



## Wilds Cooperative of PA Governance Planning Consultant

### Summary

The PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship (Center) seeks a consultant to support strategic planning and the development of a Governance Plan for the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania (WCO). The WCO is a value chain network of more than 600 creative entrepreneurs, organizations and communities based in the highly rural Pennsylvania Wilds region, a premier outdoor recreation destination. Together, WCO members and the PA Wilds Center are addressing PA Wilds market demands by connecting and scaling the unique establishments and producers that are central to the region's place-based tourism development. The goal of this project is to attain recommendations for an evolved WCO governance structure and to evaluate how it can better leverage partner strengths and help the region's businesses thrive. See "Project Scope" for more details.

### Timeline

RFP Issued: April 9, 2024

Responses Due: June 7, 2024

Potential Interviews: June 28, 2024

Notifications: July 1, 2024

Contract Period: July 15 - March 31, 2025

Draft Deliverables Due: March 14, 2025

Final Deliverables Due: March 31, 2025

### Budget

\$70,000 - budget to cover consultant services and outreach efforts outlined in the consultant activities below

### Contact

Send questions and proposals to: [fellow@pawildscenter.org](mailto:fellow@pawildscenter.org)

### About the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc.

The PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship, Inc., is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to integrate conservation and economic development in a way that inspires the communities of the Pennsylvania Wilds. The Pennsylvania Wilds is a very rural 13-county region that includes the counties of Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Forest, Jefferson, Lycoming, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Warren, and northern Centre.

The PA Wilds Center leads a locally-informed, state-sponsored regional strategy to intentionally grow rural PA's outdoor recreation and tourism sectors under the place-based Pennsylvania Wilds brand, to diversify local economies, inspire stewardship, attract investment, improve quality of life and retain population.

The PA Wilds Center's core programs are organized into a synergistic Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to help regional businesses and organizations leverage the PA Wilds brand and connect with new market opportunities. These core programs include the Wilds Cooperative of PA (WCO), a network of more than 600 place-based businesses and organizations; Sustainable Commerce, including the physical PA Wilds Conservation Shop and online PA Wilds Marketplace, which feature products sourced from the WCO; PA Wilds brand licensing, and more. For more information on the PA Wilds Center, visit [www.PAWildsCenter.org](http://www.PAWildsCenter.org). To



learn more about the WCO, visit [www.WildsCoPA.org](http://www.WildsCoPA.org). Explore the PA Wilds at [www.PAWilds.com](http://www.PAWilds.com). Find regionally made products at [www.ShopThePAWilds.com](http://www.ShopThePAWilds.com).

### **About the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania Program**

Managed by the PA Wilds Center, the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania (WCO) is the main program through which small businesses and nonprofits – from artisans, breweries, B&Bs, outfitters, retailers, restaurants and galleries to designers, videographers and other creative services enterprises to nonprofits that help with financing, small business plans and other services – engage with the Pennsylvania Wilds brand, networks and platforms. The value chain network is focused on growing and connecting unique place-based businesses, which are vital to creating vibrant, sustainable communities. The network is free to join and most businesses in the region are eligible. WCO members receive access to a suite of opportunities, including branding and marketing tools, the opportunity to sell products to the PA Wilds Conservation Shop and online at ShopThePAWilds.com, networking and education programming, and mentorship and referrals to PA's financial and technical service programs. Details: [WildsCoPA.org/about/](http://WildsCoPA.org/about/). Joining the WCO provides the onramp for members to leverage the broader PA Wilds Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, which includes social enterprise components designed to provide economic opportunities for local businesses to help them scale alongside the PA Wilds brand and tourism destination. The Center invests in local businesses participating in the ecosystem in a variety of ways, including by purchasing wholesale products directly from local makers for resale; creating new market opportunities for producers related to the brand and place; intentionally encouraging rural business-to-business sales opportunities, such as between retailers and producers; sourcing service contracts with local businesses; and making social impact investments in rural businesses via competitive offerings.

