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Request for Proposals for Consultant Services

The Sowams Heritage Area Project (SHAP) is requesting proposals for consultant services to produce a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study as a key step towards achieving National Heritage Area Status.

SHAP is seeking qualified consultants to prepare a Feasibility Study in compliance with National Park Service (NPS) standards to demonstrate to Congress the national significance of the Sowams Area landscape and its worthiness for designation as a National Heritage Area (NHA).

Responsible for working under the direction of the all-volunteer SHAP Steering Committee, the successful contractor(s) shall have extensive resources at their disposal, including a 100-page interpretive plan and a 380-page website. Additionally, the contractor(s) shall coordinate with other entities as appropriate such as: the National Park Service and regional federally-recognized and non-recognized American Indian tribes.

Project Description:

The Sowams Heritage Area Project tells the American origin story from the perspective of the people who welcomed the Pilgrims in early 1621. They were the leaders of the Pokanoket Nation, the people from “the Land of the Clearing” on the northeastern shore of Narragansett Bay, 40 miles to the west of Plymouth, Massachusetts. By identifying the 17th century Native and colonial sites in their ancestral seat, this project interprets the devastating transition of power from an ancient tribal nation to an English colonial confederation. The goal of the Project is to ensure that the ancestral seat of the Pokanoket Nation is designated by the U.S. Congress as a National Heritage Area (NHA), “where natural, cultural, and historic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally important, landscape.”

Organization Description: The Sowams Heritage Area Project was begun in 2018 by a ten-member Design Team who initiated the Project. A 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation was created in 2020, and a 15-member Steering Committee was appointed in February, 2022 to oversee the development of a Feasibility Study for submission to the National Park Service.

Themes: The SHAP has identified four themes to interpret and promote within the Heritage Area.

- The unique history of colonial settlement and expansion into the area during the 17th century;
- The history of original settlement of the Area by Native populations;

- their subsequent expulsion following the conflict known as the King Philip War, 1675-76; and
- the natural history of the region, including the land and waterways and their subsequent development.

Proposed Boundary: A preliminary boundary for the Sowams Heritage Area has been defined as the communities of Barrington, Bristol, East Providence, Providence and Warren, Rhode Island, and Rehoboth, Seekonk and Swansea, Massachusetts.

History

The Pokanoket people had been living on their land for 12,000 years before European traders arrived on the continent, carrying disease that wiped out more than half of the Indigenous people before the *Mayflower* landed. The Pilgrims, Separatist Protestants from England via Holland, were welcomed by the leader of the Pokanoket Nation, the Massasoit Ousamequin. Weakened by the pandemic and threatened by their enemy, the Narragansetts across the Bay, Ousamequin entered into a remarkable 40-year treaty with the Plymouth Colony in March of 1621, just four months after the settlers arrived. Following the death of the great Pokanoket leader in 1661, the alliance unraveled disastrously. In 1675, the ferocious King Philip's War broke out, causing the highest per-capita casualty rate in all of North American history and the enslavement and genocide of the defeated Pokanoket Nation, whose very name was erased from history for more than 300 years.

After King Philip's War, it was illegal for the few Pokanokets who survived to call themselves "Pokanokets". They retreated into the shadows of society or assimilated into other tribes. It wasn't until the start of the 21st century, when it was no longer illegal to be called "Pokanoket," that the members of the Tribe would emerge from hiding to tell their story. Today more than half of the Massasoit's descendants live in or near their original homeland, an area that today comprises eight communities along the Rhode Island-Massachusetts border.

Objective and Goal

The Sowams Heritage Area Project interprets the story of America's birth in the natural and built homeland of the Pokanoket People. More than 50 locations throughout this region reveal the traumatic interaction of Indigenous and European cultures that belie the American myth of the "First Thanksgiving." These fragments of 17th century life consist of historic structures, early burial grounds, and numerous written documents such as treaties, deeds, and wills. Evidence of Indigenous life of that time consists today of natural formations in the landscape and the springs, streams and rivers that provided fresh water and a complex network for communication and trade.

The goal of the Sowams Heritage Area Project is to ensure that the ancestral seat of the Pokanoket Nation is designated by the U.S. Congress as a National Heritage Area (NHA). The NHA program is a grassroots, community-driven approach to heritage conservation and economic development. The National Park Service would provide technical assistance and funding, but the government would not

own the land or assume land use controls. NHAs are not national Parks, but lived-in landscapes that foster pride of place and enduring community stewardship. Above all, the Sowams Heritage Area will tell a story that needs to be told and offer lessons about our past that could inform our future as a diverse and complex culture.

