



# Request for Proposals (RFP) for An Experiential Master Plan for Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary

## Funding Opportunity Overview

[National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#), in cooperation with the [Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary \(WSCNMS\)](#) is soliciting bids for creation of an Experiential Master Plan for Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary.

### Request for Proposals

Contract Ceiling amount: \$100,000

The objective of the contract is to create an Experiential Master Plan for WSCNMS and partner communities. This plan is a tool for helping us and our partners create seamless visitor experiences between digital and physical spaces.

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### Implementation Period

January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026

The contract may be completed earlier

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### Application Package Due

Friday, October 10, 2025

11:59 PM Eastern Standard Time

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## BACKGROUND

The [National Marine Sanctuary Foundation](#) was founded in 2000 by America's most influential ocean conservation leaders and works with communities and NOAA to conserve and expand these special places for a healthy ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes. Sanctuaries and monuments are our essential network of protected waters, owned by every American and championed by us. Connected by currents, they sustain miraculous species, coastal communities, and our shared heritage. The Foundation is a leading voice for U.S.-protected waters, and our work extends from the ocean floor to the classroom to Capitol Hill. The Foundation supports a growing portfolio of Community Stewardship, Outreach, and Education programs aimed at providing students, educators, and lifelong learners with opportunities to explore and discover connections to the natural world, no matter where they live.



[Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary](#) provides stewardship for our nation's maritime heritage in Lake Michigan, including 40 nationally significant historic shipwrecks. Co-managed by NOAA and the state of Wisconsin, the sanctuary expands on the state's 30-year management of these historic sites, bringing new opportunities for research, resource protection, and education. In partnership with local communities, the sanctuary provides a national stage for promoting recreation and heritage tourism.

The sanctuary is part of NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary System, a network of underwater parks that protect iconic natural and cultural treasures across our nation.

## OVERVIEW OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

### Goal

The goal of this project is to create an Experiential Master Plan to provide the sanctuary and its partners with tangible, actionable, and visually exciting methods for creating visitor experiences at key locations along the sanctuary's coastline from Two Rivers, Wisconsin to Port Washington, Wisconsin.

More broadly, the plan should thoughtfully tie the individual visitor experience locations into one regional experience that can be cross-promoted and marketed by each individual location. It should use a "four communities, one destination" approach.

### Important Information

The plan should be based on findings and opportunities described in the sanctuary's [2023 Facility Strategy report](#), but also recognize new opportunities that may have arisen since.

Over 60 individuals from various organizations informed the facility strategy. Participants represented the four principal communities in the sanctuary (Two Rivers, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, and Port Washington), as well as the state of Wisconsin (Madison, Wisconsin History Center). Several overarching themes stood out, which should inform the final Experiential Master Plan:

- NOAA and the sanctuary should act as a common thread that connects all the associated communities and entities within the sanctuary region. Use a "four communities, one destination" approach.
- Sanctuary visitor experiences should help drive tourism and recreation and should produce regional/collective benefits.
- From an interpretive perspective, Lake Michigan ecological topics should be presented hand-in-hand with the cultural history and significance of the sanctuary.
- Sanctuary visitor experiences should highlight the importance of Lake Michigan and inspire action.
- Interpretation must be representative of a wide range of perspectives and include Indigenous Peoples.
- Thousands of artifacts from sanctuary shipwrecks are coming back into the public domain. NOAA should play an important role in conservation and public access to these powerful objects.
- Technology should be utilized to connect visitors and residents with the shipwrecks and Lake Michigan.



- At some locations, educational programming will need to be considered as well (i.e., a space could serve as both a great visitor experience *and* a venue for educational programming by the sanctuary and its partners).

