

**OPPORTUNITY
TO APPLY FOR GROUNDWORK USA PROGRAM FUNDING
AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND
TO JOIN THE GROUNDWORK USA NETWORK**



Issue Date: November 1, 2016

Letter of Interest Due Date: February 1, 2017

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SECTION I: GROUNDWORK USA PROGRAM – CALL FOR LETTERS OF INTEREST

A. Background

The Groundwork Program of the National Park Service (NPS) builds community capacity to improve the environmental, economic and social conditions in communities impacted by brownfields and derelict lands. It supports the establishment and early success of locally organized and led nonprofit organizations, called Groundwork Trusts, dedicated to carrying out the mission of the Groundwork network. The mission of the network is “to bring about the sustained regeneration, improvement and management of the physical environment by developing community-based partnerships which empower people, businesses and organizations to promote environmental, economic and social well-being.”

Groundwork USA (GW USA) is the national non-profit partner of the National Park Service that leads the development of the Groundwork Network and local Groundwork Trust organizations. Groundwork Trusts work locally to create strong partnerships with municipal government, other agencies and organizations, neighborhood groups, schools, businesses, foundations, and individual residents to engage them in the transformation of their communities. Projects and programs are accomplished through a creative mix of staff, volunteers and leveraged resources.

Groundwork Trusts transform neglected land and waterways into community assets, and lead programs that invest in people’s capacity to thrive, thereby increasing environmental, social and economic well-being while building community capacity. By advancing inclusive community engagement, Groundwork Trusts turn brownfields into parks, trails, gardens and greenways; restore urban waterways and water systems; create neighborhood infrastructure for active living; expand healthy food production and access; invest in the potential of young people and the local workforce; and lead inclusive planning efforts to realize equitable development outcomes.

The Groundwork Program is funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields Program and administered by the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA). EPA provides NPS with funds to implement the Groundwork Program under an Interagency Agreement. NPS partners with Groundwork USA to provide the funds to successful applicants and works with Groundwork USA to provide technical assistance to help selected communities create and sustain Trusts.

The Groundwork Program has supported the creation of a network of Groundwork Trusts in communities in every region of the United States. The Groundwork USA network now comprises Trusts in 23 communities. Groundwork USA works in cooperation with NPS to coordinate, manage, and develop the national network, and to support and provide technical assistance to the individual Groundwork Trusts. Visit www.groundworkusa.org for more information about Groundwork USA and the Groundwork USA network.

Groundwork Trusts have tended to be established as new non-profit organizations. They can also be established by an existing non-profit organization transforming itself into a

Groundwork Trust in both name and operation. Keep Providence Beautiful became Groundwork Providence and the Mill Creek Restoration Project became Groundwork Cincinnati/Mill Creek.

Up to two communities will be selected for the Groundwork Program through this RFP process. They will be eligible for up to \$200,000 in funding and technical assistance from NPS, EPA and GW USA to plan, establish and build the capacity of Groundwork Trust organizations in their communities.

B. Objectives

The objectives of the Groundwork Program and the national network of Groundwork Trusts are to build capacity to improve the local environment and quality of life in communities impacted by brownfields, derelict land, degraded natural resources and other environmental challenges and to do that work in an inclusive and equitable manner that engages and invests in the well-being of all members of the community.

The joint objectives of the National Park Service, the US Environmental Protection Agency, Groundwork USA, and each community selected to participate in the Groundwork Program will be to assess the feasibility of developing and sustaining a Groundwork Trust organization in the community; to launch a new Groundwork Trust if appropriate; and to initiate conservation, recreation, and economic development projects and programs that improve the environment and overall quality of life.

Groundwork Trusts use a holistic approach and diverse partnerships to carry out multiple projects and programs that, over time:

- **Transform derelict and abandoned land** into community assets such as parks and greenways, community farms and gardens, recreation facilities and natural areas;
- **Remediate and transform brownfields** -- land that is, or is perceived to be, contaminated or polluted -- as well as waterways and land along the waterways, for community benefit;
- **Improve outdoor facilities** for recreation and education, and develop programs to engage youth in conservation and community regeneration;
- **Enhance commercial areas** to support community economic development and engage businesses in community service;
- **Involve youth and young adults** in projects and programs that develop job, leadership, civic and other life skills;
- **Ensure equitable and inclusive participation** by all members of the community in the work of the Groundwork Trust.

