

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:
PROJECT MANAGEMENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
CONSULTING SERVICES**



Van Cortlandt Park Alliance (VCPA) is requesting proposals from qualified, experienced Consultants or Firms to provide community engagement and project management services for Phase 1 of the multi-phase project, *Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground in Van Cortlandt Park*. A Request for Proposals (RFP), which includes instructions for its completion, is attached.

Respondents to this RFP shall submit completed proposals in a sealed envelope, clearly marked with "Proposal for Community Engagement Services" and the name of the firm submitting the proposal. **Printed copies (3) and digital PDF must be received by VCPA no later than 4:00 p.m. EST on Friday, October 4, 2024.**

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance
80 Van Cortlandt Park South
Suite #E1
Bronx, NY 10463
Email: proposals@vancortlandt.org

Questions regarding this solicitation may be submitted in writing in the Google form linked [HERE](#) and will be answered by Executive Director, Stephanie Ehrlich, at the time of the walk-through. **To RSVP for the on-site walk-through on September 18 at 10:00AM, click [HERE](#).**

RFP Schedule*

- RFP Issued: September 6, 2024
- On-site walk-through: September 18, 2024 at 10:00 AM
- Proposal Deadline: October 4, 2024
- Proposals Reviewed: October 7-11, 2024
- Applicant Interviews: October 21-25, 2024
- Selection of Consultant/Firm: By October 28, 2024
- Contract Executed: November 30, 2024

**Exact dates are subject to change. All deadlines are by 4:00 p.m. EST of the stated date.*

Request for Proposals
PROJECT MANAGEMENT & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
CONSULTING SERVICES
Van Cortlandt Park Alliance

INTRODUCTION

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance (VCPA) is seeking proposals from Consultants/Firms to assist the organization with community engagement and project management services for Phase 1 of the project, *Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground in Van Cortlandt Park*.

The anticipated project period will last 12-18 months to provide adequate time for participation by project partners, staff, and board of VCPA, with input and review by key community stakeholders, including select staff at NYC Parks, Community Board members, etc.

The primary deliverable of this contract and process will be the comprehensive creation and implementation of a community engagement plan that includes stakeholder identification and analysis, engagement strategies, communication and documentation plans, evaluation metrics, and culturally sensitive approaches to ensure inclusive and meaningful participation in the *Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground* project. This plan will engage artists, designers, and landscape architects to collaboratively create and implement a community engagement process.

This RFP requests professional services of a Consultant/Firm to facilitate the community engagement planning and implementation process. VCPA is aware that there are a variety of perspectives, models, and approaches to community engagement; therefore, the successful Consultant/Firm should be able to discern which model or model(s) will best define, develop, and achieve the goals outlined in the project proposal.

Additionally, the Consultant/Firm will be responsible for managing a design competition that culminates in renderings for a reimagined cultural landscape. The Consultant/Firm will promote the contest and manage the selection process.

Based on the proposals received, the selection committee at VCPA will choose individual Consultants/Firms to be interviewed. As a result of those interviews, the top-rated Consultant /Firm will be selected by VCPA.

Proposals must be responsive to VCPA's request. VCPA shall determine the most responsive and responsible Consultant/Firm providing the best service at the most reasonable cost. Cost alone shall not be the determinative factor. VCPA reserves the right in its absolute discretion to make no award or contract.

The total available funding for this project is up to \$125,000.

BACKGROUND

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance is the sole nonprofit partner working with NYC Parks to manage the park. VCPA's mission is to preserve, support, and promote the recreation, ecology, cultural arts, and history of Van Cortlandt Park. VCPA was formed in 2019 by merging two preexisting nonprofits whose 35 years of combined history lay the foundation for excellence in educational programming, cultural events, advocacy, and restoration projects.

VCPA's Enslaved People Project (EPP), in coordination with local nonprofits, the park's community, and NYC Parks, has been working to share untold stories and the unvarnished history of Van Cortlandt Park, once a plantation, through cultural programs and events, ceremonies, classes, virtual walking tours, and new signage.

Van Cortlandt Park Alliance's vision, informed by the community, is the creation of a memorial in the park that would establish a formally designed Enslaved African Burial Ground, making it a destination for descendants, including park visitors, school groups, families, and more.

