

**Q23-7512NF
REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS**

On the Canals 2024 Recreational Adventures

I. Mission and Goals

The New York State Canal Corporation (NYSCC) announces this Request for Qualifications (RFQ) to identify qualified providers to develop & operate, and/or support, a variety of recreational adventures, available to people of all abilities, in a New York State Canal System location, potentially beginning in June 2024, in support of the On the Canals Program. These adventures will be part of a series of Canal-based programming offered to the public and accessible to all, wherever possible, for an agreed-upon period, during the Summer (2024), Fall (2024) and Winter (2024-25) seasons. Goals of this programming include local and regional economic development and furthering NYSCC environmental and social responsibility objectives.

As described in subsequent pages, the On the Canals program is in no way meant to subsidize businesses, municipalities, or non-profit organizations on a long-term basis. The program is meant to help jumpstart or give a boost to organizations selected, giving them the opportunity to test the appeal of new offerings or new markets with an eye toward transitioning these free sessions to paid offerings in subsequent months/years.

For the purposes of this RFQ, locations targeted span the Canal System, including the Champlain, Erie, Oswego, and Cayuga-Seneca canals and adjacent trails.



For more information on the Canal System, please visit: <https://www.canals.ny.gov/> and <https://eriecanalway.org/>

II. Background

“On the Canals” Program

Now embarking on its fifth year, the On the Canals program strives to introduce the Canal to a larger audience by offering a wide spectrum of both active and passive recreational opportunities. In past years, a variety of excursions were offered by various organizations, for free to the public,

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which included boat tours, cycling, kayaking, water safety sessions, painting, wildlife hikes, birding, stand-up paddleboarding, Canal infrastructure tours, and snowshoeing. NYSCC reimbursed the provider for the cost to offer the excursions for free to the public, and in some cases reimbursed for the purchase of necessary equipment to run the excursions.

As a result of participation in the program, many of the On the Canals providers have taken their On the Canals offering(s) and transitioned them to paid programming through their businesses. Municipalities have seen increased visitation through the program, with significant economic impact to their locale, and non-profit organizations have seen increased donations and volunteer activity through their participation in the program.

Although On the Canals providers have seen significant benefits from the program, the On the Canals program is in no way intended to subsidize organizations. Selection as an On the Canals provider does not guarantee selection in future years. Likewise, providers selected for 2024 programming which also participated in past years should not expect a similar reimbursement level as past years. The program budget is reviewed carefully each year and reimbursement is dependent on many factors including the number of qualified responses received, location, activity type, provider experience, cost compared to similar programming/organizational types, and the degree to which program goals and focus areas are met.

On the Canals will continue in 2024 with the following 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 recreation by people of all backgrounds and abilities

Furthering NYSCC environmental and social responsibility objectives

- Greater accessibility for people of all abilities
- Participation by marginalized and under-represented communities
- Responsible conservation and environmental stewardship

Accessibility and Inclusion – Market Opportunity

2024 will mark a transitional year for the On the Canals program, with an increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. Specifically, the program aims to provide greater accessibility for recreation along the Canal corridor for people of all abilities and increase participation by marginalized and under-represented communities.

A 2018 report by American Institutes for Research titled, “A Hidden Market: The Purchasing Power of Working-Age Adults with Disabilities,” stated one in five adults in the United States, or 64 million people, has a disability. Of these, 22 million (35%) are between the ages of 16 and 64. The total after-tax disposable income for these 22 million people is about \$490 billion. Discretionary income for this group is \$21 billion. Additionally, according to the report, “People with disabilities are not a solitary market; they are surrounded by family members and friends who also recognize the value in products and services that accommodate all people in society.” A study

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in 2015 found that 26 million adults with accessibility needs spend \$17.3 billion annually on travel and there are 1.5 million people with disabilities in New York State alone.

According to the New York State Council of Trout Unlimited, “Today’s demographic trends show that more people than ever are interested in conservation and the outdoors. However too many barriers still exist that limit participation and opportunities for everyone.” Additionally, the Council notes that “Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC), women, and the LGBTQIA community remain grossly underrepresented in all levels of outdoor activities...” A February 2023 press release from Governor Hochul stated that “...Black travelers represent more than 13 percent of the domestic leisure travel market, spending over \$109 billion annually.”

It is critical that On the Canals providers ensure people with disabilities are welcomed and invited, creating opportunities for families and friends of all abilities to recreate together. Likewise, providing recreational opportunities for marginalized and under-represented communities is important. Focusing in both these areas not only brings new audiences to the Canal system but allows more people to reap the benefits of recreation, regardless of their ability or demographic.

Environmental Stewardship

As we continue to face challenges related to environmental health and sustainability, environmental stewardship is critical. The Environmental Protection Agency defines environmental stewardship as “the responsibility for environmental quality shared by all those whose actions affect the environment.” The benefits of environmental stewardship efforts include conserving natural resources, protecting biodiversity, improving human well-being, and enhancing ecosystem and community resilience.

The On the Canals program aims to provide opportunities for education about the environmental perils faced and the actions that can be taken to help mitigate threats to the environment. Examples of environmental stewardship actions include:

- Reducing individual and commercial environmental footprints,
- Invasive species removal,
- Hosting community clean up events,
- Installing rain gardens to manage stormwater, and
- Landscaping with native plants.

