



Request for Qualifications:
Summative Evaluation of
Parks, Trails & Green
Design (PTGD) Focus Area

September 8, 2022



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OVERVIEW

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation seeks to contract a firm or team of evaluators to conduct a summative evaluation of the Foundation's Parks, Trails, and Green Design (PTGD) focus area. The objectives of the evaluation are 1) to document the grantmaking and non-grantmaking processes to date and analyze the associated outcomes of those efforts; and 2) to develop an evaluation plan to continue monitoring the progress of PTGD initiatives, including identifying metrics to measure outcomes. The Foundation intends to use the evaluation to not only inform and strengthen PTGD work internally but also to create lasting, sustainable impact by informing its partners and the field at large.

BACKGROUND

The Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation (RCWJRF) is a grantmaking organization dedicated to sustained investment in the quality of life of the people of Southeast Michigan and Western New York. The two geographic areas reflect Ralph C. Wilson, Jr.'s devotion to his hometown of Detroit and greater Buffalo, home of his Buffalo Bills franchise. Prior to his passing in 2014, Mr. Wilson provided that a significant share of his estate be used to continue a life-long generosity of spirit by funding the Foundation which bears his name. The foundation's primary grantmaking focus areas are Active Lifestyles, Entrepreneurship & Economic Development, Preparing for Success, Caregivers, and Nonprofit Support and Innovation. Parks, Trails, and Green Design (PTGD) is a sub-focus of the Active Lifestyles grantmaking area. The foundation has a grantmaking capacity of \$1.2 billion over a 20-year period, which expires January 8, 2035. For more information visit www.rcwjrf.org.

RCWJRF believes that through strategic investment, collaboration, and governance, Southeast Michigan and Western New York will become world-class models of green, accessible, and connected public parks and trails. By strengthening regional trail connectivity, activating and increasing access to public parks and trails, and supporting targeted and collaborative green infrastructure and design, RCWJRF seeks to contribute to the economic development, environmental resiliency, and recreational opportunities that support improved quality of life.

Grantmaking for PTGD work began in 2016 and was soon followed by a significant public announcement and celebration on the 100th anniversary of Mr. Wilson's birth on October 17, 2018. On that day, RCWJRF made a public commitment of \$200 million to support Parks & Trails in its two regions. The commitment included an allocation of \$50 million for the design, development and construction of a "Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Centennial Park" in both Buffalo and Detroit. In addition, \$50 million in each region was committed to help make connections and eliminate gaps in the burgeoning regional trail systems. Within the Foundation's \$200 million



commitment – a total of \$40 million (or 20%) – is earmarked for future maintenance and sustainability of these assets. To date, there have been \$270 million committed dollars from the Foundation that have leveraged an additional \$750 million for the communities of investment.

Much of the PTGD work to date has been focused on organizing and strengthening a complex coalition of cross-sector stakeholders and funders in order to execute community-led capital projects in shared public spaces. Most of the capital projects (e.g.: regional trails, Centennial Parks) are in progress and have not been constructed/completed. As such, this evaluation will analyze the Foundation’s process and the subsequent impacts of efforts to date, while also beginning to frame the post-construction usage and impacts that can be more fully evaluated once the capital projects are more realized. Please see the Scope of Services below for more details.

Efforts in the PTGD focus area have included:

- ***Programs and Projects*** - supporting community engagement activities and strategy development; supporting activities and programs that activate public spaces; supporting initiatives that eliminate gaps in regional trail connectivity; piloting green infrastructure and design projects; developing signature parks in Buffalo and Detroit as part of the Foundation’s Centennial Commitment
- ***Capacity Building*** - developing and increasing the capacity of partner organizations that support PTGD-related activities; supporting initiatives that ensure the long-term sustainability and maintenance of parks and regional trails; promoting innovative financing structures to change the “giving landscape” as related to PTGD initiatives
- ***Partnerships*** - building networks of public and private sector partners, including local, regional, state, and federal governments; building and strengthening funding networks through targeted investments; developing innovative financing and funding partnerships; build and influence support for partners and co-funding opportunities; developing and growing relationships between stakeholders within and across Southeast Michigan and Western New York
- ***Learning*** - supporting research and evaluation as related to PTGD initiatives, including feasibility studies, needs assessments, policy evaluation, program evaluation, and innovative funding and governance models

Additional descriptions of the PTGD work to date will be included in our [RFQ webinar](#). See below for details.



SCOPE OF SERVICES

The key activities of this work will include: 1) a process evaluation of the PTGD work, including a description and analysis of the intended and unintended outcomes to date; and 2) collaboration with Foundation staff to develop an evaluation plan that will determine what outcomes best capture the complex nature of PTGD initiatives and design a framework to monitor and measure these outcomes going forward.

1.) Process & Initial Outcomes Evaluation. The process and exploratory outcomes evaluation seeks to answer the overarching question, *How has the approach of the PTGD work impacted the advancement of parks, trails, and green design in Western New York and Southeast Michigan?* In other words, how has the Foundation's work impacted the programs, projects, organizational capacity, and partnerships related to PTGD initiatives? Have there been any unintended consequences, positive or negative?

While the exact evaluation methods used will be determined upon selection and co-development with the Foundation staff, the evaluation should include the following:

- **Use of mixed methods:** Both qualitative and quantitative measures are of interest with more of a focus on qualitative data collection and analysis. These methods should be used to answer the draft evaluation questions in Appendix A.
- **Description of Process:** Methods should be designed to capture the complexity of the PTGD work in both regions with a focus on the draft evaluation questions in Appendix A.
- **Description of Process Outcomes:** Describe the intended and unintended outcomes of the work to date. These outcomes will likely be slightly different from those in the theory of investment (see Appendix B). Some of the outcomes in the theory of investment are dependent on the completion of capital projects. Much of that capital work is still in process (e.g., parks are being built, trail grants made but not built yet). The outcome evaluation will focus on tying the key strategies used to date to intended and unintended outcomes.