Phase 1 is the planning phase of this multi-phase project. The ultimate goal (Phase 3) is to create, through a construction project, a memorial grove with public art and interpretive trails with signage, making the Enslaved African Burial Ground a destination for the community, NYC residents, and tourists alike.

Phase 1 of the project includes a community engagement process and a design competition that culminates in renderings for a reimagined cultural landscape to honor the contributions of the Enslaved African People who built much of Van Cortlandt Park's southwestern quadrant.

ENSLAVED PEOPLE PROJECT

Pre-park History: In the 1870s construction workers unearthed skeletons near the lake, while working on the New York and Northern Railroad. According to an 1879 Yonkers Statesman newspaper article, a local man, Caleb Van Tassell, recalled "making a coffin for a slave" that was buried here. Writing in a memoir, another area resident recalled that "a great number of skeletons of former slaves were unearthed" during the railroad construction. It was not reported what happened to the skeletons after they were disinterred. The railroad trackbed is the Putnam Greenway of today.

1980s: Headstones at the Kingsbridge Burial Ground were removed by NYC Parks due to ongoing vandalism. Kingsbridge Burial Ground is adjacent to the Enslaved African Burial Ground; no headstones were removed from the area associated with the Enslaved African Burial Ground.

VCPA: Enslaved People Project

2019: Van Cortlandt Park Alliance (VCPA) created the Enslaved People Project, bringing together a coalition of experts, the Descendant Community, and other community stakeholders.

2019: USDA conducted a study with ground-penetrating radar, identifying what appear to be coffins and interment.

2019: Artist Kamau Ware (Black Gotham Experience) debuted, "Sugar Shadow," a photography exhibit at Van Cortlandt Golf House. *The work was created based on an onsite photo shoot, where*

Kamau Ware directed costumed actors in scenarios depicting the lives and humanity of Enslaved Africans at Van Cortlandt Plantation.

2020: Formation of the Enslaved People Project Task Force; Funding provided by Bronx Community Board 8 to create a free curriculum for elementary and middle school students.

2021: Official naming of the Enslaved African Burial Ground and Hester & Piero's Mill Pond, at VCPA's first annual Juneteenth Celebration in the park in partnership with Bronx Arts Ensemble. Artist Kamau Ware created a temporary installation for the inaugural event. *VCPA's Juneteenth Celebration has taken place in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024.*

2022: Grant award from NYS Senator Alessandra Biaggi for interpretive signage at the burial ground and surrounding areas. *Contract with the NYS Dormitory Authority is in process.*

2023: Baobab Tree Installation near the burial ground. Ghana-born, Bronx artist Tijay Mohammed, in conjunction with Beam Center, installed an 18' temporary sculpture: *Baobab Tree of Life*. The exuberant tree encourages dialogue. Mohammed feels strongly that the ancestors called him to the location. *Installation 4/14/23 through 4/14/24.*

2023: Introduced inaugural Pinkster Festival, in partnership with Van Cortlandt House Museum. Programming was designed and implemented by Pinkster experts Chief Baba Neil Clarke and Lavada Nahon. *The second annual Pinkster Festival was held on 5/4/24.*

2023: The preliminary design plan for Daylighting Tibbetts Brook/Putnam Greenway Extension (NYC's largest green infrastructure project to date) was unanimously approved by the Public Design Commission, 8/14/23.

SCOPE OF SERVICE REQUIRED

The scope of services for this proposal will include the following components.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Consultant/Firm will:

- collaborate with VCPA to create comprehensive stakeholder mapping (identifying partners and leveraging partnerships with individuals and community groups through input-gathering methods like, but not limited to, focus groups);
- work with VCPA to develop and finalize the community engagement process's specifications; validate VCPA's objectives for this project; and outline VCPA board, staff, and Consultant/Firm roles and responsibilities for the project;
- create and implement content and techniques/initiatives to promote public involvement designed to engage the community, stakeholders, and VCPA's leadership throughout the process;
- develop a work plan and timeline to guide the process, its activities, and communications;
- conduct an orientation and multiple community conversations with key stakeholders on project goals and the potential outcomes;
- develop, manage, and execute community activations that are effective, fun, and

welcoming;

- be available for presentations, including but not limited to a presentation of the final version of the community engagement plan;
- manage the competition/contest process, including serving as an intermediary with design contestants and conveying the outcomes of the community engagement process into the language of the design competition RFP.