Several key objectives will support the project's goal, and should be considered by RFP respondents:

- Use the sanctuary's [2023 Facility Strategy report](#) as a foundation for the Experiential Master Plan.
- Create consensus among the sanctuary and its partners regarding goals for the Experiential Master Plan.
- Recognize that the Experiential Master Plan should include exhibits and/or other experiences at each of the four principal communities in the sanctuary, and possibly the state capital (see below).
- Utilize approaches that leverage existing infrastructure and unique cultural characteristics in each community.
- Utilize approaches that limit long-term operations and maintenance costs by NOAA, the sanctuary, or the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.
- Conduct an initial meeting with sanctuary staff to outline the current vision.
- Conduct a site visit to include partner meetings with key stakeholders in each community.
- Conduct regular virtual follow up meetings throughout the project.
- The Experiential Master Plan should be developed in a way that enables a phased implementation based on unpredictable funding availability.
- The plan should be crafted such that it supports fundraising efforts by Friends of Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary, the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, and other sanctuary partners.

## TIMELINE

The timeline of project activities should be clearly addressed in the applicant's proposal. Project proposals that do not address whether work can be completed within the noted timeline will not be rated as highly in the review process. The contract's period of performance is January 1, 2026, to December 31, 2026.

## ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must have a proven track record of doing similar projects in scope and scale, preferably within Wisconsin or the Great Lakes region, and must have the technical ability to complete the project within the provided budget.

By submitting an offer in response to this RFP, the offeror certifies that it and its principal officers are not debarred, suspended, or otherwise considered ineligible for an award by the U.S. Government. The Foundation will not award a contract to any firm that is debarred, suspended, or considered to be ineligible by the U.S. Government.

## HOW TO APPLY

Application packages should be submitted by 10:00 AM Eastern Standard Time on Friday, October 10, 2025. Please submit your application package to the Foundation through C-STAAR – the Foundation's Collaborative System for Tracking Activities, Awards, and Reporting – using the following link: <https://marinesanctuary.smartsimple.com/>.



**Step 1:** You will need to register your organization to begin your application. You can find registration steps and instructions [here](#).

**Step 2:** Once you have set up your Organization Profile, navigate to the Applicant Home page. Scroll down and click “View Active Contract RFPs” to find the RFP titled “An Experiential Master Plan for Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary” opportunity. Click “Apply to RFP” to see the application page. **Be sure to click the blue “Start Application” button at the bottom of the page before beginning your application.**

**Step 3:** Complete the application and submit by clicking the green “Submit” button at the bottom of the page. Please direct all questions to [support@marinesanctuary.org](mailto:support@marinesanctuary.org) with the email subject line: “RFP QUESTION for An Experiential Master Plan for Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary : [Your Organization Name].”

We will be reviewing applications in October, and we will be reaching out for next steps by early November.

## SCOPE OF WORK

The successful candidate will develop an Experiential Master Plan that encompasses the key partner communities and enhances tourism by leveraging the unique cultural and physical elements of “Wisconsin’s Shipwreck Coast.” The plan should contain:

- A section on the overall strategy and purpose of the Experiential Master Plan.
- A clear articulation of how these sanctuary-driven efforts will have positive impacts on local/regional tourism and education.
- Clearly show that the Experiential Master Plan has been developed with an eye toward maximizing any investment by NOAA and/or the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation.
- Visually appealing elements (floor plans, perspective drawings, digital elements, etc.) that help easily convey ideas/concepts, create excitement, and support fundraising efforts.
- Separate sections for each location, but also an overarching message that these individual locations are purposely and thoughtfully connected to produce a regional benefit.
- Use maps to reinforce the geography, scale, and “interconnectedness” of this unique and thoughtful visitor experience approach.
- Digital assets to support social media, other online communications, and fundraising.
- A “leave behind” document (both digital and printable) to be used in fundraising efforts, elected official engagement, public awareness campaigns, etc.

## Budget Requirements

Submitted proposal budgets cannot exceed \$100,000.

All submitted budgets must include the following:

- Travel costs for at a minimum of one in-person meeting at the partner locations (Two Rivers, Manitowoc, Sheboygan, and Port Washington). All other meetings can be done virtually;
- Personnel cost; and
- Other relevant costs. However, all line items need a justification.



