

Request for Qualifications

Forestry Outreach and Implementation Project Partner for Roots for Resilience Initiative

Mid & Lower Eastern Shore

(Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester Counties, MD)

Award Amount: up to \$1,040,000

Award Duration: 3 years

Issue Date: May 1, 2026

Submission Deadline: 4:00 PM on June 15, 2026

Expected Start Date: August 1, 2026

1. Introduction

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) is implementing an initiative named [Roots for Resilience](#) (R4R) that is funded through a multi-state Climate Pollution Reduction Grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Overall, the R4R Initiative aims to implement blue carbon and forest carbon projects, coordinate landscape-scale planning, enhance community outreach, increase resilience to climate impacts, and expand recreational opportunity, among other outcomes. The Maryland Forest Service (MFS) is responsible for the R4R Forestry Goals, which include: 500 acres of afforestation dominated by three focal species (Atlantic white-cedar, baldcypress, and shortleaf pine), 1,000 acres of enhanced forest management implementation, and engagement with county governments and the public through survey and public meetings. The afforestation and implementation projects will occur on the Mid and Lower Eastern Shore (Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester) on both private and public land. Engagement with county government and the public will also focus on those six counties.

The MFS seeks qualifications from experienced non-profit organizations to support the MFS in meeting the R4R Forestry Goals by:

- Engaging with the public to talk about their landscape, communicating how forestry plays a role, and identifying opportunities to support community goals with forestry activities.
- Supporting county governments in further integrating forestry into their planning processes by providing necessary background research, data, and maps about topics that are of interest or concern.

- Encouraging collaboration between adjoining landowners/stakeholders by promoting no-cost programs, cost-share programs, and support tools, and by identifying common objectives.
- Identifying opportunities for cross-county collaboration and lead engagement with county representatives for necessary coordination.
- Supporting MDNR's commitment to implementing 1,000 acres of enhanced forest management activities on private and public land.

Forestry Planning Needs

Forest health, forest management, forest-based recreation, and forest product markets are key factors in climate and economic resilience. Forests that are healthy, connected, and free from invasive species sequester more carbon, sustain better habitat, provide more ecosystem services, and adapt better to climate impacts. These concepts are common and often required to be addressed in major county-level plans such as Comprehensive Plans or Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plans. These concepts may also come up in day-to-day interactions with residents or in decision-making. However, forestry is a complex umbrella that local jurisdictions may not have the capacity to undertake, especially across boundaries at large scales. The R4R outcomes of enhanced community outreach and coordinated landscape-scale planning will address that capacity gap by selecting a non-profit partner through this RFQ.

The selected partner will contribute to the outcome of enhanced community outreach by hosting in-person meetings and gathering community input. The selected partner will undertake outreach efforts that will include planning and leading county-scale meetings, 18 in total, that reach a variety of interest groups, communities, and perspectives. The selected partner will also build and conduct a survey for each county to gather input from residents. Additionally, MDNR is hiring Community Liaisons to further support the R4R Initiative. These Community Liaisons will be local individuals that will serve as trusted messengers, foster meaningful public engagement, and strengthen connections between MDNR and our partners. The selected partner will work with MDNR's Community Liaisons to connect with communities, facilitate meetings, and conduct surveys.

The selected partner will contribute to the outcome of coordinated landscape-scale planning by generating a *Forestry Assessment* for each county that compiles and contextualizes the information and data collected through outreach and research activities, specific to each county and their needs. A total of six Forestry Assessments will be created, one for each of six counties: Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester. These Forestry Assessments (titled, ex. *Forestry Assessment for Caroline County*) will be prepared in collaboration with each county as a customized complement to the Maryland Department of Planning's [Forestry Guidance to Local Governments](#). Each document will cover an array of topics, to include, at least:

- Ecosystem services (e.g. recreational opportunity, health and wellness) and the practical benefits of forests (protecting infrastructure, mitigating flooding);
- Climate change impacts (e.g. sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, ghost forests, wetland migration, extreme heat and storms);

- Forest health (e.g. pests and pathogens, invasive species);
- Forest product markets and the local forest-based economy;
- Commercial (i.e. timber harvesting) and non-commercial (e.g. prescribed fire, invasive species treatment) forest management as restoration and community defense (i.e. fuels reduction);
- Land cover and land cover changes over time, unique habitats, the landscape mosaic, habitat connectivity, and dynamic forest restoration blocks.

