

**INVITATION TO RESPOND
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
JULY 21, 2020**

*Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape
Strategic Plan*

Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) in collaboration with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) invites qualified firms to respond to a Request for Proposals for facilitating and drafting a strategic plan for the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape (LHCL).

Questions regarding the technical aspects and/or specifications of the proposal should be directed in writing to Marla Meyer Papernick, PEC at mpapernick@pecpa.org. All questions and responses will be posted for all potential applicants at pecpa.org.

Other Terms and Conditions:

1. The Pennsylvania Environmental Council reserves the right to cancel this RFP and/or reject any or all proposals, to waive informalities in any proposal, to award any whole or part of a proposal, and to award to the Respondent whose proposal is, at the sole discretion of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, determined to be in the best interest of the project.
2. All determinations as to the completeness or compliance of any proposals, or as to the eligibility or qualification of any Respondent, will be within the sole discretion of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.
3. Proposals will be evaluated and, unless all Proposals are rejected, an Award of the Contract will be made based upon the evaluation process outlined within this RFP. The evaluation may result in the Award of the Contract being made other than to the lowest priced Proposal.
4. This RFP does not represent any obligation or agreement whatsoever on the part of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. Any obligation or agreement on the part of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council may only be incurred after the Respondent enters into a written agreement approved by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council.
5. The Respondent will be required to comply with all applicable terms and conditions required by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources including, but not limited to, those identified in DCNR Grant Agreement number BRC-SR-24-181.

Submission Requirements

Complete proposals should be submitted via email by 5:00 p.m., Wednesday, August 19, 2020 to: Marla Meyer Papernick, mpapernick@pecpa.org

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape

Strategic Planning Facilitation

July 22, 2020

SUMMARY

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council is soliciting proposals to develop a strategic plan for the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape (LHCL), a partnership program of the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The purpose of the plan is to create an updated vision statement for the LHCL and develop a three- to five-year strategic plan to advance short-, mid-, and long-term goals that support the revised vision, a short-term action plan, and tools for assessing outcomes.

BACKGROUND

The Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape (LHCL) is one of eight large landscapes designated by DCNR to address issues related to conservation, resource protection, and outdoor recreation from a large-landscape perspective; one that crosses jurisdictional boundaries to promote collaboration and advance the mutually beneficial goals of Landscape partners and DCNR. One of the oldest DCNR landscapes, the LHCL was created in 2005 and currently includes Cambria, Fayette, Somerset, and Westmoreland Counties. The LHCL has evolved from a DCNR-led, project-based program that focused on public lands along the three ridges including the bulk of public lands on the Laurel Ridge, to an issue-oriented approach that employs topical committees to identify and implement projects that advance the common priorities of DCNR and our partners. However, the program has outlived its vision statement; “By 2015, the unique character of the LHCL is protected and the region and its communities are recognized as world-class heritage and recreation destinations as well as wonderful places to work and live.” It is time to revisit the vision and set a new course for the Landscape.

Note: for this RFP, key stakeholders and stakeholders are defined as:

Key Stakeholders:

- Current partners: LHCL existing partners on committees and leadership team (examples: heritage areas, watershed organizations, trout unlimited chapters, land trusts, conservation districts, visitors bureaus, trail managers, county recreation departments, county planners, park and forest managers, partner state agencies/commissions) in the landscape.
- Funders
- DCNR internal leads and senior management

Stakeholders:

Key Stakeholders plus the following groups:

- Former partners who no longer participate in CL
- Potential partners; those who either aren't aware, or those who would like to participate but have found obstacles to participation
- Citizens in the region
- Local elected officials and town/borough managers

GOALS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

The purpose of the proposed plan is to set a path forward for the planning effort through the development of:

- A new shared vision for the landscape based on input from our stakeholders
- A plan to implement the vision including the goals that will help realize the vision and an effective and manageable organizational structure
- Measurements to evaluate degrees of success

Lines of Inquiry

To achieve those goals, we propose the following lines of inquiry for the study, recognizing that they will be reviewed and adapted by the Strategic Plan Steering Committee and selected consultant at the commencement of the planning process.

Value of Conservation Landscape Program: What is happening in the LHCL that would not occur if the Landscape Program did not exist and what is the value created by a large landscape program to our partners and DCNR?

- What is the value of the LHCL to key stakeholders?
- What are the top three roles/activities/services that the Landscape Program provides to key stakeholders?
- How are the values of key stakeholders aligned? What are the significant differences in key stakeholder perspectives?
- What is the value to the natural and cultural resources in the Landscape?

Purpose: What is our new shared vision; what do our key stakeholders see as the purpose/value of the LHCL going forward? What are the critical needs, benefits, urgencies in the Landscape?

- What issues related to natural resources, outdoor recreation, and economic development are the priorities of the key stakeholder groups?
 - What are the top three most pressing issues in the Landscape?
 - Other issues that are priorities for key stakeholders?
 - How do these issues correlate with the vision?
- What do key stakeholders need to advance these issues?
- What do stakeholders perceive the region needs?
- In general, do the various resource management, heritage, and tourism plans support the priorities of stakeholders and the CL?
- How will the allocation of resources to address these issues benefit the key stakeholders?
- How will allocation of resources benefit the Landscape?