C. Application and Selection Process

This is a call for Letters of Interest (LOIs). The LOI process, LOI preparation guidelines, and criteria that will be used to evaluate Letters of Interest appear below. Up to eight (8) communities will be selected from those submitting LOIs to participate in follow-up assessments. The assessment process is also described below. At the conclusion of the assessment process and submission of full proposals, up to two (2) communities will be selected to receive support for feasibility studies to determine whether a Trust should be created and receive financial support and technical assistance.

This multi-step process leading to establishment of a new Groundwork Trust is described in further detail below (timeframes are approximate). The goal of the process is to determine the needs, opportunities, capacity, and level of commitment to establish a Groundwork Trust in the applicant community, and if appropriate, to undertake the steps needed to launch the new Groundwork Trust in its first critical years of operation.

Community participation in the Groundwork Program should be sponsored by a locally convened “Groundwork Steering Committee” with broad and diverse representation from the community’s local government, civic leaders, business interests, neighborhood representatives and other organizations and individuals interested in the potential for establishing a Groundwork Trust in their community. The Steering Committee should be an inclusive cross section of the community that Groundwork is being proposed for, representing its racial, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender diversity.

Interested communities may request assistance with the application process from their regional National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program. RTCA Program and staff contact information is available at www.nps.gov/rtca.

Step 1 – Letter of Interest (due February 1, 2017)

Interested communities submit Letters of Interest from their local Groundwork Steering Committees to Groundwork USA, explaining how the Groundwork Program might address their environmental, social and economic needs. See the *Guidelines for the Groundwork USA Letter of Interest* in Section II-B for the format and content of this letter. Up to eight (8) communities will be selected to participate in the assessment process below.

Step 2 – Assessment Process (February 2, 2017 – April 15, 2017) and Proposal (Anticipated Due date for final proposal is May 31, 2017)

Based on the Letter of Interest, representatives of Groundwork USA and NPS will meet with each selected community’s Groundwork Steering Committee, and other community members as appropriate, to explain the Groundwork Program in detail; visit potential Groundwork project sites; learn more about the community’s interest in the Groundwork Program; and answer questions and react to initial ideas about the potential for the Groundwork Program in the community. These meetings should involve regional representatives of EPA’s Brownfields Program.

Based on the assessment, Groundwork USA (in consultation with NPS and EPA) will invite selected communities to submit a full **Proposal for Groundwork Program Funding and Technical Assistance**. The local Groundwork Steering Committee submits the proposal in partnership with its local government and chief local elected official. **The proposal must include a commitment letter from the Mayor or other chief elected official to provide the local match of \$35,000 or more per year for the first three (3) years of operations if a Groundwork Trust is established.**

A private sector match of \$10,000 or more per year is also required for the first 3 years of the new Trust's operations. The private sector match amount will be finalized and commitment letters submitted as part of the Feasibility Study Process (Step 3).

(Please note: Proposal guidelines will be provided directly to the selected communities. Groundwork USA and NPS staff will be available by phone or email to answer questions regarding proposal preparation.)

Step 3 – Feasibility Study (6 to 9 months)

Based on the proposals, up to two (2) communities will be selected to develop a **Groundwork Feasibility Study** under the auspices of the local Groundwork Steering Committee. Technical assistance will be provided by Groundwork USA and the National Park Service. The purpose of the Feasibility Study is to assess whether the Groundwork Program is a “fit” for the community and, if so, how a local Groundwork Trust would be established and sustained over time. Groundwork USA will work closely with the selected communities to develop the Feasibility Study, and will provide up to \$5,000 to the local Steering Committee to hire a local coordinator to support this work.

Upon completion of the Feasibility Study, the Groundwork Steering Committee and chief local elected official will decide whether to proceed with establishment of the local Groundwork Trust. The Groundwork USA Board of Directors will also need to review and approve the Feasibility Study. Groundwork USA will require letters of support from NPS and EPA to admit the new Groundwork Trust to the national Groundwork network and to release the federal funds that are available to help establish the Trust.

