

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

On the Canals 2026 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, in a New York State Canal System location, potentially beginning in June 2026, 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 people with and without disabilities, for an agreed-upon period, during the Summer (2026), Fall (2026) and Winter (2026-27) seasons.

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 entering its seventh 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, which included boat tours, cycling, kayaking, water safety sessions, painting, wildlife hikes, birding, stand-up paddleboarding, Canal infrastructure tours, and snowshoeing/snowsliding. NYSCC

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

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 or transportation 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 2026 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 2026 with particular focus on supporting the principles and strategies identified in the New York State Canal Recreation way Plan 2050 which can be found at <https://www.canals.ny.gov/canal-recreationway-plan-2050> . Respondents are strongly urged to review the plan in detail prior to responding to this RFQ. Applicable principles include:

- Convene both local residents and visitors (beginning on page 40)
- Commemorate history and culture in all its forms (beginning on page 50)
- Champion quality of life and inclusivity for all users (beginning on page 62)

NYS Canal Corporation strives to make the Canal system a global destination for people with disabilities and their families/friends. Responses supporting this and the principles/strategies in the 2050 plan will be prioritized.

On the Canals Adventures - Examples

Sample adventures are included in the opening paragraph of Section II of this RFQ. Additional examples are provided below. This list is by no means exhaustive and respondents are welcome to suggest alternate ideas. Respondents are encouraged to carefully review the 2050 Plan and suggest adventures that best support it.

- 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, including self-serve stations
- Cycling with standard and adaptive equipment available, including self-serve stations
- Adaptive and standard fishing
- Excursions for marginalized and under-represented communities

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

- 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
- Ecotours
- Invasive species educational tours
- Canal ecosystem tours (including embankment management)
- Artist-led activities that engage with the environment or ecosystems of the Canal
- Learning to landscape with native plants and install rain gardens
- Guided photography sessions on the trail or at a lock
- Pollinator garden talks/strolls
- “How to” sessions
- Weaving/dying with plants
- Plant ID strolls/talks
- Evening/moonlight insect strolls/talks
- Fall foliage walks
- Run Clubs/Training
- Walking Groups
- Mindfulness Walks
- Tai Chi
- Circuit Training – other fitness classes
- Guided Meditation Class
- New parents meetup/walks/information-sharing
- Teen-specific programming

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 and view a video created by the Erie Canal Museum. NYSCC reserves the right to require the provider to 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 eligible.

Accessibility Education Program

In July 2024, NYPA/Canals introduced the On the Canals Accessibility Education Program. The program is available to all On the Canals providers and is intended to help drive the establishment of inclusive recreational opportunities across the entire Canal System.

The program provides a 1-year mentored consulting arrangement with Rochester Accessible Adventures, at no cost to the provider (with the exception of staff time). Components of the program include the following:

- Establish a Core Inclusion Team (up to 3 people per business) to complete inclusion training and lead the inclusion process within the organization

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

- Complete physical assessments of each business's office and program facility sites to provide recommendations for accessibility enhancements which can guide short- and long-term strategic planning, and to provide descriptive and meaningful information to potential guests so that they can determine if the sites are accessible to them.
- Develop and implement the Recommendations Report and Strategic Inclusion Action Plan which guides operational and programmatic inclusion changes
- Support each business's development of inclusion practices that ensure sustainability across staff changes, time, and programs by empowering the organization to conduct assessments and reviews of their inclusion work towards stated benchmarks, including increased participation by people with intellectual, developmental & physical disabilities.
- Establish pathways for families who have a member with a disability and agencies that serve them to connect with the newly inclusive programming/sites at the business. Includes Inclusion Specialist work to provide community education, conduct outreach at agency fairs, and social media, website, and public media promotion of the business' programs and inclusive practices.
- Empower each business to conduct outreach and engagement of individuals living with a disability in a manner that creates a pathway to inclusive participation.
- Potentially receive reimbursement for a starter set of equipment, where applicable and available, including training on its use. In the event the Provider ceases to utilize equipment purchased by NYSCC, the Provider is required to promptly return the equipment to NYSCC or its designee.

Respondents are asked to indicate interest in being considered for participation in the On the Canals Accessibility Program on page one of the RFQ Response Form.

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 Canalway Trails. 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 and in the NYS Canal Recreationway Plan 2050.

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. All On the Canals providers must use an online registration platform of their choice. Providers offering only phone registrations will not be selected.

In certain circumstances, and only as approved by NYSCC, reimbursement for certain equipment purchases for excursions may be considered. If NYSCC provides reimbursement for any equipment (with receipts as proof of purchase), such equipment shall be considered the property of NYSCC. In the event that the Provider ceases to utilize equipment purchased by NYSCC, the

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Provider is hereby required to promptly return the equipment to NYSCC or its designated representative, which shall be provided in writing to the Provider. The Provider shall ensure that the equipment is returned in good working condition, subject to reasonable wear and tear.

Alcohol is prohibited on all On the Canals adventures.

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.

Consideration will be given to proposals that directly support the program goals and principles/strategies contained in the NYS Canal Recreationway Plan 2050.

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:	November 19, 2025
Deadline to submit questions:	December 15, 2025
RFQ Submittal Due Date:	January 12, 2026

Eligibility

Responses are welcome from 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 2026 programming.

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Participation as a provider in past years does not guarantee selection for 2026 programming, and reimbursement at a similar total amount is not guaranteed in the event the provider is selected for 2026 programming.

Insurance will be required for each proposed adventure and will be requested prior to commencement of any adventure as determined by NYSCC. The specific insurance requirement is dependent on the specific activity to be undertaken during the proposed adventure, however, the minimum insurance requirement is \$1 million, per occurrence, general liability. Additionally, the following is required:

- Acord 25 naming State of New York, NYPA, and NYS Canal Corporation as certificate holder
- Copy of following endorsements naming State of New York, NYPA, and NYS Canal Corporation:
 - Additional insured: Form CG 20 26 04 13
 - Waiver of subrogation: Form CG 24 04 05 09
 - Primary and noncontributory
- Workers comp certificate – evidenced on form C105.2 or form CE-200: Certificate of Attestation of Exemption, if not required to carry NYS specific workers' compensation insurance.

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/experience can be offered
 - Specific actions to be taken to ensure people of all abilities are welcomed
- 2050 Plan principle(s) supported by the proposed On the Canals adventure(s)
- 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

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

C. Expected Costs and Reporting

- For each location and adventure proposed, provide a itemized costs (as much as possible) to offer the adventures for free to the public.
- Reporting capabilities in terms of # of participants, participant zip code, participant surveys, and end-of-season debrief/recap.

Submission Guidelines

- Respondent package (items listed above in “Submission Requirements”) should be submitted by 4pm EST on January 12, 2026. 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> Q25-7725EA On the Canals Recreational Adventures* and use the following format for your attachments: *<Company name> Q25-7725EA On the Canals Recreational Adventures 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.

Lady Elizabeth Aguilera – Strategic Buyer I (Services)

Office: 914-629-3308

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

REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

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 NYSCC. (i.e. Members of the public participate in the “free excursion” and NYSCC 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 NYSCC 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.