The selected partner will also support the R4R Forestry Goal of implementing 1,000 acres of forest management on private and public land. The MFS will find project opportunities through normal operations. The selected partner will generate project opportunities through conversations with county staff and landowners. The MFS will plan all forest management implementation projects. The selected partner will provide support by finding and paying contractors to complete the project work.

2. Scope of Work

The selected partner will complete the following (*Parts can and should overlap*):

Part 1 – Engage with county staff.

- Identify key points of contact from various departments within each county.
- Assess the inclusion of forests, forestry, forest-based recreation, and the forest products industry in existing county-level plans.
- Meet with county staff to assess how forests and forestry are already integrated into the planning process. Query county staff on topics of interest, data or information gaps, and challenges.
- Meet with county staff to discuss county-owned forests. Discuss topics such as habitat connectivity, landscape mosaic, cross-boundary collaboration, cross-county collaboration, and [dynamic forest restoration blocks](#).
- Recruit and onboard a consultant capable of providing support on the project, if applicable.
- **DELIVERABLE: Forestry Assessment Outlines** – Provide a summary of everything gathered in Part 1 (key points of contact, forests' role in county planning, topics of interest or concern, information or data gaps, forestry in existing county-level plans, etc.) for each county. This outline will serve as a 'skeleton' for the final Forestry Assessments. Topics will include, at least:
 - Ecosystem services (e.g. recreational opportunity, health and wellness) and the practical benefits of forests (protecting infrastructure, mitigating flooding);
 - Climate change impacts (e.g. sea level rise, saltwater intrusion, ghost forests, wetland migration, extreme heat and storms);
 - Forest health (e.g. pests and pathogens, invasive species);
 - Forest product markets and the local forest-based economy;

- Commercial (i.e. timber harvesting) and non-commercial (e.g. prescribed fire, invasive species treatment) forest management as restoration and community defense (i.e. fuels reduction);
- Land cover and land cover changes over time, unique habitats, the landscape mosaic, habitat connectivity, and dynamic forest restoration blocks.

Part 2 – Conduct research and community outreach.

- Research the topics of interest, data or information gaps, and challenges identified by counties. Create maps and compile information on each item to be included as sections of the final resource documents.
- Generate a list of stakeholders relevant to this project in each county as a section in the final resource documents. These stakeholders may include non-profits organizations, interest groups, user groups, community organizations, volunteer groups, or local businesses. Provide a short synopsis for each organization that describes what the organization is and how it might support/inform landscape-scale planning and/or implementation.
- **DELIVERABLE: Survey** – Develop and conduct a survey (or other similar outreach tool) unique to each county. The survey should capture the public’s opinion related to the topics of interest identified by each county. The key audience will be the residents of each county. The survey should be advertised broadly and through multiple avenues to reach a variety of interest groups, communities, and perspectives. Conduct targeted outreach to over-burdened or historically under-engaged communities.
- **DELIVERABLE: Community Outreach Meetings** – Plan and host 18 total public meetings, 3 in each of the six counties. Engage with individuals, interest groups, and other stakeholders, and include targeted outreach to over-burdened and historically under-engaged communities. Create relevant materials and agendas, advertise, coordinate speakers, take minutes, provide summaries, etc. with support from MDNR’s Community Liaison(s). The anticipated meeting topics in each county are:
 - **Meeting 1** – the county-scale landscape and questions or topics of interest posed by the county; an extension of the survey to give participants an opportunity to expand on feedback for the county.
 - **Meeting 2** – the landscape mosaic and encouraging cross-boundary collaboration by identifying common objectives; shared stewardship as an opportunity to amplify management efforts; no-cost programs, cost-share programs, and support tools.
 - **Meeting 3** – how forests and forestry contribute to community resilience, with a focus on climate impacts, health and wellness, and ecosystem services.

Part 3 – Prepare the final Forestry Assessments.

- Create a Forestry Assessment for each county that addresses and contextualizes all topics of interest, data or information gaps, and challenges. Integrate results from community outreach as additional topics, evidence of community concern, etc.
- Present each Forestry Assessment to the key points of contact for each county.

- **DELIVERABLE: Forestry Assessments** – A customized document for each of the six counties, Forestry Assessment for x County, that compiles and contextualizes information and data related to forests, forestry, and the forest industry. These assessments will include topic overviews, county-specific data, recommendations related to county-owned forests, survey results, maps, and links to resources.
- **DELIVERABLE: Cross-county Engagement** – Plan and host a virtual meeting that includes representatives from each of the six counties. This comprehensive meeting, a sort of ‘State of Forestry on the Mid and Lower Shore’, should summarize and talk about the findings – compile similarities, common problems, and shared public feedback, as well as unique requests or ideas by counties. This meeting will highlight projects that have been done by individual counties as examples, spreading knowledge of possibilities and inspiring expansion of forestry work implemented by counties. Build cohesion between counties by facilitating conversations about how counties might collaborate to address common concerns, issues, or ideas through forest management implementation on a regional scale.