PROJECT COMPONENTS

Stakeholder Engagement

Initial Meeting with Community Engagement Consultant/Firm and Project Partners

Participate in an initial meeting hosted by VCPA with key project partners to establish a collaborative framework. This meeting will serve as a baseline to defining roles, responsibilities, and expectations, ensuring alignment on the project's vision and objectives. The goal is to foster a shared understanding and commitment among all stakeholders.

Community Outreach

Organize and conduct community engagement that involves local residents and stakeholders in the project. These sessions will provide a platform for sharing information, gathering input, and fostering dialogue about the burial ground project. The goal is to ensure community voices are heard and incorporated into the planning and design processes, enhancing transparency and inclusiveness. Arts integration through performance, hands-on art-making, etc. is welcome and encouraged as part of the plan.

Engagement should include in-person modules and might take the form of:

- Visual arts-based workshops
- Pop-up conversations
- Hands-on creativity
- Interactive performances (music, dance, theater, etc.)
- Surveys (in person or online)
- Concerts or other public programs
- Culinary arts

Deliverables

1. **Summary Report** at the end of community engagement process, to feed into the design competition RFP. *A comprehensive report will be produced at the conclusion which will be shared with the public to provide a detailed summary and insights from the engagement activities.*
2. **RFP for the design competition.** The request for proposals aims to attract high-quality design proposals that align with the project's vision and community expectations.
3. **Final Report and Visual Representation** of the community engagement process to capture and convey the project's evolving dynamics and themes.

**Deliverables will be used as Capital Campaign Tools to help fundraise for the next phases of the project.*

Competition Planning and Implementation

Development of Overall Project Plan

The Community Engagement Consultant/Firm will develop a comprehensive project plan that outlines the strategic approach, key milestones, and timelines. This plan will serve as a roadmap for the project, detailing the steps necessary to achieve the project's goals, including community engagement strategies, stakeholder involvement, and communication protocols. The plan aims to ensure structured and efficient project execution.

Drafting of RFP for Design Competition by Community Engagement Consultant/Firm

The Community Engagement Consultant/Firm will draft a Request for Proposals for the Design Competition. This RFP will specify the competition's objectives, criteria, and submission requirements, targeting design firms with relevant experience in working with burial grounds and/or archaeologically sensitive sites. The RFP aims to attract high-quality design proposals that align with the project's vision and community expectations.

Support and Oversight During Design Rendering Process

The Community Engagement Consultant/Firm and VCPA will provide support and oversight to ensure the competition participants have the necessary information and resources without direct involvement that could influence the competition. This approach maintains the integrity and fairness of the design competition while ensuring they understand the project requirements and community expectations. The aim is to achieve high-quality design renderings that align with the project's vision.

Formation of Selection Committee

Establish a selection committee composed of diverse stakeholders, including community representatives, experts in relevant fields, and project partners. The committee will be responsible for evaluating design proposals and selecting the winning concept.

Press Conference

Key representatives from VCPA, the Community Engagement Consultant/Firm, and other stakeholders will participate in a press conference to unveil the concept renderings. The event aims to update the public, highlight the selection process, and emphasize the project's significance. Its goal is to promote transparency, raise community awareness, and generate enthusiasm and support for the project.

FACILITIES

Work will take place at the consultant's/firm's facility or at an approved alternate location. The Consultant/firm shall attend meetings and perform various tasks at Van Cortlandt Park, during the period of performance of the task order. Local travel expenses of the Consultant's/Firm's personnel will not be the responsibility of VCPA, including parking. VCPA is not required to provide workspace, facilities, or hardware to the contractor at their off-site location.

