

Request for Proposals: Conservation Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3)

Overview and Purpose

Since its founding in 1947, the Richard King Mellon Foundation has invested approximately \$1 billion to conserve and restore critical habitats in Pennsylvania and nationally, and to promote sustainable economic development and create livable communities in and around those critical habitats. In the process, the Foundation has protected more than 4 million acres of precious lands in all 50 states, with a particular focus on increasing public access. Now, in an effort to diversify the users of public lands, the Richard King Mellon Foundation is reissuing a request for proposal (RFP) that is aimed at expanding the conservation movement. This RFP is aligned with the Activation Investment Area of the Foundation's Conservation funding program in the Foundation's new 2021-30 Strategic Plan. In 2021, a similar RFP was released by the Foundation and the response was so robust that we decided to reissue it. Applicants responding to the RFP should apply through the Foundation's standard application process noting the program category listed above.

The Challenge and the Opportunity:

Hunters, anglers, and outdoor enthusiasts serve as the backbone of the conservation movement. Their commitment and spending support a wide variety of environmental programs, leading to the protection of critical habitats and the restoration of damaged ecosystems. For more than 30 years, however, outdoor activities often have been siloed into singular categories such as hunter, angler, hiker, birdwatcher, or cyclist. These siloes can disconnect individuals and entire communities from forming holistic outdoor identities that foster more inclusive and durable outdoor experiences over a broad range of activities. Moreover, recent and projected demographic changes within the American population raise necessary questions about the relevance of these singular pursuits to underrepresented communities, whose members may struggle to see themselves and their values represented in the management and use of the nation's public-trust resources. Finally, past efforts to recruit, retain and reactivate outdoor enthusiasts often have focused on youth recruitment, certainly a laudable outcome, but have failed to concentrate on adults (18 and older) who may provide a much higher return on investment in terms of generating an interest in and a love for the outdoors.

If conservation and environmental programs are to thrive in the future, there needs to be a proportional representation of America's ethnic, racial, and gender demographics in outdoor activities, pursuits, industries, and support networks. This requires the establishment of accessible and inclusive learning opportunities for new and existing outdoor enthusiasts to expand their suite of outdoor skills and interests. As part of its new Strategic Plan, the Foundation will support data-driven efforts to increase the number and diversity of outdoor enthusiasts, so that a broader group of people can enjoy nature and become the conservation leaders of tomorrow.

Guidelines:

Priority consideration will be given to proposals that target one or more of the following groups:

- Adult (18 and older) participants.
- Underrepresented demographics
- Those who already participate in at least one outdoor recreation activity but are open to exploring other activities. This includes, but is not limited to, backpacking, birdwatching, boating, camping, fishing, hiking, hunting, mountain biking, shooting sports, trapping, and watersports.
- Those who hold existing nature-related values. These include, but are not limited to, sustainable food, conservation-minded behaviors, desire for ties to nature, gardening, healthy lifestyle, and adventure-seeking. The goal is to build upon these interests to increase participation in hunting, angling, and other types of outdoor activities.

The primary objective of a proposed recruitment, retention or reactivation project under this RFP should be to increase the number and diversity of participants in outdoor activities, which would not have occurred in the absence of the project.

Metrics that may be used to reflect these objectives include:

- **Usage or Participation.** An increase in sales of licenses, tags, passes and other indicators of participation in outdoor activities. **Changes in Behavior or Attitudes.** Where individual usage metrics are not available as indicators, pre- and post-event surveys or questionnaires should be used to document participant changes in behavior at appropriate time intervals. For example, a project that aims to increase participation in hunting and fishing should administer surveys to participants following peak hunting and fishing seasons. For other outdoor activities such as hiking, boating, shooting sports or camping, surveys or questionnaires designed to document outcomes should be delivered no less than six months following the completion of the effort.

Critical Design Considerations for Programs:

- The effort has been designed to address known barriers restricting its target audience. These barriers should have been identified via standard social science or marketing audience-assessment techniques. These include, but are not limited to, structured focus groups, surveys, interviews (phone and/or in-person) or published research.
- Participants are selected based on a pre-program assessment process that allows program administrators to identify participants with the greatest alignment with the target audiences.
- The effort integrates next-steps options for participants to increase the likelihood that behavioral outcomes will persist in participants.
- The effort uses a Before-After-Control-Impact (BACI) approach or modified BACI design to evaluate its output/implementation effectiveness as well as ultimate outcome achievement.
- The effort has established partnerships with stakeholder groups and/or agencies that can increase the likelihood of long-term sustainability.
- The effort has secured matching funds (financial or in-kind) and has established working partnerships with state fish and wildlife management agencies, outdoor industry and/or sportsperson or conservation organizations.
- Where possible, the programs should indicate a connection to the Foundation's past investments in habitat conservation.

Proposals should focus on at least one of the following categories, though priority will be given to those that include more than one category:

- Engaging underrepresented demographics in outdoor lifestyles.
- Establishing pathways to outdoor activities for a diverse audience of people whose current activities and values are likely to lend themselves to increasing their outdoor pursuits.
- Recruiting adult audiences.
- Fulfill the Foundation's basic eligibility criteria, described on the [Apply page](#) of our website.

Proposal Submission Requirements:

Proposals should be submitted directly through our [online application](#) by noon on September 1, 2022. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered at this time. The Foundation does not expect that more than \$250,000 will be available per proposal. However, if a proposal is truly exceptional and reflects a broad partnership, the Foundation may consider providing more than \$250,000.

After review by staff, proposals that are viewed as meeting the criteria listed above may be considered by the Foundation's Board of Trustees in December 2022. If funded, projects must be implemented within 12 to 15 months. The Foundation reserves the right to request more information or to work with applicants to improve their proposals for future consideration.

Questions

If you have any questions, please visit the FAQs on our [website](#) or contact us at rkmf@rkmf.org.