Step 4 – Start-Up (12 – 18 months)

Groundwork USA will administer the initial federal funds provided by the National Park Service (\$90,000) to help establish each new Groundwork Trust. Groundwork USA and NPS will also provide technical assistance to support the start-up of the new Groundwork Trust in the community. The funds are disbursed over the period of 12 to 18 months based on progress under a work plan negotiated between the new Groundwork Trust, Groundwork USA and NPS. These funds may be used to hire staff; secure office space; engage partners; initiate projects and programs such as park improvements, community gardens, youth development initiatives, community outreach, creation of conceptual plans, and coordination of volunteer events; and to cover other operational expenses. The funds are tied to deliverables that demonstrate how the tasks were completed and how they helped build the capacity of the organization. The funds may not be used for project construction or fundraising.

PLEASE NOTE: IF THE DECISION IS MADE TO ESTABLISH A GROUNDWORK TRUST, THE APPLICANT COMMUNITY'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS REQUIRED TO PROVIDE A MINIMUM CASH MATCH OF \$35,000.00 PER YEAR FOR THE TRUST'S FIRST THREE YEARS OF EXISTENCE. A PRIVATE SECTOR MATCH OF \$10,000.00 OR MORE PER YEAR FOR THREE YEARS IS ALSO REQUIRED TO PROCEED WITH ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NEW TRUST. THE FIRST YEAR MATCH MUST BE IN PLACE FOR FUNDING TO BE RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. ADDITIONAL CASH AND IN-KIND RESOURCES ARE STRONGLY ENCOURAGED FROM THE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT THE COST OF START-UP, INCLUDING PROJECTS, PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS.

Step 5 – Building Capacity (3 years)

Upon successful completion of the work plan in Step 4, a full year of operation including incorporation and submission of 501(c)3 application, and a one-year operations review with Groundwork USA, the local Groundwork Trust is eligible to receive funds (as available to the Groundwork USA Program) in a total amount of up to \$100,000 over three (3) years (in annual increments of between \$25,000 and \$50,000). These funds can be used for purposes similar to those provided during start-up.

SECTION II: ELIGIBILITY INFORMATION

A. Eligible Applicants

To be considered for Groundwork Program Funding and Technical Assistance, interested communities must:

- Have received or be receiving funding from the US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program, and have demonstrated success utilizing that funding;
- Convene a local Groundwork Steering Committee representative of the community's racial, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic and gender diversity, and with representation from local government, businesses, civic groups, community organizations, institutions, neighborhood residents and other interested stakeholders. The role of the Steering Committee is to apply for Groundwork USA Program Funding and Technical Assistance, and if selected, to conduct the Feasibility Study and develop a launching strategy as a community partnership effort. Groundwork USA and NPS will support its work. The Steering Committee may also provide transitional support to help coordinate start-up of the new local Groundwork Trust, especially recruitment and selection of the Executive Director and Board Members, as appropriate.

B. Letter of Interest – Content and Format

Guidelines for submitting a Letter of Interest (LOI) for the Groundwork Program are provided below. Letters should not exceed five (5) pages in 11 point font. Based on the LOI submittals, up to eight (8) communities will be selected to participate in follow-up site visits and scoping meetings with Groundwork USA and NPS to evaluate the potential of the selected

communities for the Groundwork Program and, if appropriate, to submit full proposals for Groundwork USA Program Funding and Technical Assistance. The LOI should:

1. Provide a brief description of the geographic area (e.g., city, watershed, specific areas within city or county) where your local Groundwork Trust would operate. Include relevant demographics. Describe the environmental and community development issues that a Groundwork Trust could help address.

The area should be large enough geographically and population-wise to contain both sufficient project and program needs and the community resources needed to sustain a new organization working in partnership with other agencies and organizations. Groundwork Lawrence, one of the most successful Groundwork Trusts in the network, is based in a community with a population of 77,000 residents, which is one of the smaller jurisdictions Groundwork serves. Once established, and as needs arise, a Groundwork Trust may grow and expand its work to similarly challenged neighborhoods and/or adjacent communities.