The On the Canals program also strives to provide education on, and awareness of, the importance of environmental justice which, is based on the principle that everyone has a right to a clean and healthy environment. The On the Canals program seeks to make underrepresented groups feel welcome in environmental stewardship spaces while also providing education on actions that can be taken to ensure environmental justice for all those in Canal and surrounding communities, including those facing socioeconomic inequalities.

On the Canals Adventures - Examples

Sample adventures are included in the opening paragraph of Section II. Additional examples of adventures that would support the On the Canals goals and program transition described previously

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are included below for guidance purposes. Respondents are encouraged to carefully review the program goals and focus areas to suggest adventures that best support them.

- Greater accessibility for people of all abilities (enabling families and friend groups the opportunity to recreate together):
 - Outdoor painting sessions offering both standard and adaptive equipment and supplies including easy-grip brushes and wheelchair accessible easels
 - Birding opportunities with standard binoculars and adaptive equipment including wheelchair-mounted scopes, digiscoping adaptors, binocular mounts, binocular harnesses, and monoculars
 - Kayaking with standard and adaptive equipment available
 - Cycling with standard and adaptive equipment available
- Participation by marginalized and under-represented communities:
 - Recreational tours discussing Haudenosaunee history, technology and culture; the Underground Railroad and stories of freedom-seekers; and/or the stories of immigrants in Canal communities
- Responsible conservation and environmental stewardship:
 - Ecotours
 - Invasive species educational tours
 - Canal ecosystem tours (including embankment management)
 - Artist-led activities that engage with the environment or ecosystems
 - Learning to landscape with native plants and install rain gardens

Adventures typically last 1-3 hours and are offered per the provider's capability (i.e. once or twice per week for 4-6 weeks). Guided adventures have proven to be the most popular. Providers conducting adventures related to Canal history will be required to submit a script of the adventure prior to being selected. NYSCC reserves the right to require the provider correct any portion of the script that is not accurate and/or excludes non-traditional narratives, as necessary.

For the purposes of this RFQ, events and festivals are not considered in scope.

III. Scope

This RFQ invites respondents to submit information demonstrating their qualifications to successfully develop and operate recreational opportunities at a location on, or adjacent to, the Canal System and/or the Empire State Trail. Examples of recreational opportunities are included in Section II and respondents are encouraged to suggest other adventures that would be appealing to the public and meet the intended goals of the Program as outlined in Section II above.

NYSCC will consider subsidizing some or all components of the proposed adventures (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.

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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.

Consideration will be given to proposals that directly support the program goals and focus areas as outlined in Section II – Background, and additionally, those proposals that demonstrate a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) including, but not limited to, multi-lingual staff and outreach materials, collaboration with community-based organizations that serve a DEI mission, and adventures that reflect multi-cultural values and accommodation for all 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 adventures, NYSCC reserves the right to procure a subset of them. If the respondent(s) proposes adventures at a specific site or region, NYSCC reserves the right to request respondent(s) to relocate the adventures 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 7, 2023
Deadline to submit questions:	December 29, 2023
RFQ Submittal Due Date:	January 12, 2024

Eligibility

Responses are welcome from individuals and any organization type including, but not limited to, for-profit, not-for-profit, and municipalities, located on, or providing services in, the New York State Canal Corridor.

Responses clearly showing ways in which the proposed adventure meets program goals and scope will be considered.

Due to budget constraints, not all responses may be selected for 2024 programming.

Participation as a provider in past years does not guarantee selection for 2024 programming, and reimbursement at a similar total amount is not guaranteed in the event the provider is selected for 2024 programming.

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

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Submission Requirements

Provider 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
- Experience with providing recreational opportunities which are available to people of all abilities

B. Proposed Adventure

- The overall description/narrative describing the proposed adventure. This may include, but is not limited to:
 - Details of the adventure including length of time, distance (if applicable), appropriate ages
 - Location(s) in which the adventure can be offered
 - Information on any partner that would be providing the service with the respondent
 - Specific actions to be taken to ensure people of all abilities are welcomed
 - Specific accommodations that can be made for people with disabilities
- On the Canals Program goals or focus areas that the submission supports
- Description of the reservation system or method to be used by the public to reserve the adventure, including any accommodations needed for people with disabilities
- Assistance needed in order to make the adventure available to people with disabilities

C. Expected Costs

- For each location and adventure proposed, provide a high-level cost overview including the following:
 - A breakdown of start-up costs, if any, including equipment needed to offer the proposed adventure
 - Cost to offer the adventure for free to the public

Submission Guidelines

- Respondent package (items listed above in “Submission Requirements”) should be submitted by 4pm EST on January 12, 2024. 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 the response, respondents MUST include the following on the email subject line: **<Company Name> Q23-7512NF On the Canals Recreational Adventures** and use the following format for your attachments: **<Company name> Q23-7512NF On the Canals Recreational Adventures Response Form**

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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, Category Manager – Services, Major Projects
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.

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.

To date, On the Canals has been offered free of charge to the public, subsidized by NYPA/Canals. (i.e. Members of the public participate in the “free excursion” and NYPA/Canals compensates the provider for this service.) Future programming may be fully subsidized or will be setup as a cost share, with the participants paying a partial fee for the excursion. In some cases, reimbursement has been made to providers for the purchase of equipment to be used during these excursions, with the intent for the provider to then use that equipment for future business growth. If applicable, reimbursement for equipment costs will be covered in the executed contract between NYPA and the provider, in addition to the operating cost to conduct the excursions. **A response to this RFQ alone is no guarantee that a particular response will be accepted, or equipment cost incurred in anticipation of selection will be reimbursed.**