

## Strong Parks, Strong Communities

### *Application for Strategic Growth Initiative – Cohort 2*

**Applications / Nominations Due:** Friday, November 8, 2019

The National Park Foundation (NPF), in partnership with the Friends Alliance and the National Park Service (NPS), is pleased to announce that it is accepting applications from all philanthropic park partners for the 2020 cohort of the *Strong Parks, Strong Communities Strategic Growth Initiative*.

Nominations / applications must be submitted by a staff executive or board president of an official philanthropic partner organization on behalf of that organization, or by an NPS superintendent or regional partnership coordinator wishing to nominate a Friends Group for consideration.

Selected organizations will undergo an organizational assessment and receive capacity-building technical assistance by a third-party consultant, paid for by NPF. The format for technical assistance will be provided individually or in groups with similar challenges/opportunities. Selected organizations will not receive direct funding for capacity building at this time.

**Notification:** Applicants will be notified of award selections by December 9, 2019.

**Selection Process:** All nominations / applications will be reviewed by a selection committee comprised of representatives from the National Park Foundation, with support and approval from the National Park Service and the Friends Alliance. Selections will be based on the nominee's / applicant's ability to meet and exceed program requirements and required outcomes.

**Questions:** Contact Madeleine Balkonis, Senior Manager, Community Partnerships, (202) 796-2505, [mbalkonis@nationalparks.org](mailto:mbalkonis@nationalparks.org), with any questions about this application or program.

**Submission Options:**

- Email: [mbalkonis@nationalparks.org](mailto:mbalkonis@nationalparks.org)
- Mail: Madeleine Balkonis c/o National Park Foundation, 1110 Vermont Ave, NW Suite 200, Washington, DC 20005

**Application Contents:**

- A. Program Overview
- B. Program Goal and Outcomes
- C. Program Timeline
- D. Program Requirements and Instructions
- E. Checklist

## A. Program Overview

National parks more than ever need their Friends organizations to be strong philanthropic partners. With increasingly constrained budgets, national parks need additional private funds to help protect park resources, implement research and capital projects, educate park visitors, and enhance the visitor experience. The recipe for effective Friends organizations includes engaged board leadership, capabilities and capacity in resource development, a strong case for support, a clear constituency, and visibility to potential donors. It also calls for a close relationship with the park superintendent and / or park leadership staff, and an understanding of the pressures and processes inherent in managing a large federal agency.

Strong Parks, Strong Communities capacity-building investments are aimed at increasing the impact and effectiveness of national park philanthropy in 2020. Groups may self-nominate / apply or be nominated by others. Four to six organizations will be selected to participate in organizational assessments with a third-party consulting firm, followed by capacity-building investments. Those selected will include a range of organizational sizes and scales, geographic distribution, and a variety of capacity challenges and opportunities. Some will have relatively straightforward capacity-building needs that can be addressed quickly with short-term action-planning; others will have more complex challenges that will take longer to address. Capacity-building will include customized projects and training for individual organizations. It may also include cohort-based / peer learning and training for groups with common capacity needs.

## B. Program Goal and Outcomes

**Impact.** Increase impact and effectiveness for participating organizations

**Multiplier effect.** Participants will extend their learning to others in the field through participation in mentoring relationships, affinity groups, or similar shared-learning platforms.

**Replicability.** Capacity-building investments in individual Friends Groups will be applicable to other similar groups.

## C. Program Timeline

**Application / nomination.** By November 8, 2019.

**Review.** Nominations will be reviewed for minimum criteria and screened and narrowed by the National Park foundation. Priorities would be given to groups that are most likely to benefit and advance. Applicants will be notified of final decisions by December 9, 2019.

**Schedule.** A total of 4-6 groups will be selected and confirmed by the end of December 2019. Participating organizations will begin work with our third-party consultants in January 2020.

**Length of engagement.** The more straightforward engagements are anticipated to take 3-6 months (completion no later than June 30, 2020); complex projects are anticipated to take 8-12 months (completion no later than December 31, 2020).

**Time commitment.** Groups may be required to commit 10 to 20 hours per month (per organization) for the term of the project, depending on the project's complexity.

## D. Program Requirements and Instructions

Please submit a narrative response to the items below, attaching any required supporting material at the end of your narrative. A checklist is included at the end of this application.

*NOTE: An overview describing the types of projects and activities that organizations participated in during Cohort 1 of the Strategic Growth Initiative is included as an appendix to the application.*

**Interest.** In one page or less, describe why undertaking capacity building would be helpful and in which facets of your organization. These may be challenges, opportunities, or both. Please provide basic program and budget information (you may attach an organizational budget).

### **Selection Criteria.**

*Park commitment.* Please attach a signed letter of support from your superintendent and / or park leadership staff. If you have a NPS agreement in place, attach that as well.