2. Describe the opportunities for a Groundwork Trust to improve the local environment for conservation, recreation, health and economic development, in terms of:
 - The potential for a Groundwork Trust to facilitate creation, improvement and stewardship of parks, greenways, community farms and gardens, natural areas and waterways, and to increase opportunities for recreation, conservation and environmental improvement;
 - The potential for a Groundwork Trust to stimulate economic and environmental rejuvenation and equitable development;
 - The potential for a Groundwork Trust to increase the community's capacity to improve its environment, economy and quality of life;
 - The potential for a Groundwork Trust to engage all members of the community in planning and development of projects and programs to improve local conditions and create community assets.
3. Describe the opportunities for a Groundwork Trust to help address brownfield issues in your community in terms of:
 - The potential to leverage funds to support brownfield assessment, remediation, and reuse for parks, greenways, community farms and gardens, natural areas, waterways, and other community benefits;
 - The potential to engage all members of the community in planning and implementation of projects and programs to assess, clean up, and re-use brownfields for broad community benefit;

- The potential to help reduce threats to human health and the environment associated with the presence of hazardous substances, pollutants and/or contaminants in the community.
4. Identify the organization or agency convening and leading the local Groundwork Steering Committee, and describe the agency or organization's experience with community engagement, fund development, and environmental improvement activities. Provide the name and contact information for a lead contact person, and describe the person's anticipated role in the work of the Groundwork Steering Committee.
 5. Describe the level of community interest and commitment to learn about, evaluate and possibly establish a Groundwork Trust. Identify the local organizations, businesses, institutions, government agencies and/or community groups interested in evaluating the potential for the Groundwork Program in your community in terms of:
 - The breadth of community participation on the Steering Committee -- including business, government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, faith-based groups, community organizations and residents – and representation of the diversity of the community;
 - The racial, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender diversity of the larger community reflected on the Steering Committee;
 - The commitment of local government to participate on the Steering Committee;
 - The potential for a Groundwork Trust to be viewed as a collaborator or a competitor by other non-profit organizations in the community.
 6. Describe the experience that key members of the Steering Committee will bring to the planning and development of the Groundwork Trust in your community:
 - What is their experience engaging partners and stakeholders?
 - What is their experience leading a community engagement planning process that is equitable and inclusive?
 - What is their experience fundraising and securing public and private sector funding matches?
 - What is their experience with non-profit development and management?
 7. Describe the potential for local funding to help support the development, operation, and projects and programs of the Groundwork Trust in your community in terms of:
 - The commitment of local government to provide or exceed the required local government funding match should a Groundwork Trust be established;
 - The ability of the private and/or philanthropic sectors to provide or exceed the required private sector match should a Groundwork Trust be established;

- The potential for other resources to be leveraged to support development of the local Groundwork Trust.
8. Describe any funding and/or technical assistance your community has received or currently receives from the US Environmental Protection Agency Brownfields Program. (Note: you may need to contact your local government official responsible for overseeing such funds.) What was accomplished with that funding/technical assistance to remediate and reuse brownfields?
 9. Describe any assistance your community has received or is currently receiving from the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service, and/or your community's experience working with other NPS programs or park units. Describe any accomplishments from these partnerships in improving opportunities for conservation and recreation in your community.
 10. Describe any technical assistance your community has received or is currently receiving from Groundwork USA. What was accomplished with that technical assistance?
 11. Provide the name and contact information for your local staff contact in the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of the National Park Service. Describe the anticipated involvement of NPS staff with the local Groundwork Steering Committee. Interested communities may receive assistance from RTCA by contacting their regional RTCA program at www.nps.gov/rtca.
 12. Provide the name and contact information for your regional staff contact in the EPA Brownfields Program. Describe the person's anticipated role with the local Groundwork Steering Committee.

Section III: SUBMISSION INFORMATION

A. Submission Deadline

Format and content for the LOI should follow the guidelines in Section II-B. Letters of Interest will be evaluated for consistency with those guidelines and for the likelihood of success as measured by the Groundwork USA Program Funding and Technical Assistance evaluation criteria in Section IV.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring the LOI is received by Groundwork USA by **February 1, 2017**. **LOIs received after the deadline will not be reviewed or considered for review.** Applicants eliminated from consideration for this reason will be notified. **LOI preparation time may take several weeks. Please start the process as soon as possible.**

B. How to submit

Letters of Interest must be submitted to Groundwork USA **VIA EMAIL** by the due date specified above. Please reference **Groundwork Program LOI** in the subject line of the email.

