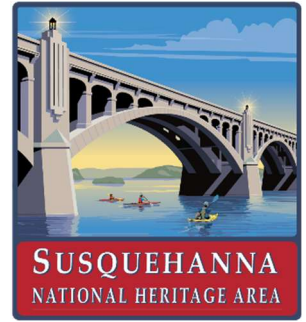


REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

SUSQUEHANNA DISCOVERY CENTER & HERITAGE PARK INTERPRETIVE PLAN



Issued by: Susquehanna National Heritage Area

Contact Person: Peter Miele, Senior Project Leader, pmiele@susqnha.org

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Proposal Due Date: Friday, February 27, 2026, by 11:59pm, as PDF to pmiele@susqnha.org

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Susquehanna National Heritage Area (SNHA) seeks proposals from qualified consultants or firms to develop an **Interpretive Plan** for the **Susquehanna Discovery Center & Heritage Park (SDC)**, a new world-class visitor destination under development in Wrightsville and Hellam Township, Pennsylvania. **The overarching goal of this process is to craft a holistic visitor experience by developing a cohesive, detailed, site-wide interpretive plan integrating cultural and environmental content, visitor engagement strategies, humanities scholarship, and multimedia.** This RFP outlines the qualifications sought, scope of work, and deliverables expected. SNHA has a professional staff, Board of Directors, and a 15-member volunteer task force that have guided the project to this stage. These groups, along with humanities scholars from across the region and nation, will contribute to this Interpretive Plan process.

Susquehanna National Heritage Area is a non-profit organization that connects the people and communities of Lancaster and York Counties to one another and to the nation through stories about this nationally important place. The National Heritage Area welcomes visitors, cultivates partnerships, and nurtures a strong regional identity. The two-county region is both state and federally recognized for its contributions to Pennsylvania and American history. In 2023, SNHA completed a National Heritage Area Management Plan (<https://susqnha.org/about-us/studies-reports/>), which outlines our strategic priorities and responsibilities for the next decade. This plan also identifies the region's nationally important stories, a primary focus of interpretation at this new site.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Quakers Jonathan and Susanna Wright Mifflin settled on the "Mifflin Farm" circa 1800. A working farm for more than 225 years, between approximately 1810 and 1846, the Mifflins sheltered freedom seekers in their home, making it a crucial stop on the Underground Railroad in south central Pennsylvania. On June 28, 1863, the property was the site of fighting during the Battle of Wrightsville, a key engagement of the Gettysburg Campaign. In late 2023, SNHA secured \$5.25 million to purchase the 87-acre Mifflin Farm, saving the property from demolition for warehouse development.

Over the next decade, SNHA will transform the site into the **Susquehanna Discovery Center & Heritage Park**, a world-class visitor destination celebrating the unique stories and experiences of America's 55th National Heritage Area. SNHA has drawn inspiration for this project from the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley (Winchester, Virginia), the Brandywine Conservancy & Museum of Art (Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania), the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Montgomery, Alabama), and the Shelburne Museum (Shelburne, Vermont).

In 2025, SNHA opened the Mifflin Farm to the public on a limited basis. In May 2025, the National Park Service listed the Mifflin House on the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. In September 2025, the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office Board voted to recommend to the Department of the Interior that the Mifflin House & Farm be listed in the National Register of Historic Places with National Significance. In late 2025, SNHA engaged John Milner Architects & the Urban Heritage Project to complete a Historic Structure & Cultural Landscape Report for the Mifflin House, surrounding outbuildings, and 42-acres of core landscape. This study will be completed in spring 2026 and be made available to the Interpretive Plan consultant.

PROJECT OVERVIEW (CONT.)