2.) Evaluation Framework. The Foundation intends to measure PTGD outcomes beyond the initial evaluation described above. Based on the theory of investment and what is learned from the initial evaluation, the selected team will collaborate with Foundation staff and partners to craft evaluation questions, identify leading indicators, design a measurement plan for those indicators, and document an ongoing process for internal and external learning with our partners. This evaluation plan will be a blueprint to capture that information going forward.



Deliverables. At a minimum, the key deliverables will include 1) a process and outcomes evaluation report on efforts to date and 2) an evaluation plan for moving forward. The Foundation is interested in innovative ways to engage our key stakeholders around the planning for and findings of this work. Key audiences for this work are:

- Broader industry strategy (congressional policymakers, federal agency officials, industry associations, though leadership, press & media)
- Partners in the work, including other funders in the work
- Foundation staff and board members

Timeline. The evaluation and evaluation framework development are expected to be completed in 18 months with the first three months designated as a time to refine a clear methodology for the work, clarify evaluation questions, develop tools for implementation, etc. This will be followed by a year of data collection and analysis. The final three months will be used to develop the key deliverables with iterative feedback from the Foundation's staff and partners.

QUALIFICATIONS

We seek an evaluation team with:

- Alignment with the Foundation's values of innovation, outcomes, and teamwork.
- Experience working closely with grantmakers, their partners, and communities.
- Experience conducting similar evaluations in the subject matter (i.e., parks, trails, and green design, and economic impacts of these spaces) across geographically diverse and dispersed regions, with multiple partners.
- Ability to project-manage, including planning, regular communication with the Foundation and adhering to deliverables and timelines.
- Ability to work with a communications team to translate products for use by multiple audiences.
- Skill in using evaluation for learning/facilitating learning within foundations and/or communities.
- Skill in navigating among philanthropies, systems, and communities.
- Comfort with uncertainty, ambiguity, and problem-solving – and experience navigating these conditions to find ways to move the work forward.
- Experience with leveraging results to impact policy.



SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

We envision this evaluation will be done by a large, multifaceted team over an 18-month period. If you are interested in leading this evaluation, [please RSVP to attend an informational webinar on Thursday, September 29 at 11:30 AM EST](#) and respond with the following materials by Friday, October 14 at 5:00 PM. Please respond with

1. Qualifications for relevant staff in the form of bios and resumes.
2. Responses to the following. Limit your responses to no more than five (5) pages.
 - a. Briefly describe how you would approach the process and initial outcomes evaluation for PTGD, including an evaluation framework that would guide this evaluation (part 1).
 - b. Briefly describe how you would approach the evaluation plan development (part 2).
 - c. We anticipate a budget of at least \$500,000 over the 18-month period. Once an evaluator is selected, the budget may increase to up to \$1 million to account for the agreed-upon scope and contract terms. Please submit a high-level budget within this range. Include a brief narrative that addresses how, at a high level, the budget can address the two phases of the work requested, including the approximate amount of effort for key staff identified in item 1.
 - d. Describe at least one similar or relevant project you have completed. If available, please provide an example of this work. How would you apply this experience to this evaluation work?

Email responses and materials to Liz Gordillo at liz.gordillo@rcwjrf.org by Friday, October 14 at 5:00 PM EST.

Questions about the RFQ may also be directed to Liz Gordillo at the same email or to the RCWJRF team during the webinar. Any questions submitted outside of the scheduled webinar may be shared anonymously, including responses, with all applicants.



REVIEW PROCESS & TIMELINE

Date	Activity
9/29/2022	Informational webinar at 11:30 AM EST – 1:00 PM EST. RSVP Link
10/5/2022	All questions must be submitted by this date at 5PM EST. Any questions submitted after this deadline may not be addressed.
10/6/2022	Responses to questions emailed to webinar participants.
10/14/2022	RFQ responses due at 5:00 PM EST (receipt will be confirmed within 24 business hours of submission)
Week of 10/21	Notice to top three candidates
11/10-11/2022	Virtual interviews of top three candidates – 2 hours with potential for follow-up calls
11/21/2022	Top candidate selected & all candidates notified
Early December 2022	In person kick-off meeting in Detroit
First quarter 2023	Finalized scope of work due to Foundation
April 2023	Begin evaluation
Third quarter 2024	Final deliverable(s) due



Appendix A – Evaluation Questions

Evaluation Questions for Part 1

1. What has been the impact of the \$200 million Centennial Commitment? How did the significant public announcement of the Centennial Commitment raise awareness of the Foundation’s initiatives and priorities within each region? In what ways did the Centennial Commitment shape the overall PTGD focus area?
2. How did the process to establish a funding framework and structured partner agreements for the Parks & Trails Initiative in Southeast Michigan and Western New York lead to collaborative networks in both regions and within the States?
3. How has sustainability and maintenance funding for parks and trails in both regions been implemented to date and what has the impact on the broader industry been so far because of this strategy?
4. How was community engagement implemented for the two signature parks, and how has that impacted the outcomes of the parks to date (e.g., design of the park and adoption of the park)? How does this differ based on place (Buffalo and Detroit)? How is this impacting the planning for the park as implementation begins?
5. How was green infrastructure layered on the park and trail investments and how is this impacting environmental outcomes (e.g., environmental policy, other investments in green infrastructure) for those projects as they materialize?
6. How are leveraged partnerships and dollars in the parks and trails ecosystem elevating the scope of parks and trails projects and catalyzing new collaborations/partnerships within the regions?
7. How is Foundation-supported research and evaluation informing activities related to PTGD in Western New York and Southeast Michigan?