### Past Performance & Technical Requirements

Please provide a sample of a past master experience plan, visitor experience plan, master exhibit plan, or equivalent plan. These can be uploaded as attachments.

Please provide 3–4 references with names, organizations, titles, phone numbers, and email addresses. This can be uploaded as an attachment.

Please provide the background and experience of the technical staff who will be working on this project.

### Desired Capabilities (not required)

- Previous work on similar heritage-based interpretation.
- Experience creating an Experiential Master Plan or a similar tool that creates seamless visitor experiences between digital and physical spaces.

## REVIEW PROCESS

### Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation Criteria	Sub-Questions	Score	Scoring for this criterion will be assessed on how well proposals:
<b>PAST PERFORMANCE</b>	Does the proposal include relevant samples of past work?	45	Does the proposal show experience working on master experience plans, visitor experience plans, master exhibit plans, or equivalent plans?  Does the past experience have relevance to this RFP? Considerations include work with multiple partners and communities, work on heritage-based interpretation, and work with both digital and physical spaces.
<b>TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PROJECT FEASIBILITY</b>	Does the proposal clearly outline a plan to address the scope of work?  Is the proposal feasible in the period of performance timeframe?  Is a descriptive timeline included?  Do the applicant and any project partners have the ability and expertise (or the potential) to conduct the scope and scale of the proposed work?	45	Demonstrate a thorough level of planning that will allow the applicant to begin the project promptly and complete the project within the period of the performance timeline. Considerations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are milestones identified in the project timeline that align with project goals and objectives?</li> <li>• Are roles clearly identified?</li> <li>• Do activities take place during the implementation period?</li> </ul>
<b>PROJECT COSTS</b>	Is the budget realistic?  Does the budget description sufficiently explain how each	10	Provide a detailed list of specific items, tools, materials, etc., and associated costs for each expense category. Considerations include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are explanations provided for how each</li> </ul>



	item in the budget table supports project activities?		item in the budget table supports project activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are budgeted items prioritized that directly support projects and/or workforce development and capacity-building opportunities (program staff salary, fringe, and indirect budget requests are relatively small fractions of the total budget)</li> </ul>
<b>Total Points</b>	100		

## APPLICATION LOGISTICS

### Timeline

Expected Timeline (broken down by month)	2025				2026											
	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Request for Proposals Submission Open</b> All proposals must be submitted by Friday, October 10, 2025																
<b>Technical review of proposals</b> Proposals will be reviewed and scored during October and November 2025.																
<b>Notification, Contracting</b> All applicants will be notified of proposal status in November. Proposals may be invited into a negotiation round.  Contracting will be performed in December.																
<b>Period of Performance</b> January 1, 2026 – December 31, 2026																

## TERMS & CONDITIONS

This is a Request for Proposals (RFP) only. Issuance of this RFP does not in any way obligate the Foundation to make an award or pay for costs incurred by potential offerors in the preparation and submission of an offer. In addition:

- (a) The Foundation may cancel RFP and not award;
- (b) The Foundation may reject any or all responses received;
- (c) Issuance of RFP does not constitute award commitment by The Foundation;
- (d) The Foundation reserves the right to disqualify any offer based on offeror failure to follow RFP instructions;
- (e) The Foundation will not compensate offerors for a response to RFP;
- (f) The Foundation reserves the right to issue an award based on an initial evaluation of offers without further discussion;
- (g) The Foundation may negotiate with short-listed offerors for their best and final offer;
- (h) The Foundation reserves the right to order additional quantities or units with the selected offer or;



- (i) The Foundation may reissue the solicitation or issue formal amendments revising the original RFP specifications and evaluation criteria before or after receipt of proposals;
- (j) The Foundation may modify the specifications without issuing a formal notice to all offerors when the revisions are immaterial to the scope of the RFP;
- (k) The Foundation may choose to award only part of the activities in the RFP or issue multiple awards based on multiple RFP activities; and
- (l) The Foundation reserves the right to waive minor proposal deficiencies that can be corrected prior to award determination to promote competition.