In May 2025, SNHA completed a Master Plan & Interpretive Framework, guided by Mahan Rykiel Associates of Baltimore, Maryland. This plan recommends **four components** on the historic property, constructed in phases over the next decade:

- **A Discovery Center & Susquehanna River Art Museum**, in the historic barns and a new addition, will both welcome and orient visitors to the site and host a +/-5000 SF exhibit sharing the history and culture of York and Lancaster Counties through the region's nationally important stories. These structures also include space for educational programs and events. The integrated Susquehanna River Art Museum, the first of its type, will explore artists inspired by the scenic beauty of the river, creating an early American art movement. This museum will display and interpret a collection of etchings, drawings, paintings, and 3-D objects dating back 400 years. This art collection, under separate ownership, is already interpreted as an existing exhibition that will eventually come to SDC.
- **An Underground Railroad Learning Center**, in the historic Mifflin House, will present stories of freedom seekers, the Mifflin Family, and Black and white collaborators through immersive exhibits and interpretation. The exhibit will connect efforts in south-central Pennsylvania to national antislavery and Underground Railroad movements.
- **A 79-acre Heritage Park**, offering immersive interpretation of the local Civil War battle and Underground Railroad activity and passive recreational opportunities for visitors and the community via a four-mile network of trails and areas restored to their natural habitats.
- **Freedom's Crossing River Park**, located along the shore of the Susquehanna River, will provide the community with riverfront access for water-related activities, picnicking, walking trails connected to the Mason-Dixon Trail, and interpretation of the Underground Railroad routes that crossed the Susquehanna River at this point.

The full Master Plan & Interpretive Framework can be viewed at <https://susqnha.org/what-we-do/projects/mifflin/>

SCOPE OF WORK

A. Project Initiation and Visitor-Use Analysis

- Conduct kickoff meeting(s) with SNHA staff, SDC Task Force representatives, and scholars.
- Review all background resources including, but not limited to, SDC Master Plan & Interpretive Framework, SNHA Management Plan, the Susquehanna River Art collection, National Register of Historic Places application, Underground Railroad Network to Freedom application, and Historic Structures & Cultural Landscape Report.
- Research and understand the impact of cultural and historical institutions in the region.
- Develop audience profiles and accessibility considerations for both sitewide and component-level experiences.
- Conduct 3 focus groups/listening sessions with priority audiences and users.

DELIVERABLE: Kickoff brief, with audience analysis report

B. Interpretive Themes

- Develop the overarching preliminary interpretive question/theme (flexible at the beginning of the process and concrete by the conclusion) within the context of SNHA's nationally important stories.
- Develop an interpretive theme hierarchy for sitewide and component-specific narratives.
- Integrate recent and relevant scholarship from environmental humanities, human geography, Underground Railroad studies, Quaker history, Indigenous history, African American history, art history, and Civil War history.

DELIVERABLE: Interpretive theme matrix

C. Visitor Experience Plan

- Create a sitewide visitor flow and orientation strategy, considering SNHA's already-established visitor sites.
- Develop cognitive and emotional takeaways and learning outcomes for identified audience groups.
- Recommend interpretive approaches, universal accessibility recommendations, and levels of engagement for diverse audiences.
- Provide a framework for using media to enhance both on- and off-site interpretation.

DELIVERABLE: Visitor Experience Plan

SCOPE OF WORK (CONT.)

D. Community Engagement & Scholarly Collaboration

- Facilitate up to three meetings with the Interpretation Work Group.
- Conduct three humanities scholar roundtables.
- Lead community feedback session and report on integration of public insights.

DELIVERABLE: Engagement & scholarship integration report

E. Component-Level Interpretive Plans

E1. Underground Railroad Learning Center

- Develop narrative structure, exhibit concepts, and ongoing programmatic recommendations for immersive and scholarly Underground Railroad interpretation; connect local actions to broader efforts.
- Address complexities surrounding Quakerism, enslavement/“indentured servitude,” racial collaboration, and freedom seeker agency.

E2. Discovery Center & Susquehanna River Art Museum

- Develop narrative structure, exhibit concepts, and ongoing programmatic recommendations to share the nationally important stories of the Susquehanna National Heritage Area defined in the National Heritage Management Plan; connect to interpretive resources in York & Lancaster Counties.
- Leverage River Art assets to tell the nationally important stories of the two-county National Heritage Area.

E3. Heritage Park

- Develop a comprehensive trail-based interpretive plan, considering cultural landscape interpretation, environmental and ecological interpretation, wayside concepts, monumentation and memorialization, and outdoor educational strategies.

