

Rio Grande Public Funding Navigator

**Request for Proposal (RFP) for Consulting Services
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership**



Introduction

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership (TRCP) seeks proposals from qualified firms with in-depth knowledge and expertise in navigating public funding opportunities to support the development and implementation of water resource projects with fish and wildlife and climate resilience benefits. Firms would serve as a “public funding navigator” for community-based agricultural and watershed organizations active in the Rio Grande watershed within New Mexico and western Texas. Specific services would include maintaining a public database of public funding opportunities, building and maintaining relationships with public funding agencies, and assisting organizations and other interested parties in securing public funding.

The TRCP is initiating this RFP to obtain proposals from qualified and experienced firms (from now on referred to as “Proposer” and “Consultant”) that provide consulting services to non-governmental organizations. Proposers must have qualifications and experience in navigating and applying for public funding opportunities for water resource projects, specifically watershed restoration and conservation efforts. Proposers must also have qualifications and experience in project management, project planning, grant writing and management, and facilitation services. Proposers must be knowledgeable of water resource and ecosystem management issues in New Mexico and/or western Texas. TRCP intends to award a one-year contract to one Proposer for all services herein.

About the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

The TRCP is the country’s largest coalition of hunting, fishing, and conservation groups, outdoor businesses, and individuals working to advance proactive conservation solutions in the federal policy arena. With a mission to guarantee all Americans quality places to hunt and fish, the TRCP unites and amplifies the voices of 63 organizational partners and 130,000 individual members and supporters in support of policies, programs, and funding that conserve fish and wildlife habitat and public access. The TRCP builds non-partisan coalitions to advocate for conservation in multiple program areas, including water resources, public lands, agricultural and private lands, and climate resilience.

The TRCP is a policy-focused organization working throughout the Rio Grande watershed to support community-based agricultural and watershed organizations and other interested parties, such as acequias and Pueblos, to address barriers to accessing public funding for water resource projects with fish and wildlife and climate resilience benefits. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) offer a vast federal investment in climate and water resilience strategies, including those for the Rio Grande. However, despite

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the availability of these public funds, there are numerous barriers to accessing federal and state funding for aquatic and riparian ecosystem restoration and conservation efforts. The most significant barrier, particularly in rural and underserved regions, is a lack of human capacity. This capacity gap includes federal/state agency capacity to administer and deliver funds and organizational capacity to navigate, apply for, and implement federal funds. Many rural and underserved areas also lack access to resources to manage large federal grants, including accounting and project management services. Another significant suite of barriers is federal funding “misalignment,” which tends to de-prioritize allocating funds to support capacity building and pre-project development activities such as stakeholder engagement and navigating/applying for federal funds compared with project implementation.

Public Funding Navigators

The deployment of “public funding navigators” within strategic watersheds has been identified as a crucial tool for overcoming the barriers to accessing BIL and IRA federal resources and other water-focused federal funding opportunities. A public funding navigator is an expert or team of experts who understand the barriers that entities face in securing public funding and assist with securing funding and advocating for entities in the public funding process. These public funding navigators, often local and regional experts with a deep understanding of challenges and opportunities in their area, have existing connections and relationships with local communities and organizations. Their role is pivotal in bridging the gap between community leaders and federal resources, instilling confidence in the process, and ensuring that the benefits of these federal investments reach the grassroots level.

With their unique blend of expertise and local knowledge, public funding navigators can potentially transform the landscape of public funding access. By assisting entities in developing priority projects, aligning projects with available funding, and finding suitable matching resources, they can help overcome the universal barriers to accessing public funding. Their role in connecting with public funders, evaluating project fit, and providing grant and proposal development support is invaluable. Moreover, they can relieve agency funder technical assistance burdens and streamline grant-writing processes for partners. Public funding navigators can empower local communities, creating a network of champions with the expertise to access public funding.

Qualifications

Proposers should have the following qualifications:

- Significant experience in assisting non-governmental organizations and other entities such as Pueblos, acequias, watershed collaboratives, and conservation districts in navigating and accessing public funding for multi-benefit water resource projects, including but not limited to watershed planning, river and stream restoration, and

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irrigation infrastructure enhancements. Proposers ideally have project management experience spanning the entire lifecycle of a project, including project planning, design, and permitting.

