

**Q21-7256NF
REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS**

Recreational Activities & Excursions on the New York State Canal System

I. Mission and Goals

The New York State Canal Corporation (NYSCC) announces this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify qualified providers to develop and operate a variety of recreational Activities & excursions (“Activities”) across one or multiple New York State Canal System locations, potentially beginning in May 2022, in support of On the Canals Program. These Activities will be part of a series of Canal-based Programming offered to the public for an appropriate period based on the nature of the activity. Goals of this Programming include expanding awareness and utilization of the Canal waterways and trails, increasing visitation to Canal communities, and advancing the environmental and social responsibility objectives of NYSCC.

For the purposes of this RFQ, locations targeted span across three regions—Western, Central and Mohawk & Champlain.



Activities may include but are not limited to those within the categories below and specific examples as included in Section III (Scope).

- Canal-based Activities
- Trail-based Activities
- Tours and excursions
- Instructional-based Activities
- Local food and beverage offerings

II. Background

New York’s Erie Canal was opened in 1825, capping an eight-year period of engineering and construction that was unprecedented in its day. Designed to promote growth in Western New York and ensure the state’s role in international trade by connecting inland points to the Port of New York City. Initially, it was referred to by many as “Clinton’s Ditch,” after NY Governor Dewitt Clinton who championed its construction. Once completed, it became an overnight success. In the absence of rail or road alternatives, commercial traffic on the Erie Canal and its main branches grew rapidly, and the Canal was enlarged several times most notably in 1918, with the completion

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of an expansion and partial rerouting to become known as the New York State Barge Canal. The Barge Canal, which includes the Erie, Champlain, Oswego and Cayuga-Seneca canals, is known as the New York State Canal System. The Canal remains in seasonal service today. Visitors to the locks can witness boaters and kayakers ascend and descend up to 35 feet multiple times a day.

Operated and maintained by the New York State Canal Corporation, a subsidiary of the New York Power Authority, the Canal System includes 57 locks, 16 lift bridges, and spans 524 navigable miles linking the Hudson River with the Great Lakes, the Finger Lakes and Lake Champlain.

As part of the Empire State Trail, the Canalway Trail and Champlain Canalway Trail comprise a network of approximately 300 miles of multiple-use trails across upstate New York. The Canalway Trail follows the towpaths, used by animals pulling vessels along historic sections of the New York State Canal System, and also adjacent abandoned rail corridors. The trails are a great long-distance bicycling destination, but also an attractive close-to-home recreational resource for biking, walking, jogging, snowshoeing and other types of seasonal trail activities. Trailhead parking and interpretive kiosks with historic information are located at many points along the trails. The trails are primarily constructed of a stone dust surface with some asphalt segments.

Alongside the walking trails is a water trail, the NYS Canalway Water Trail, which offers paddlers over 125 public access points along the 524-mile Canal System. The Canalway Water Trail is part of a growing system of water trails across New York State, and the Eastern Erie Canal and Champlain Canal sections join up with the Hudson River Greenway Water Trail.

“On the Canals” Program

During the summer of 2020, as many individuals and families looked to stay close to home due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NYSCC offered a series of “days-out” along the Canal to serve as localized mini-vacations. Relying on partnerships with providers across the state, the “NY Canal Staycation” Program promoted six hubs of Canal and trail activity, and nearby local businesses. Based on the popularity of the Staycation Program, On the Canals was launched in 2021, striving to introduce the Canal to a wider audience, support local businesses and encourage new ones, and introduce new recreational Activities to the Canal water ways and trails. Activities during the fall and winter seasons were also piloted. The Activities have been named excursions to more closely identify them as outdoor tourism destinations for recreation.