E4. Freedom’s Crossing Heritage Park

- Conceptualize interpretation addressing Underground Railroad crossings, river ecology, regional Indigenous cultures, and human-river interaction.

DELIVERABLE: Four Component-Level Interpretive Plans

F. Costs & Implementation

- Develop high-level cost estimates for recommended physical interpretive plan components.
- Create phased roadmap for implementation, aligned with SDC’s decade-long development plan contained in the Master Plan & Interpretive Framework.

DELIVERABLE: Cost estimates and phased roadmap tables

G. Draft & Final Interpretive Master Plan

- Prepare draft plan for SNHA review.
- Incorporate feedback and produce publication-quality final plan.
- Provide up to two presentations to SNHA staff, Board of Directors, SDC Task Force, and/or public audiences.

DELIVERABLE: Draft plan & final plan

GENERAL TERMS

- SNHA reserves the right to reject any or all proposals and to select the proposal that it determines to be in the best interest of SNHA.
- The contract is subject to the approval of the Board of Directors and is effective only upon their approval.
- Proposers are bound by the deadline and location requirements for submittals in response to this RFP as stated.
- Proposals will remain effective for SNHA review and approval for 60 days from the deadline
- If only one proposal is received by the SNHA, it may negotiate with the proposer or seek additional proposals on an informal or formal basis during the 60-day period when the proposals are effective.
- The proposer is encouraged to add to, modify, or clarify any scope of work items it deems appropriate to develop a high-quality plan at the lowest possible cost. All changes should be identified with an explanation. However, the scope of work proposed must accomplish the goals and work stated above.

TIMELINE

- Consultant Selected – March 2026
- Scope of Work components A-D – no later than September 2026
- Scope of Work components E-G – December 2026

REQUIRED SUBMITTALS

Proposals should include the following components:

- **Letter of Transmittal**
 - A statement demonstrating your understanding of the work to be performed.
 - The firm's contact person, email, and telephone number.
- **Company/Team Profile**
 - A statement of the firm's experience in conducting work of the nature sought by this RFP; advertising brochures may be included in support of this statement.
 - The location of the firm's office that will perform the work.
 - Resumes of individuals (consultants, employees) proposed to conduct the work and the specific duties of each in relation to the work.
 - A reference list of other clients of the firm with contact information.
 - Any other information relating to the capabilities and expertise of the firm in doing comparable work.
- **Methodology:** The proposal must include a detailed description of the methods and procedures the firm will use to perform the work. Inclusion of examples of similar work is encouraged.
- **Work Schedule:** The schedule must include time frames for each major element, and dates for completion of draft and final documents.
- **Cost:** For each major work element, the costs must be itemized showing:
 - For each person assigned to the work, the title/rank (organizational level) of the person in the organization, the hourly rate, and the number of hours to be worked.
 - The reimbursable expenses to be claimed.

The itemized costs must be totaled to produce a contract price. If awarded a contract, the proposer is bound by this price in performing the work. The contract price may not be exceeded unless the contract is amended to allow for additional costs. If awarded a contract, the firm may not change the staffing assigned to the project without approval by SNHA. However, approval will not be denied if the staff replacement is determined by SNHA to be of equal ability or experience to the predecessor. The method of billing must be stated. The preferred practice of SNHA is to pay upon completion of the work and receipt of the required report. However, SNHA will consider paying on a periodic basis as substantial portions of the work are completed.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

- **Technical Expertise and Experience:** The following factors will be considered:
 - The firm's experience in performing similar work.
 - The expertise and professional level of the individuals assigned to conduct the work.
 - The clarity and completeness of the proposal and the firm's demonstrated understanding of the work to be performed.
- **Procedures and Methods:** The following factors will be considered:
 - The techniques for collecting and analyzing information.
 - The sequence and relationships of major steps.
 - The methods for managing the work to ensure timely and orderly completion.
- **Cost:** The following factors will be considered:
 - The number of hours of work to be performed.
 - The level of expertise of the individuals proposed to do the work.
 - Cost-effectiveness and value for money.
 - Within a total project budget of **\$100,000**.