- Significant experience working with federal, state, and local natural resource agencies in New Mexico and/or western Texas. Proposers ideally have strong existing relationships with key federal natural resource agencies, including, but not limited to, the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Reclamation, and Natural Resources Conservation Service. Strong relationships with state natural resource agencies in New Mexico and/or Texas are also welcome. Proposers should understand internal federal and state natural resource agency processes and decision-making processes to elevate partner-driven funding requests. Experience with National Fish and Wildlife Foundation funding is a plus.
- Familiarity and experience with public capacity-building and workforce development resources such as the Bureau of Reclamation's Cooperative Watershed Management Program, the United States Department of Agriculture's Equity in Conservation Outreach Cooperative Agreements, Environmental Protection Agency environmental justice and water infrastructure technical assistance programming, USDA Rural Development resources, and/or AmeriCorps.
- Familiarity and experience working on water resource projects and planning efforts in New Mexico and western Texas.

Scope of Services

The TRCP seeks an experienced consultant to serve as a public funding navigator within the Rio Grande watershed. The following reflects the proposed scope of services for the consultant:

- Assist TRCP staff in maintaining and updating existing public funding and capacity-building databases and work with local and regional partners to migrate these databases onto public-facing platforms. The Consultant will send biweekly funding updates to an existing partner listserv.
- With support from TRCP staff, research emerging and unique public funding opportunities to support multi-benefit water resource projects with fish and wildlife and climate resilience benefits.

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- Work with TRCP staff and partners to identify at least three target sub-watersheds and/or regional planning areas within the Rio Grande watershed to provide navigational assistance to community-based agricultural and watershed organizations and other interested parties. Once identified, the consultant would work with local entities to develop and refine watershed plans and project lists/pipelines, assess local capacity for pursuing public funds, and align priority projects and capacity-building needs with available public funding opportunities focusing on BIL and IRA funds.
- Coordinate and facilitate monthly meetings with public funding agencies and partners to provide information on existing and emerging public funding and provide opportunities for partners to elevate project proposals.
- Coordinate and facilitate monthly meetings with other partners providing public funding technical assistance services in New Mexico and western Texas to help ensure coordination of services, share information on available and emerging public funding opportunities, and collaborate on larger-scale project proposals.
- Assist TRCP staff in developing at least three funding proposals, focusing on capacity-building grants/cooperative agreements and discretionary funding internal to federal natural resource agencies (e.g., U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management). Where necessary, this may include identifying funding opportunities to meet non-federal cost share requirements, and technical support with preparing federal grants applications.
- Assist TRCP in tracking project successes and challenges and develop a capstone report summarizing the public navigator experience with recommendations to enhance and/or strengthen these services within the Rio Grande watershed.
- Participate, as needed, in New Mexico's current regional watershed planning process to ensure alignment with project objectives.
- Establish regular meetings with TRCP staff to share project progress and challenges.

Budget

The maximum budget for the scope of services is \$65,200 for a one-year contract. An additional \$10,000 is available to support travel needs.

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How to Apply and Response Requirements

Please send proposals to Alexander Funk, TRCP's Director of Water Resources, at afunk@trcp.org and Elle Benson, TRCP's Rio Grande Program Manager, at lbenson@trcp.org. Responses will be reviewed as submissions come in. Any questions about the scope of the work can be directed to Alexander and Elle and will be responded to as received.

Within your proposal, please include the following information:

- Describe your/your firm's capabilities, including your experience with working with non-governmental organizations and federal and state natural resource agencies, navigating and accessing public funding for water resource projects, grant-writing and project management, and understanding of barriers to accessing public funds.
- Describe your/your firm's experience working on water resources projects within the Rio Grande watershed, particularly within New Mexico and/or western Texas.
- Provide a brief project outline and timeline, including any recommendations for accomplishing the scope of services within the contract period.
- Provide your proposed fee and anticipated budget based on the scope of services and available funding. *If you believe the scope of services as written does not adequately reflect the current budget, please provide an explanation and estimate for achieving the full scope of services.*
- List the principal consultants working on this project and provide examples of current and previous clients. While not required, the TRCP seeks consultants who can translate public funding information for Spanish speakers.

The TRCP recognizes that answering an RFP takes thoughtful time and energy from your business. The TRCP would like to ease the submission requirements for this RFP. Rather than requiring a lengthy, unique proposal, we ask you to submit the above information in a brief proposal, along with an existing work sample that you feel represents similar work to what you've done for another client. This way, we can gauge your level of expertise and the quality of output without the burden of creating extensive new material related to this submission.

The TRCP highly values diversity, equity, and inclusion and encourages proposals from Proposers with employees from diverse backgrounds, including veterans, LGBTQ+ individuals, BIPOC individuals, women, and those underrepresented in the environmental consulting services field. Proposers who highly value and respect hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation are also encouraged to submit proposals.