On the Canals will continue in 2022 with the following Program goals and focus areas:

Local and Regional Economic Development

- Increased visitation to the cities, towns and villages along the Canal
- Involvement of and support for local businesses and organizations in proximity to the Canal
- Expanded awareness and utilization of the New York State Canal System and Empire State Trail for public recreation, entertainment, and enjoyment
- Attract new visitors from the local community and surrounding region
- Utilization of the Canal water ways and trail assets in new and interesting ways for active and passive recreation including but not limited to health and wellness, art and history, sports, boating, education, etc.

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Furthering NYSCC environmental and social responsibility objectives

- Participation by marginalized and under-represented communities
- Multi-generational Programming
- Greater accessibility for individuals and groups of all abilities
- Responsible conservation and environmental stewardship

III. Scope

This RFQ invites respondents to submit information demonstrating their qualifications to successfully develop and operate recreational Activities at one or more locations on or adjacent to the canal system and/or the Empire State Trail. Respondents are encouraged to indicate all locations and/or regions in which they would be willing to operate.

Recreational Activities may include but are not limited to the following, and respondents are encouraged to suggest additional Activities that support the Program goals and focus areas.

Canal-based Activities

- Boat rides
- Kayaking and fish kayaking
- Paddleboarding
- Canoeing
- Hydro biking
- Ice biking
- Ice fishing
- Ice skating

Trail-based Activities

- Biking
- Snowshoeing
- X-country skiing
- Group cycle riding
- Hiking
- Movies/screenings

Tours and Excursions

- Boat/kayak tours
- Historic tours
- Bike tours
- Accessible outings
- Supported group bike rides
- Nature tours
- Food tours
- Beverage tours

Instructional-based Activities

- Rock climbing
- Birding
- Fishing
- Foraging
- Canals infrastructure tours
- Tours by photographers or artists with hands-on Activities
- Fitness classes
- Art instruction

Respondents can propose one or more recreational Activities in one or more locations.

Respondents may also propose a multi-activity place-based itinerary. Past itineraries included a combination of recreational Activities (i.e., kayaking/cycling, boating/cycling). Guided Activities have proven to be the most popular. Excursions with a food and/or beverage component and those serving disadvantaged and accessibility-challenged audiences are special interest areas for the

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Program. In the past, excursion lengths typically ran between two and four hours but longer, even multi-day, excursions will be considered for future Programming.

Respondents are encouraged to suggest other Activities that would be appealing to the public and meet the intended goals of the Program as outlined in Section II above for consideration by the NYSCC.

NYSCC will consider subsidizing some or all components of proposed Activities (i.e., equipment costs, staffing, reservations, additional insurance required, etc.) where appropriate. NYSCC will publish information on a website to showcase the Program and promote the selected vendors through a marketing campaign.

NYSCC may, at its discretion, choose to extend any or all selected proposals into multiyear agreements. Also, in the event a response is not received from an appropriate distribution across the Canal System, or for a desired recreation activity, NYSCC may, at their discretion, enter into an agreement with one or more providers filling this void.

For data collection purposes, selected providers will be required to share with NYSCC specific information including but not limited to participation counts (registered vs. actual), and information gathered from participants such as names, emails, city/state/zip of residence. NYSCC may also ask selected providers to ask participants to voluntarily provide additional information such as age, race, ethnicity, etc. so as to help ensure programs are committed to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) and are being marketed to and servicing a diverse group.

Consideration will be given to proposals that directly support the Program goals focus areas as outlined in Section II – Background and additionally, those proposals that demonstrate a commitment to DEIA, but not limited to, multi-lingual staff and outreach materials, collaboration with community-based organizations that serve a DEIA mission, Activities that reflect multi-cultural values and accommodation for differing abilities.

IV. Submission Considerations

Respondent(s) may submit as individual firms or as teams. One or more qualified teams/firms may be invited to submit a formal proposal following the RFQ process. If the respondent(s) proposes multiple recreational Activities, NYSCC reserves the right to procure a subset of those Activities. If the respondent(s) proposes Activities at a specific site or region, NYSCC reserves the right to request respondent(s) to relocate the Activities if feasible.