Please email to:

Groundwork USA
proposals@groundworkusa.org

Section IV: Groundwork USA Program Funding and Technical Assistance - Evaluation Criteria

The US Environmental Protection Agency provides funding to NPS for the Groundwork Program and has established the following priorities for participating communities:

- Groundwork shall support the remediation and reuse of brownfields for community benefit.
- Groundwork shall help reduce the threats to human health and the local environment associated with the presence of hazardous substances, pollutants or contaminants.
- Groundwork shall address or facilitate the identification and reduction of threats to the health and welfare of populations at risk.

The above priorities and the following specific criteria will be used to evaluate the Letters of Interest from interested communities and the proposals from those communities that are selected for further evaluation:

1. The community/local government's status as a current or past recipient of funding from the EPA Brownfields Program and demonstrated success in its efforts.
2. The breadth of community participation on the local Groundwork Steering Committee and support for establishing a Groundwork Trust from a broad array of stakeholders including business, government, philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, faith-based groups, community organizations and residents.
3. The representation of the racial, cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic and gender diversity of the larger community on the local Groundwork Steering Committee.
4. The experience that key members of the Steering Committee bring to the planning and development of the Groundwork Trust, particularly experience in partnership development, inclusive community planning and engagement, resource development and fundraising, and nonprofit development and management.
5. The commitment of local government to support the effort, participate in the process and provide a local government funding match that meets or exceeds the required minimum.

6. The availability and readiness of the private sector (philanthropic and business community) to participate in the development of the Groundwork Trust and provide a private sector funding match that meets or exceeds the required minimum.
7. The extent to which other resources will be leveraged to support development of the local Groundwork Trust and its projects and programs.
8. The need for and extent to which the Groundwork Trust would support the creation, improvement and stewardship of parks, greenways, open space, community farms and gardens, waterways, natural areas and other new community assets, and would increase opportunities for recreation, conservation, youth development, job training and other improvements in the environment, health, economy and quality of life.
9. The need for and extent to which the Groundwork Trust would support the assessment and remediation of brownfields and their reuse for parks, recreation facilities, community farms and gardens, natural areas, and other community benefits.
10. The need for and extent to which the Groundwork Trust would increase engagement of the local community in the equitable and inclusive planning and development of projects and programs to improve the local environment, including the assessment, cleanup and reuse of brownfield sites for parks, recreation facilities, community farms and gardens, natural areas, and other community benefits.
11. The community/local government's current or past partnership with the National Park Service and demonstrated success in its work.
12. The community/local government's current or past partnership with Groundwork USA and demonstrated success in its work.

Section V: REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

A. Review Process

LOIs will be reviewed and ranked by Groundwork USA with the assistance of NPS, EPA, and other Groundwork USA advisors using the criteria in Section IV.

B. Notice of Selection

Groundwork USA will notify applicants selected for further assessment based on the submitted Letters of Interest and invite them to participate in the next step of the process involving a site visit and scoping meetings.

Selected communities should expect to receive this notice approximately six (6) to eight (8) weeks after the LOI submission.

Communities that were not selected on the basis of the submitted Letter of Interest will receive a notice as promptly as possible with an explanation why their LOI was not selected.

Section VI: Questions

Questions regarding the content of the announcement must be submitted by e-mail, with **Groundwork Program Questions** in the subject line of the email, to:

Groundwork USA
proposals@groundworkusa.org

And to:

Douglas Evans – Groundwork USA Program Manager
douglas_evans@nps.gov

Section VII: Other Information

A. Modifications to the Announcement

Notices of any modifications to this announcement will be posted on the Groundwork USA website.

B. Notice of Potential Disclosure Under Freedom of Information Act

Applicants should be advised that identifying information regarding all applicants, including applicant names and/or points of contact, may be subject to public disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, whether or not such applicants are selected for the Groundwork Program.