portion of the project, it is anticipated that the budget would follow a rough breakdown of 10-15% of the budget (~\$12,000) supporting segment 1 and 85-90% of the budget (~\$68,000) supporting segment 2. Please provide justification if your proposed budget does not align with this general expectation.

The proposed cost should include consultant services, related travel, resulting publications, meeting expenses, communication costs, and all other project costs.

The cost for segment 1 and segment 2 should be detailed separately to facilitate independent evaluation and comparison with other responses.

**CONSULTANT QUALIFICATIONS and SELECTION****A. Consultant Qualifications**

To be considered for one or both segments of the project, respondents should have the following qualifications and experience:

- Expertise in collaborative conservation and experience guiding diverse partners to establish a shared vision, common values, and actionable goals.
- Extensive experience in strategic planning regarding heritage, cultural, natural, and recreational assets and development and/or broad regional economic development.
- Experience developing program guidelines, including identifying roles and responsibilities of key personnel.



- Experience in public participation and stakeholder (public and private entities) engagement projects including consensus building and dissemination of resulting information and strategies to produce successful outcomes.
- Strong expertise in analyzing qualitative and quantitative data and developing recommendations and action plans that include milestones and benchmarks to ensure success.
- It is not a pre-requisite to have experience with Pennsylvania's Heritage Areas Program, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources or the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation.

## **B. Selection Process**

Each submission will be reviewed by the Selection Committee, consisting of representatives from Heritage PA, DCNR, and other key partners and stakeholders. Each segment of the project will be evaluated separately based on the criteria below. Failure to provide detailed information for each segment for which you wish to be considered may result in disqualification of the proposal. Interviews may be scheduled with select candidates if a decision cannot be reached based on proposal evaluation alone. The award may be made to one vendor for both segments, or to multiple vendors for individual segments, at the sole discretion of the Selection Committee.

## **C. Selection Criteria**

The following criteria will be used to evaluate the submissions:

<b>Element</b>	<b>Description</b>
Approach / Methodology	Details of the planned approach, including the expected timeline, the activities involved, and how partners and stakeholders will be engaged.
Qualifications	Explanation of qualifications and how they relate to the requested scope of work, including examples of similar projects
Key Personnel	List of key staff assigned to the project and how well their experience supports the requested scope of work
Proposed Costs	Clear, itemized, and reasonable list of project costs within available budget

## **D. Project Schedule**

The final project schedule will be determined by the selected consultant(s). However, we are aiming to complete the project within 9-12 months from the start date. The schedule below provides firm deadlines for the consultant selection process and an estimated timeline thereafter.

RFP release	December 17, 2025
Question submission deadline	January 9, 2026
Response to submitted questions	January 14, 2026
<b>PROPOSALS DUE</b>	<b>February 2, 2026 (by 4pm)</b>
Consultant selection & notification	February 27, 2026
Start of project	March 2026
Segment 1 ( <i>visioning</i> )	Week of April 13, 2026
Segment 2 ( <i>strategic planning</i> )	Spring 2026-Fall 2026
Final plan complete	January 2027
Approval of plan and project wrap up	February 2027

## E. Submittal Requirements

Each consultant team is asked to submit the following information:

- Cover page indicating the name and address of the submitting organization
- Statement of qualifications, including a description of the firm(s) and resumes of key personnel. Where possible, detail the role of the staff as it relates to this project proposal.
- An annotated project list that demonstrates experience in similar projects, including a reference list with client contact information.
- If bidding on Phase 1, please provide examples of past training outlines, curriculum, and/or presentation slides.
- A general description of the approach the team would use to accomplish the outlined Scope of Work.
- Project timeline for scope of work tasks.
- Planned deliverables.
- Itemized budget(s) detailing all elements of project expenses, separated into distinct budgets for each of the 2 project segments.
- Acknowledgement and concurrence of the DCNR Nondiscrimination and Sexual Harassment Clause.

**A pdf of the submittal must be received via email by:  
4:00pm on February 2, 2026**

## **NONDISCRIMINATION/SEXUAL HARASSMENT CLAUSE**

1. **Representations.** The Grantee represents that it is presently in compliance with and will remain in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and policies relating to nondiscrimination and sexual harassment for the term of the agreement. The Grantee shall, upon request and within the time periods requested by the Commonwealth, furnish all necessary employment documents and records, including EEO-1 reports, and permit access to its books, records, and accounts by the Commonwealth for the purpose of ascertaining compliance with provisions of this Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment Clause.
2. **Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment Obligations.** The Grantee shall not:
  - a. in any manner discriminate in the hiring of any employee(s) for the performance of the activities required under this agreement or any subgrant agreement, contract, or subcontract, by reason of race, gender, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or in violation of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Act ("PHRA") and applicable federal laws, against any citizen of this Commonwealth who is qualified and available to perform the work to which the employment relates.
  - b. in any manner discriminate by reason of race, gender, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or in violation of the PHRA and applicable federal laws, against or intimidate any of its employees.
  - c. in any manner discriminate by reason of race, gender, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or in violation of the PHRA and applicable federal laws, in the provision of services under this agreement or any subgrant agreement, contract, or subcontract.
  - d. in any manner discriminate by reason of race, gender, creed, color, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or in violation of PHRA and applicable federal laws, against any subgrantee, contractor, subcontractor, or supplier who is qualified to perform the work to which this agreement relates.
  - e. in any manner discriminate against employees by reason of participation in or decision to refrain from participating in labor activities protected under the Public Employee Relations Act, Pennsylvania Labor Relations Act, or National Labor Relations Act, as applicable, and to the extent determined by entities charged with the Acts' enforcement and shall comply with any provision of law establishing organizations as employees' exclusive representatives.

3. **Establishment of Grantee Policy.** The Grantee shall establish and maintain a written nondiscrimination and sexual harassment policy that complies with the applicable law and these Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment provisions and shall inform its employees in writing of the policy. The policy must contain a provision that states that sexual harassment will not be tolerated and employees who practice it will be disciplined. For the entire period of this agreement, the Grantee shall: (1) post its written nondiscrimination and sexual harassment policy or these Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment provisions conspicuously in easily accessible and well-lighted places customarily frequented by employees at or near where the grant activities are performed; or (2) provide electronic notice of the policy or this clause to its employees not less than annually.
4. **Notification of Violations.** The Grantee's obligations pursuant to these provisions are ongoing from the effective date and through the termination date of the agreement. Accordingly, the Grantee shall notify the Commonwealth if, at any time during the term of this agreement, it becomes aware of any actions or occurrences that would result in violation of these provisions.
5. **Cancellation or Termination of Agreement.** The Commonwealth may cancel or terminate this agreement and all money due or to become due under this agreement may be forfeited for a violation of the terms and conditions of these Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment provisions. In addition, the granting agency may proceed with debarment or suspension and may place the Grantee in the Contractor Responsibility File.
6. **Subgrant Agreements, Contracts, and Subcontracts.** The Grantee shall include these Nondiscrimination/Sexual Harassment provisions in its subgrant agreements, contracts, and subcontracts with all subgrantees, contractors, and subcontractors providing goods or services under this agreement. The incorporation of these provisions in the Grantor's subgrants, contracts, or subcontracts does not create privity of contract between the Commonwealth and any subgrantee, contractor, or subcontractor, and no third-party beneficiaries are created by those provisions. If the Grantee becomes aware of a subgrantee's, contractor's, or subcontractor's violation of these provisions, the Grantee shall use its best efforts to ensure the subgrantee's, contractor's, or subcontractor's compliance with these provisions.