Timetable

Following is a tentative timetable spanning the release of the RFQ and is subject to change. Any changes will be communicated to the respondents.

RFQ Released:	December 17, 2021
Deadline to submit questions:	January 11, 2022
RFQ Submittal Due Date:	January 21, 2022

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Submission Requirements

Respondent to complete the attached Response Form which shall include the following:

A. Supplier Information

- Overview of respondent's organization and general business strategy
- Key individuals supporting respondent's submission including contact information
- Demonstration that the respondent is capable of, and experienced in, providing recreational and hospitality services, which should include:
 - Past or ongoing services of a similar nature, including financial information (revenue, expenses) and fees paid by the public for the specific services
 - Experience with NYSCC or with other relevant public entities
 - Contact information for references who can speak to the character of the responding organization and its personnel
 - Proven ability to promote their past, proposed or similar services via groups, organizations, previous users/members and other platforms including social media

B. Vision / Concept

- The overall project description/narrative describing the proposed Activity. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Details of the Activity proposed
 - Location(s) in which the Activity can be offered
 - Proposed trip itinerary/design, if proposing an entire excursion
 - Information on any partner that would be providing the service with the respondent
 - Whether or not the excursion(s) will be guided
 - Appropriate ages and mobility factors
 - An ADA-accessible excursion
- On the Canals Program goals or focus areas (see Section II) that the submission supports
- Description of the reservation system or method to be used by the public to reserve the Activity

C. Expected Costs

- For each location and Activity proposed, provide a high-level cost overview including the following:
 - A breakdown of start-up costs, if any, including equipment needed to operate the Activity
 - A breakdown of day-to-day operation costs for the Activity being proposed
 - Anticipated fees to be charged to the public for the Activity

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D. Insurance will be required for each Activity and will be requested prior to commencement of any Activity as determined by NYSCC.

Submission Guidelines

- Respondent package (items listed above in “Submission Requirements”) should be submitted by 4pm EST on January 21, 2022. The Response Form (Attachment A) has been included with this document.
- Respondents should submit their responses electronically, in a PDF file, to OntheCanals@nypa.gov.
- When submitting your response, respondents MUST include the following on the email subject line : <Company Name> *Q21-7256NF On the Canals Recreational Activities & Excursions* and use the following format for your attachments:
 - <Company name> *Q21-7256NF On the Canals Recreational Activities & Excursions Response Form*

V. Contact Information

Designated Contacts

The following individuals are the ONLY Designated Contacts for this RFQ process. Respondents are advised that contact and communications with other individuals or entities to discuss this RFQ may result in disqualification.

Nancy Florence, Senior Strategic Buyer, Services
Office: 914-390-8268
Email: OnTheCanals@nypa.gov

Questions and Inquiries

All inquiries and requests for information regarding this RFQ must be directed to the Designated Contact, as listed above, no later than the date noted in the above timetable. The organizers will provide written responses to substantive questions in the form of one or more addenda to the RFQ. Such addenda are the only authorized method to communicate substantive information, including the clarification or modification of the timeline, terms or other requirements of this RFQ.

VI. Disclaimer

Respondents will not receive any preference for any future solicitation, license, or permit should they choose to submit materials in response to this opportunity. NYSCC reserves the right, at its sole discretion to: withdraw or discontinue this RFQ in whole or in part; use the ideas or materials submitted in any manner deemed to be in the best interests of the NYSCC, including, but not limited to, the undertaking of the prescribed work in a manner other than that which is set forth herein. The NYSCC likewise reserves the right, at any time, to change any components, concepts or approaches of the RFQ. All costs associated with responding to the RFQ are the sole responsibility of the respondent, and any such costs shall not be reimbursed by the NYSCC.

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NYSCC will not return materials submitted in connection with this RFQ and assumes no liability for the accuracy of the information provided in this RFQ.