CONTRACTOR TRAVEL & EXPENSES

Travel and all other project expenses should be factored into the overall project budget. There will not be reimbursement for expenses incurred related to the project.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

It is recommended that proposals contain the following information:

- A cover letter introducing the company and the individual who will be the primary contact person. A description of the Consultant's/Firm's organization and staff's qualifications.
- Proposed statement of work, project approach, and plan to accomplish the work. Describe in detail your project approach and methodology in managing and implementing a project of this size and scope and experience of developing and supporting the implementation of a comprehensive community engagement plan. *Key elements include: a. Project Understanding, b. Project Methodology and Deliverables, c. Roles & Responsibilities, d. Project Management.*
- A statement that the Consultant/Firm is registered to conduct business in New York City. We strongly encourage proposals from certified Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE).
- Specific qualifications regarding experience in community engagement services, including the names of clients doing similar work as VCPA or relevant fields. A reference list should be attached to the proposal, with client names, contact persons, and phone numbers.
- Examples of 2-3 projects of a similar scope, magnitude and complexity to the work described in this solicitation.
- A detailed timeline for completion of each phase and the total project. VCPA is interested in completing Phase 1 of *Reimagining the Enslaved African Burial Ground in Van Cortlandt Park* in the previously stated timeline and in as expeditious a manner as possible.
- A pricing narrative with a proposed fee schedule for each phase of the project including number/fee estimates for the following: travel to Van Cortlandt Park, in-person meetings, Zoom meetings, materials, printing.

SELECTION PROCESS

Each of the proposals received will be evaluated and determined if it meets the stated requirements. Failure to meet these requirements will be a cause for eliminating the Consultant/Firm from further consideration. Initial evaluation of the proposals will be made by VCPA's Selection Committee. In addition to evaluating written proposals, interviews will be requested by VCPA staff.

VCPA shall not be liable in any way for any costs incurred by any Consultant/Firm in the preparation of its proposal in response to this RFP or any losses or damages arising from the VCPA's rejection of any proposal for any reason whatsoever.

Proposals will be evaluated on specific criteria.

The minimum general proposal requirements include:

- Qualifications and experience of the project team
- Proven understanding of scope of work and suggested approach to project
- Demonstrated cultural sensitivity
- Capacity to perform work within schedule and budget
- Billing rates, hourly, to remain in effect for the duration of the project
- Three references
- Examples of prior, related work
- Staffing plan (please identify project manager and supervisor)
- Detailed practices for time management and cost monitoring
- High level schedule/timeline for the project
- Number and type of community engagement activation events.

Project Budget

Available funding for Project Management & Community Engagement Consulting Services is \$125,000. Proposals should specifically break down and list how you would utilize that amount of funding over 12-18 months. Additionally, there is a modest production budget for activation events (refreshments, stipends, artists, etc.). *Proposals should clearly outline how time and cost overruns would be handled, including how the designer or agency alerts the client and negotiates unanticipated changes or delays.* Payment is in 5 installments of \$25,000 each.

Evaluation Criteria

	Points
<p>Overall Experience of Company & Demonstrated Results Our evaluation will include an assessment of the history of your company, your experience as it relates to the requirements within this RFP, evidence of past performance, quality and relevance of past work and references, as well as cultural sensitivity. Experience working in the Bronx is a plus, but not required.</p>	35
<p>Strategic Thinking/Planning Approach Overall approach and strategy described/outlined in the proposal and capacity to perform the engagement within the specified timeframe.</p>	40
<p>Budget Approach/Cost Effectiveness Effective and efficient delivery of quality services is demonstrated in relation to the budget allocation.</p>	25
Total	100

PROPOSAL REVIEW AND AWARD SCHEDULE

All deadlines are by 4:00 p.m. EST of the stated date. Written proposals and an electronic PDF must be received by VCPA no later than **4:00 p.m. EST on October 4, 2024**. Proposals received after this deadline will not be accepted or considered. The selection committee shall make a recommendation to VCPA, who retain final approval of the contract. Work may begin immediately following contract execution with the finalist.

RFP Issued	September 6, 2024
On-site walk-through	September 18, 2024 at 10am
Final Date for Questions Related to RFP	September 19, 2024
Proposal Deadline	October 4, 2024
Proposals Reviewed/Evaluated by Selection Committee	October 11, 2024
Interviews	October 21-25, 2024
Selection of Consultant/Firm	October 28, 2024
Contract Executed	By November 30, 2024
Onboarding	December 2024
Project Start	January 1, 2025