Program Implementation:

- How will the vision best be implemented; who needs to be engaged and how should that be done; what are the goals that will help realize the vision?
- What organizational structure will best serve our goals?
- Does the existing program structure of topical committees and a leadership team support the goals of the Landscape?
- How is this structure effective to achieve the Landscape vision and goals?
- What are the challenges of this approach to achieving the Landscape vision and goals?

- Are there barriers to participation for partners and/or potential partners and other stakeholders? If yes, what are they?
- What is the role of the external lead organization? What qualities are necessary for the external lead to be effective?
- What is the role of DCNR/internal leads? What qualities are necessary for the internal leads to be effective?

Geography: Do the LHCL boundaries match the vision, goals, and capacity of the LHCL stakeholders?

- Are the geographic boundaries clearly defined and understood; is there consensus among partners, DCNR, and external leads as to what boundaries define the LHCL?
- Do the geographic boundaries complement the vision?
- What are the optimal geographic boundaries of the LHCL?
The boundaries of the Laurel Highlands as defined by the visitors bureau are different than those of the LHCL: How does this impact the Landscape Program?

Outreach: Is the Landscape reaching the right audiences effectively?

- Who is the primary audience for the LHCL?
- What does the primary audience know about the LHCL; is the vision understood?
- Who are the secondary audiences and what do they know about the LHCL?
- What are the key messages that the LHCL should communicate to its various audiences?
- What vehicles for communication would be most productive?
- Does the LHCL need a brand to achieve its vision?

Evaluation: How will success be measured; what are the desired outputs and outcomes?

- What programs, initiatives, roles of LHCL do key stakeholders value?
- How do we measure project success for stakeholders in terms of investment of their money and time?
- What outcomes do we want to achieve?
- Assess the value of LHCL initiatives, programs, benefits (examples: mini-grants, networking, project management, facilitation, completion of projects requiring multiple partners).
- How do we measure the success of these programs?

Funding: Are the goals of primary funders in alignment with LHCL vision and initiatives?

SCOPE OF WORK

The consultant will work with the Leadership Team of the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape that includes representatives from PA Game Commission, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Department of Community and Economic Development, and representatives from tourism, watershed, land conservation, and heritage interests. The Leadership Team will serve as a Study Committee to review and approve key milestones of the strategic plan, and a subset of the Team will function as a Steering Committee for project management, routine check-ins, and feedback. There will be a minimum of three meetings with the Study Committee including a kick-off meeting, mid-project status update and information gathering, and a draft final report to the Committee.

Our partners, funders, stakeholders, and potential partners are the backbone of this program. Stakeholder engagement is paramount to this process and will include: DCNR senior staff; internal and external leads; DCNR partners in the Landscape; LHCL Leadership Team; LHCL committee members; former partners; funders; elected officials; municipal leadership; mini-grant applicants and recipients; outfitters; and others as determined with the selected consultant. This will be done through a combination of in-person and phone interviews, on-line surveys, and focus groups.

Deliverables:

1. Three- to five-year strategic plan that includes but is not limited to: vision statement, goals, program management structure including roles and responsibilities of internal and external leads, outreach/marketing plan, program evaluation tools, recommendations for long-term sustainability, and an analysis of stakeholder input.
2. Action Plan to achieve short-term goals (15 to 18 months) and measurable objectives.

TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT

Selection of consultant and notification is expected week of September 6, 2020.

REQUIRED QUALIFICATIONS

- Demonstrated experience facilitating strategic planning process with nonprofit organizations, including those in conservation and/or outdoor recreation.
- Flexibility and the ability to travel to the Laurel Highlands region.

PROPOSAL GUIDELINES AND INSTRUCTIONS

The proposal should include the following information:

- A description of the applicant's credentials and qualifications, and identification of personnel and their role(s) in executing the strategic planning process.
- A description of the applicant's general approach to strategic planning consultation, including general methodology, perspective, and guiding philosophy.
- Specific details of how the applicant will gather input from stakeholders including estimated number of on-line and phone interviews and related approaches for input collection.
- A list of project deliverables, including an estimated timeline for each deliverable and overall project completion.
- Proposed costs itemized according to plan elements.
- List of current and past clients as references.
- A detailed project budget, not to exceed \$20,000, that itemizes costs associated with project tasks as defined in applicant's approach and includes consultant's time, materials, supplies, travel, and any other expected expenses to bring the project to a successful completion.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated on a combination of factors including, but not limited to, expertise, experience, methods, and budget.

Technical Expertise and Experience

The following factors will be considered:

- The firm's experience in performing similar work.
- The staff members assigned to the project and their level of expertise.

- The clarity and completeness of the proposal and the firm's demonstrated understanding of the work to be performed.

Procedures and Methods

The following factors will be considered:

- The techniques for collecting and analyzing data.
- The sequence and relationships of major steps.
- The methods for managing the work to ensure timely and orderly completion.

Cost

The following factors will be considered:

- The number of hours of work to be performed.
- The level of expertise of the individuals assigned to conduct the work.
- Project not to exceed \$20,000.