*Leadership – Demonstrated commitment to participating.* Please attach a board or executive committee resolution to confirm your interest in participating and willingness to leverage your learning to other philanthropic park partners via the Friends Alliance. Please identify one or two champions on board or staff to carry capacity-building to completion at least for one year after receiving capacity building support from NPF.

*Leverage – Potential to leverage new resources or existing efforts for maximum impact.*

Please describe how participation in this capacity-building program would position your organization to garner additional resources or have broader impact.

**Financial Investment.** Your organization will be asked to commit funds to the implementation of your capacity building activities, following the formal assessment process. The goal is to pursue continued growth and development beyond the initial capacity-building support from NPF's third-party consultant. This investment in building capacity should be equal to 1% of your total operating budget, with a cap of \$5,000. Examples may include (but are not limited to): contributing to professional development for your staff, board development, or supporting a consultant's travel costs for in-person technical assistance. Some accommodation may be made for start-up groups.

**Diversity.** Groups will be selected for broad representation across several other factors. Please complete the checklist on the Application Cover Sheet included in this application to identify your organization by category.

**Commitment.** Groups will participate fully in their own capacity-building project. They will also "pay it forward" after completion of their project by participating in the future growth of the field of park philanthropy (e.g., participate or lead an affinity group, mentoring, or similar effort via the Strong Parks, Strong Communities initiative).

*If your group is nominated by others, you will be contacted to confirm your interest in participating.*

## E. Checklist

- Completed Application Cover Sheet, including Pledge Form
- Proposal narrative addressing the questions in this application
- Signed letter of support from park superintendent and / or park leadership staff
- NPS park partnership agreement, if one is in place
- Board or executive committee resolution
- Names and roles of your board / staff champions
- Organizational budget (*may include in narrative*)

## Strategic Growth Initiative – Application Cover Sheet

Organizational Information	
<b>Organization Name</b>	
<b>Contact Name</b>	
<b>Contact Telephone</b>	
<b>Contact Email</b>	
<b>Year Founded</b>	
<b>Number Full-Time Staff</b>	
Identify your Organization by Category (check all that apply)	
<b>Geography – NPS Region</b>	<input type="radio"/> Northeast <input type="radio"/> National Capitol <input type="radio"/> Southeast <input type="radio"/> Midwest <input type="radio"/> Intermountain <input type="radio"/> West <input type="radio"/> Alaska
<b>Geography – Setting</b>	<input type="radio"/> Urban <input type="radio"/> Suburban <input type="radio"/> Rural
<b>Type of Resource Protected</b>	<input type="radio"/> Cultural heritage / historic <input type="radio"/> Battlefield <input type="radio"/> Trails <input type="radio"/> Natural or geologic
<b>Financial Investment Pledge</b>	Organizational budget \$ _____ Financial investment \$ _____ <i>(towards your participation in this program)</i>

## *Strategic Growth Initiative – Cohort 1 Review*

### **Participating Organizations**

Fifteen philanthropic partners participated in the first capacity-building cohort from 2018-2019:

- Friends of First State
- Friends of Minidoka
- Friends of Stones River National Battlefield
- Friends of Vicksburg
- Historic Pullman Foundation
- Ice Age Trail Alliance
- Independence Historical Trust
- Manassas Battlefield Trust
- Mesa Verde Foundation
- Mississippi Park Connection
- National Parks Partners
- Rosie the Riveter Trust
- Santa Monica Mountains Fund
- Shenandoah National Park Trust
- Voyageurs National Park Association

### **Step One: Understanding the Needs**

Solid Ground consultants worked with each group to understand its strengths, opportunities, and needs. We reached out to staff, board, and external stakeholders through telephone interviews and / or online surveys, and looked at key organizational documents. We summarized what we learned, then met with organizational leaders to help each group decide what would be most helpful. We then customized a capacity-building project to respond to each group's capacity needs.

### **Step Two: Capacity-Building Projects**

Examples of projects Solid Ground conducted with the groups in this cohort include:

1. Working with the Board of Directors and NPS staff to produce **a vision statement and action plan for the start-up of a new Friends Group.**
2. The development of **strategic plans** that include vision and mission statements, goals, and an outline of specific strategies to achieve those goals.
3. Developing **tools and plans to strengthen fundraising** through major gifts, membership, capital campaigns, and electronic marketing.
4. Working with the Boards of Directors to clarify the roles of the board, and develop **plans for recruiting new board members,** along with **documents to guide recruitment and orientation.**
5. Developing a **new staffing structure** and working with a recently-formed leadership team to **develop a leadership team charter.**
6. Developing a **strategic communications plan and key messages.**
7. Creating a **collaborative plan for facility development.**
8. **Exploring a merger through facilitated conversation** about why the organizations should or should not join forces – and what it would take to get there.