REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

THE NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION'S
Strong Parks, Strong Communities Capacity Building Grant Program
Open to all National Park Philanthropic Partner Organizations

Grant Application Open: August 19 – September 9, 2020

The National Park Foundation (NPF) is excited to announce a Request for Proposals to help build the organizational capacity of national park partner organizations through Strong Parks, Strong Communities (SPSC), a public-private partnership between NPF, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Friends Alliance.

The goal of this SPSC Capacity Building Grant Program is to support park partners in their work to protect and preserve natural and cultural resources, reimagine the possibilities of interpretive and educational programming, and increase access to national parks for all people. Funding may not be directed towards unrestricted organizational operations but should allow park partners to grow their capacity for sustainable, innovative partnership to the NPS. **Organizations that have previously received capacity building funding through SPSC are encouraged to apply, to help leverage the capacity building work already begun through the Strategic Growth Initiative and/or Friends Leadership Institute programs.** Organizations who requested but did not receive prior capacity building grant support via SPSC Initiative are also welcome to apply.

Partner organizations will receive a link to NPF's FLUXX online application system on August 19th and will be able to register for access immediately. Additional details on the application process may be found in "Section F: Proposal Instructions" a copy of the online application can be found in Appendix A for parties who are interested in reviewing the application in advance of the formal launch.

Please note that only nonprofit organizations with an existing philanthropic and/or cooperative agreement with the National Park Service will be eligible for support. Organizations with agreements currently in development may also be considered when accompanied by a letter of support from NPS.

*Information from the National Park Service's Partnerships Office related to ongoing support available to park partner organizations for **COVID-19 recovery** is available in Appendix B of this document.*

Informational Conference Call: An optional, informative call to discuss this RFP and the proposal process will be held on **August 14th at 11:30am – 12:30 pm ET.** All parties interested in submitting a proposal are encouraged to attend the call, though it is not required.

Register for Informational Conference Call Here

Deadline: Applications are due no later than **September 9, 2020** (midnight ET).

Award Amount: Grant requests may not exceed $25,000; there is no minimum threshold. Funding may also be allocated at a lesser amount than requested based on availability, priority, and need. Please note that only one grant request may be submitted per organization.

Notification: Applicants will be notified of award selections by September 25, 2020.
Selection Process: All applications will be reviewed by a selection committee comprised of representatives from the National Park Foundation. Grantee selections will be based on the applicant's ability to meet and exceed program requirements and outcomes.

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

RFP Contents:
- **A. Program Overview**
- **B. Program Criteria**
- **C. Program Timeline**
- **D. Program Details and Instructions**
- **E. Program Evaluation**
- **F. Proposal Instructions**

Appendix A: Example of Online Application
Appendix B: COVID-19 Information for NPS Partner Community

A. Program Overview

The National Park Service (NPS) needs the support of its Friends Groups, Cooperating Associations, and other park partners now more than ever. With increasingly constrained budgets, national parks need private partners to help protect park resources, implement research and capital projects, educate park visitors, and enhance the visitor experience. The recipe for effective partner organizations includes engaged board leadership, capabilities and capacity in resource management/development, a strong case for support, a clear constituency, and visibility to prospective supporters. It also calls for a close relationship with NPS colleagues and an understanding of the pressures and processes inherent in working within a large, federal agency.

Since 2017, the Strong Parks, Strong Communities program has worked to enhance the capacity of local park partner organizations, offering peer-to-peer learning and opportunities to take collective action in the hope of bringing park philanthropy to an elevated level. Now, as the state of park partnership faces its newest challenge in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are empowering you to design your own plan for building organizational capacity. We want to understand where your organization is today and where it wants to go – whether that be undertaking a new strategic plan, designing a new website and communications strategy, or any of the other countless opportunities for park partnership growth.

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 through short-term planning; others will have more complex challenges that will take longer to address. Capacity building may also include cohort-based / peer-learning and training for organizations with common capacity needs.

B. Program Criteria
While NPF understands and respects that there are a broad diversity of challenges and needs in the NPS partner community – to which the SPSC Capacity Building Grant Program will endeavor to respond – the limited funding will be prioritized to those projects that most strongly meet the criteria below.

In addition, NPF will seek to fund a broad diversity of projects across the country from NPS units that focus on different aspects of NPS's mission, including those related to history and culture:

Impactful and Innovative. Projects will increase organizational impact and effectiveness for those participating and will be measurable in a way that is specific, achievable, and ideally relevant to a broader audience of park partners.

Relevant and Sharable. Participants will extend their learning to others in the field through participation in Friends Alliance national and regional meetings, affinity groups, social media content and webinars, or similar shared-learning platforms supported through Strong Parks, Strong Communities.

Ability to Implement. Capacity-building proposals will be thoughtful and precise, describing in detail the organizational advantages that will help applicants be successful, whether that be a highly motivated team with the skill set to follow through, an upcoming anniversary or commemoration, or an exciting capital project with the NPS' participation.