National Heritage Area Program

The National Park Service defines an NHA as “a place designated by Congress where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distractive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography (reference: *National Heritage Area Feasibility Study Guidelines*, National Park Service, August 2003). These patterns make National Heritage Areas representative of the national experience through the physical features that remain and the traditions that have evolved in them. Continued use of National Heritage Areas by people whose traditions helped to shape the landscapes enhances their significance.”

Obtaining designation as a National Heritage Area (NHA) has the potential of creating positive economic growth and community vibrancy by attracting secondary service and retail businesses in communities within and adjacent to the NHA.

National Park Service guidelines require four objectives in order to meet NHA designation:

1. Completion of a suitability/feasibility study;
2. Public involvement in the suitability/feasibility study;
3. Demonstration of widespread public support among heritage area residents for the proposed designation; and
4. Commitment to the proposal from the appropriate players which may include governments, industry, and private, non-profit organizations, in addition to the local citizenry.

NHA designation will increase public education about the Sowams Heritage Area and build a constituency interested in preserving, protecting, and enhancing the landscape. NHA designation has the potential to preserve historical components of the landscape that are of value to longtime and current residents and visitors; and to establish partnerships willing to undertake projects such as ecological restoration and interpretive signage.

Scope of Work

The SHAP is requesting proposals for consultant services to prepare the required Feasibility Study for a National Heritage Area designation with robust public participation and research utilizing Best Practices in NHA Feasibility Study development. The SHAP has assembled several reference documents that are available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xxxwTaXdmPF7kWe0rzf3bZDo6w6TX-DX> , including:

- a 95-page initial interpretation plan that includes an historical overview, a description of the four central themes of the project, and an audience analysis, and
- an introductory brochure, six self-guided tour guides and three styles of maps of the Heritage Area with important locations indicated
- a 14-slide PowerPoint summary of the project, mission, tagline and project summary

Prior to introducing authorizing legislation for a new National Heritage Area, a feasibility study is undertaken to determine if the region meets the 10 National Park Service (NPS) National Heritage Area criteria. Feasibility Studies are reviewed National Park Service subject matter experts, and the review findings inform NPS Congressional testimony on National Heritage Area authorizing legislation.

The Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc. is seeking an established consultant firm to produce a National Heritage Area Feasibility Study within a six-month project objective. The selected firm must have a proven track record for excellence and for working collaboratively.

Overall Study Objective: To conduct a comprehensive and inclusionary feasibility study that determines the viability of a National Heritage Area Designation for the Sowams Heritage Area.

Component 1: Public Involvement Strategy Campaign

Throughout the process, Consultants, in partnership with the Sowams Heritage Area Steering Committee, will seek to actively engage with the public about the themes of the heritage area to give them a voice in the region’s future.

Component 2: Determination of the Region’s Contribution to the National Heritage and Development of Potential Themes

NHAs, by definition, are places representative of the national experience. Often, the authorizing legislation for the study will include findings about these contributions. The consultant will assemble and synthesize all relevant historical information about the region and understand the contributions of the study area and its people and events relative to the national story. The consultant will describe the historical, natural, and cultural resources of the Sowams Heritage Area in the context of the national story.

Component 3: Natural and Cultural Resources Inventories, Integrity Determinations, and Affected Environment Data

Consultants will focus on identifying and documenting a strategic assemblage of natural and cultural resources that relates to the identified themes. The feasibility study will also identify that there is a sufficient assemblage with integrity to provide a viable interpretive experience. Consultants will work with the Sowams Heritage Area Project Steering Committee to gather all existing data and information about how the heritage area defined its geographic and cultural boundaries. Consultants will also reach out to NPS and State Historic Preservation Offices, as well as state and local agencies and organizations to further build the documentation and inventories of cultural and natural resources that may assist greatly in the region. In addition to

natural and cultural resources, information necessary to assess outstanding opportunities for conservation, recreation, and education, Consultants will also include an analysis of existing public and publicly accessible private open space, recreation, and heritage education resources and whether there are potential opportunities to increase the level and quality of such resources through heritage area designation.

Component 4: Management Alternatives and Preliminary Assessment of Impacts

Per study requirements, Consultants will include a comprehensive analysis of two management alternatives for the Sowams National Heritage area – status quo and NHA designation with an option for integration with the existing Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor. Consultants will also meet with the core team assembled to help implement this study to evaluate other options per the NPS directives and instructions.