Part 4 – Implement projects.

- Hand off forest management project ideas generated through outreach to the MFS (the MFS will assess ideas and plan the forest management implementation projects).
- **DELIVERABLE: Implementation Logistics Support** – For each project as part of the 1,000 acres of forest management implementation goal (projects will be selected and planned by the MFS), find and hire contractors to complete the work. Provide related documentation (e.g. solicitations, invoices, etc.).
- **DELIVERABLE: Implementation on County-Owned Land** – Work with county staff to identify and implement at least one forest management project in each of the six counties on county-owned land. Where applicable, work with adjoining landowners to expand project areas and increase impact. Projects may be located in municipalities or on private land if there are no applicable project opportunities on county-owned land.

Part 5 – Engage with MFS.

- Meet virtually at least once per month. Communicate daily to weekly.
- Provide invoices and a summary of accomplishments monthly.
- Give a presentation to the overall R4R team on accomplishments, challenges, and outcomes.
- **DELIVERABLE: Final Review** – A brief conclusion that summarizes the work done throughout the project duration. The conclusion should highlight successes and challenges and give recommendations for similar future work based on feedback or observations about how this project was received by counties and communities. The conclusion should also include a financial overview of expenses by category.

3. Minimum Qualifications

- Experience working with communities and county governments on the Mid and Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland (Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset, Talbot, Wicomico, and Worcester);
 - Experience using GIS for map projects that focus on natural resources;
 - Understanding of forests and forestry, in general and as they pertain to the Mid and Lower Eastern Shore;
 - Experience communicating natural resources topics;
 - Experience conducting community outreach using multiple tools; and
 - Experience creating documents that are comprehensive yet concise, organized, and navigable.
-

4. Submission Requirements

Submit a PDF (maximum 15 pages), including:

- A cover letter summarizing project management approach and organizational capacity;
 - A methodology that proposes a schedule and community outreach strategy (meetings + survey or other similar outreach tool);
 - Tasks expected to subcontract, if applicable;
 - Proposed budget framework, inclusive of overhead costs. Include an estimate of how much of the budget is expected to go directly to subcontractors for forest management implementation (\$40k must go directly towards community meetings, including participant stipends, in your proposed budget);
 - An outline of relevant experience; and
 - Key personnel qualifications.
-

5. Evaluation Criteria

Submissions will be evaluated based on:

- Experience;
 - Proposed methodology and project schedule;
 - Proposed budget framework;
 - County and stakeholder engagement strategy;
 - Community outreach strategy;
 - Comprehension of Eastern Shore forests and forestry topics.
-

6. Timeline & Submission Process

Submit all Intent to Submit notices, Questions, and Final Submissions via email to:

Charly Sager, Forest Restoration Planner
Maryland Forest Service
charly.sager@maryland.gov

Deadlines:

- Intent to Submit: 4:00 PM on May 15, 2026
 - Please submit a simple email to charly.sager@maryland.gov indicating your intention to submit a proposal.
 - Questions on all aspects of this RFQ and the project due: 4:00 PM on May 15, 2026
 - Submission can be via email, either in the message body or in an editable document.
 - Responses distributed: 4:00 PM on June 1, 2026
 - Responses to all questions will be issued to all interested parties.
 - Submittal Deadline: 4:00 PM on June 15, 2026
 - The Maryland Forest Service and partners in the Dept. of Natural Resources will review submissions and make a selection by July 1, 2026.
-

7. Equal Opportunity & Contracting Terms

The Maryland Department of Natural Resources encourages Maryland-certified MBE/WBE firms to participate in all levels of this project. A successful respondent must comply with insurance, nondiscrimination, and state contracting provisions.

9. Selection Process & Federal Funding

Funding will be made available on a competitive basis. Applicants whose proposals are selected for funding will work with MDNR to execute a funding agreement and the award will be subject to terms and conditions. Funding originated through a Climate Pollution Reduction Grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, and therefore, all awards will be considered 100% Federal funds. All Federal requirements are passed through MDNR and subrecipients of this

Request for Qualifications who successfully receive funding. *Because this Initiative is funded with Federal dollars, applicants must abide by all regulations set forth in [2 CFR 200](#).*