Potential to Leverage New Resources or Existing Efforts for Maximum Impact. Participation in this capacity-building program should position your organization to garner additional resources or otherwise have a broader programmatic and/or organizational impact.

Matching Funds: Projects that leverage additional funds or match the NPF grant will be prioritized.

C. **Program Timeline**

Application. September 9, 2020

Review. Nominations will be reviewed for minimum criteria and screened and narrowed by the National Park Foundation. Priority will be given to groups that are most likely to benefit and advance. Applicants will be notified of final decisions by September 25, 2020.

Length of Engagement. The more straightforward engagements are anticipated to take 3-6 months; complex projects are anticipated to take 8-12 months. All work must be completed by September 30, 2021.

D. **Program Details and Instructions**
   1. NPF has the ability to award up to $300,000 for SPSC Capacity Building Grant projects.
   2. Grant requests cannot exceed $25,000. Only one request may be submitted per organization.
   3. Selection Criteria
      o *Matching Funds:* Projects with in-kind funding or a partner match available will be given preferential consideration, though this is not required. If complimentary funding is available, please describe how SPSC Capacity Building Grant support will bolster program capacity.
      o *NPS Commitment:* Please attach a signed letter of support from your superintendent and/or NPS park leadership representative, as well as a copy of your NPS philanthropic/cooperative partnership agreement. In the case that your organization's agreement is still in development, please have your NPS colleagues indicate their intention to formalize a partnership in their letter of support.

- o *Leadership – Demonstrated Commitment to Participating:* Please attach a board or executive committee resolution to confirm your organization's interest in participating in the SPSC Capacity Building Grant Program and your commitment to following through on all requirements.
4. Funding will support project activities between October 2020 – August 2021.
5. Final reports will be due the end of September 2021.
6. Selected projects or partners will need to collect project content (videos, photos, participant biographies, impact stories, etc.) and work with NPF to collaboratively amplify partnership activities through social media, media inquiries, and other opportunities as available.
7. 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 program).

E. Program Evaluation

Successful applicants will be required to detail their evaluation and reporting plan in a follow up conversation with the NPF program manager, guided by the standard NPF annual reporting template (to be shared in advance).

F. Proposal Instructions:

1. Read the RFP

Please read this RFP carefully and then use the online application system to submit between August 19 – September 9, 2020. Please be as specific as possible when answering application questions to help reviewers fully understand the scope and expected impact of your proposed project. Please indicate if this grant will allow you to complete your project, begin a multi-phase project or finish something that was already started.

2. Online Application

Partner organizations will receive a link to NPF's FLUXX online application system on August 19, 2020 and will be able to register for access immediately. *(NOTE: NPF has recently moved away from its former grant application system, GIFTS, to a new interface, Fluxx. Detailed instructions for using the new system will be made available on August 19th.)*

A copy of the online application can be found in Appendix A for parties who are interested in reviewing the application in advance of the formal launch. Applications are due no later than midnight (ET) on September 9, 2020.

NPS has provided additional information regarding their support to partner organizations during this time of COVID-19 – please see Appendix B.

APPENDIX A

SPSC Capacity Building Application: Partner organization will receive a link to NPF's FLUXX online application system on August 19, 2020 and will be able to register for access immediately. The example below has been made available for parties who are interested in reviewing the application in advance of the formal launch. Applications are due no later than midnight (ET) on September 9, 2020.

Organization Information
- Organization:
- Primary Contact:
- Primary Signatory:
  Primary Signatory is the name of the person who will be signing the Grant Agreement. This is typically the partner organization's Executive Director.

Program/Project Information
- Project Title:
- Has your organization received capacity building support from NPF before? If so, please describe.
- Project Abstract:
- Program/Project Summary:
- Program/Project Timeline:
- Program/Project Partners
  Note: Applicable Program/Project information may be uploaded as separate documents.

National Park Partner Information:
- Affiliated National Park Service unit(s):
- Affiliated NPS Region?
- Does your organization have a current philanthropic agreement in place with the National Park Service?
- Annual Operating Budget:
- Number of Staff at Organization:
- Please describe how your proposed project will meet the program criteria outlined in the RFP:
- What is your greatest organizational need?
- How will your proposed project increase your organizational impact and/or address your greatest organizational need?
- Is your project relevant to a broader audience of park partner organizations?
- Will participating in this program position your organization to leverage new or existing resources?
- What organizational advantages do you have that will help this project be a success?
- Does your organization have in-kind funding or a partner match available to support this project? If so, please indicate the value of matching support.
- How much philanthropic support does your organization provide your NPS unit(s) on an annual basis?
- Does your organization provide other types of partnership support (interpretation, volunteer program, concessions, etc.)? If so, please describe.
- How would you describe your relationship with your NPS partner?