Component 5: Heritage Area Administration and Financial Planning

Consultants will create a report documenting the financial and management plan outlining administrative roles, responsibilities, and federal matching requirements of the organization as a National Heritage Area. Consultants will evaluate and assess if the best place to house the local management entity is within its current management entity or if a new organization should be formed.

Time Schedule: The following summarizes the proposed activities and deadlines. This calendar can be moved ahead as needed by the selected applicant.

Event	Date
RFP available to prospective bidders	3-7-2022
Written Questions Submittal Deadline	4-15-2022
Final submission date	5-2-2022
Proposal Evaluation and Ranking (estimated date)	5-31-2022
Finalist Interviews	6-10-2022
Notice of Intent to Award (estimated date)	6-15-2022
Contract development, processing and execution (estimated date)	6-20-2022
Contract Start Date (<i>Notice to Proceed</i>)	6-30-2022
Submission of Final Report (estimated date) within six months	12-31-2022

Contact for Questions: All questions concerning this RFP shall be submitted in writing by email to drweed@cox.net on or before April 15, 2022. Responses will be provided on a Google Drive that is available at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xxxwTaXdmPF7kWeOrzf3bZDo6w6TX-DX>

Evaluation of Public Support and Commitments:

As identified above, Consultants will collect and report information on the public’s perception of the development of an NHA in Sowams. Consultants will report and provide details on support and

opposition from comments at public meetings, letters from individuals and organizations, resolutions from governing bodies, and actual evidence of formal commitments by local governments and others to participate in heritage area planning and programming.

Consultants will document partnership commitments including agreements for working relationships, financial contributions, or pledges of other types of assistance. Consultant will specifically look for indications of commitments to assist and work in partnership with the management entity by state and local governments and other organizations as well as actual dollar or other specific contributions. Consultant will document tangible comments and partnerships in an easy to understand matrix.

Final Report Presentation and Format

Consultants will synthesize all the information into a final report that is accessible for the readers to understand the findings and the process to achieve these findings. A draft report will be prepared and presented for feedback at a final public meeting presenting all findings and giving the public and key stakeholders time to comment. The report format will utilize the recommended format put forth by the NPS. Public comment and feedback on the draft report will be included in the final document.

The document should serve as a roadmap and pathway for the Sowams Heritage Area as it pursues the designation. This document must have a clear and concise Statement of National Significance per NPS guidelines for NHA inclusion. The goal for the Consultants will be to produce a deliverable that exceeds requirements and serves as a marketing piece for the heritage area.

Proposal Submission Requirements

Proposals must include the following information:

1. Cover Letter
2. Name of Firm
3. Employer Identification Number or Social Security Number
4. Point of Contact (name, title, phone number, mailing address, and email address)
5. Business must be in good standing with their state of incorporation
6. Demonstrated understanding of the work
7. Qualifications of consultant, including prior experience in similar services
8. Sample or samples of bidder's work
9. Pricing (include how fee is calculated)
10. Three (3) references within the past 3 years who can attest to the provider's knowledge

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals shall be evaluated for suitability, utilizing a point system according to following scale:

1. Expertise and Experience: Bidder has successfully provided similar or comparative services and has the qualifications to undertake this RFP (0-25 Points)
2. Aesthetic Capabilities: Prior work demonstrates a proven track record for excellence (0-25 Points)
3. Provider's business philosophy and approach compatible to services for SHAP (0-25 Points)
4. Pricing (0-25 Points)

The Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc. reserves the right to request additional information from applicants to clarify information submitted in the proposal. The scoring may result in the selected proposal not necessarily being the lowest cost. The Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc. reserves the right to award a contract by individual items, in the aggregate, or in any combination. SHAP retains ownership of all products produced under contract by the Consultants.

Contract Period

Upon acceptance of proposal, the Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc. will prepare an agreement to be executed by both parties. The agreement shall be for approximately six months, July 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022. The agreement may be extended if circumstances require and agreed to by both parties.

Proposal Due Date and Time

Proposals must be submitted electronically by 4:00 p.m. EST on May 2, 2022 to the Coordinator, Sowams Heritage Area: Dr. David S. Weed, drweed@cox.net. Samples may be submitted electronically or mailed to ensure arrival no later than May 2, 2022 to the Sowams Heritage Area Project, Inc., 23 Bridge Street, Warren, RI 02885. Please contact Dr. Weed by email for any questions concerning this RFP.