Expected Outputs
- Please list the outputs (measurable results) you hope to achieve with this project.
- How many people will directly participate in your program? (Please do not include fulltime NPS paid staff or volunteers in this number.)

Amount Requested and Budget
- Amount Requested:
- Project Budget Description:
- Checks Made Payable To:
  Note: Applicable budget information may be uploaded as separate documents.

Superintendent Certification
- Name of Superintendent:
  Name of Superintendent/Site Manager of NPS Unit or Executive Director of the partner organization submitting this application.
- Title:
- I certify that the Executive Director of the partner organization submitting this application has approved this submission. Please note that this certifies that the project conforms with any other existing plans an NPS unit or office has in place.

Grant Terms Information
- Expected project start date:
- Expected project end date:

Document Upload
Required: Letters of Support from Affiliated Park Superintendent and Organization's Board of Directors

Information for NPS Partner Community

We appreciate all the work that partners and park managers are doing to cooperatively to address the rapidly evolving situation associated with the novel (new) coronavirus (COVID-19) to ensure guest, customer and employee safety and health and to provide clear and accurate communications to our visitors and customers.

As the situation evolves, we will use this space on NPS.gov to provide updates about matters that are of importance to this community as well as continuing to include critical updates to the NPS public health response.

Current Status of the NPS

Information about the NPS response to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) is available at nps.gov/coronavirus. Links to this page are also posted on the NPS national social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). Your park manager or other NPS point-of-contact is also a critical resource

Aligning Our Invitation to the Public

#RecreateResponsibly

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the NPS has been engaged in messaging around safe and responsible visitation. A new social media campaign, #RecreateResponsibly, supports the global effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 and shares more familiar messages such as Leave No Trace. In parks as well as in the digital space, staff and partners have posted signs and shared informational graphics as public health reminders. Operational/on-site partners can work with partner parks to access and print these signs, materials, and graphics. Additional information is on the Recreate Responsibly page on NPS.gov, including tips for planning a park visit. Please share these messages with your customers and audiences.

Find Your "Virtual" Park

As more of us find ourselves "parked" at home, we're encouraging our visitors to find us in the digital space, to Find Your "Virtual" Park. From webcams to activities for kids, live tours, and more, parks and the partner community can invite our visitors to visit us virtually.

What Partners Can Do

We ask for your assistance in several ways:

Information Being Provided to Your Customers

Our Washington Office of Communications, in coordination with the Department of the Interior Communications Office, is working closely with regional and park public information officers (PIOs) to

respond to media and public inquires. We request that you work with your NPS park contacts as you normally would to review information you are communicating with your customers. They will quickly respond to your requests.

Safety and Health Practices

We encourage you to utilize the guidance provided by the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and practice the preventive measures discussed in their guidance.

Possible Exposure

If you have employees, guests, or customers who report a possible exposure, suspect or confirmed case of illness from the COVID-19 virus, please immediately contact the park so that they can work with you to coordinate with public health authorities.

Closure or Reduction of Operations

If you are considering closing all or a portion of your operations, please contact your park manager, or appropriate regional offices if your operations cover multiple regions, to discuss this decision before taking that action. They will help work through any considerations, logistics, notifications, and communications.

Where to Find Other Information

Coronavirus Relief Options

G. The Small Business Administration (SBA) provides information about their [relief options and additional resources](#) and [local training opportunities](#) on their programs.
H. Many partner associations -- for example, the [National Park Service Friends Alliance](#), the [Public Lands Alliance](#), the [Outdoor Industry Association](#), the [River Network](#), and the [Partnership for the National Trails System](#) to name just a few - as well as industry publications have pulled together resources for more targeted communities.

I. Finally, your state association of nonprofits will have local resources. The National Council of Nonprofits has a [portal to your state association](#) and a [compilation of resources](#).

Administrative Relief to Financial Assistance Recipients

The Office of Management and Budget has published [M-20-17](#) to enable agencies to provide administrative relief to financial assistance recipients affected by the loss of operational capacity and increased costs due to the COVID-19 crisis. If you have a grant or cooperative agreement and you need to discuss projects that will need to be extended, postponed, or cancelled, please get in touch with your Federal Assistance Awarding Officer for further information and guidance.

Volunteer Organizations

Partner organizations that manage volunteers should be in touch with your local NPS volunteer coordinator or park manager for updates or questions. If your work is done under the auspices of grants or cooperative agreements and you have additional questions, please get in touch with your Federal Assistance Awarding Officer.

Interpretation, Education, Volunteers

The IEV newsletter, Connections, has information about a variety of topics relevant to practitioners. Recent topics include [sparking discussion with visitors](#), how to [SLOW down and de-escalate](#), and building experiences with partners. Talk to your park partner for more information on how to subscribe, or use this [link](#).

As always, the partnership teams across the National Park Service are ready to assist. Please let us know how we can help you navigate the many changes happening around us.