#### *Additional Program Details*

Originally named the Pennsylvania Wilds Artisan Trail, the WCO was initially imagined as a way to grow the nature and heritage tourism industry in the Pennsylvania Wilds by promoting the region's unique artisan wood products, and tying them to the regional PA Wilds brand. The opportunity, however, was much greater. The PA Wilds is home to an impressive and diverse community of skilled artisans, craftspeople, and producers working across a variety of media. In 2007, following the Artisan Development Initiative economics study, the PA Wilds Artisan Trail program was born. In 2015, the program was relaunched as the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania to better reflect its growing membership and mission.

The Wilds Cooperative of PA (WCO) is a value chain network of more than 600 creative entrepreneurs, organizations and communities based in the highly rural Pennsylvania Wilds region, a premier outdoor recreation destination. Together, members and the PA Wilds Center are addressing PA Wilds market demands by connecting and scaling the unique establishments and producers that are central to our place-based tourism development. There are three core membership umbrellas in the WCO:

- CREATIVE MAKERS – entities that make food, craft, visual or digital art in the PA Wilds and whose products and creative services are inspired our region's beauty, bounty and rural traditions
- EXPERIENCE MAKERS – place-based businesses, organizations and events that offer an experience to visitors and residents in the region
- RESOURCE PARTNERS – organizations that offer a service or resource, be it technical, business development, environmental, or otherwise



## Project Scope

Context: For 20 years, stakeholders serving the highly rural PA Wilds region, home to 2M+ acres of public land, have been implementing intentional, place-based development of its outdoor recreation and tourism sectors to help diversify local economies, attract investment, inspire stewardship, improve quality of life and retain population. This generational work, featured in ten national studies in the last five years, is succeeding against many odds. As momentum has increased, the PA Wilds Center, the nonprofit leading the strategy in coordination with state and local partners, has identified a need to evolve key stakeholder and investment frameworks to ensure programs remain strongly locally-informed and responsive to opportunities and challenges as the region's – and the nation's – outdoor recreation economy continues to grow.

The consultant selected for this project would support the development of a Governance Plan for the Wilds Cooperative of Pennsylvania (WCO). The identified consultant for this project will work with PA Wilds Center staff and the PA Wilds Center's [Economic Recovery Corps Fellow](#) (ERC Fellow) to help establish the plan to evolve governance of the Center's rural value chain and larger entrepreneurial ecosystem. Throughout the contract, the consultant will work closely with the ERC Fellow. The ERC Fellow will function as a collaborator and thought partner, particularly in the context of social enterprises and impact investment strategies, and a connector to a [national coalition of organizations and practitioners](#).

PA Wilds Center engages with the WCO network in several ways – via newsletters, website updates, social media posts, membership meetings, member outreach, presentations, programming, referrals, and annual survey outreach – but is looking to evolve the frameworks to support a more inclusive, equitable, understood, and valued program. By helping to establish stronger partner input and feedback loops, referral processes, and social impact investment approaches, the consultant will deepen our partner networks at a critical growth stage and contribute to the evolution of what the governance structure of one of the PA Wilds Center's largest core stakeholder groups should look like to support transformational work.

The goal of this research and planning process is to attain recommendations for what an evolved governance structure for the Wilds Cooperative could look like, and how it could operate to achieve these objectives: 1) Help PA Wilds Center better serve this growing network; 2) Better leverage partner strengths to serve this growing network; and 3) Help rural businesses in the WCO program thrive.

While the WCO uses the word “cooperative” in its title, it is not officially organized as a cooperative. However, the Center has found value and inspiration in many national and international models used for regional wealth building and empowerment, such as the Aspen Institute's WealthWorks and Thrive Rural programs, the Kauffman Foundation's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Playbook 3.0, and the seven principles that generally guide traditional cooperatives (1. Voluntary and Open Membership; 2. Democratic Member Control; 3. Member Economic Participation; 4. Autonomy and Independence; 5. Education, Training and Information; 6. Cooperation among Cooperatives; 7. Concern for Community). Consultants are encouraged to examine these models in the course of their research.



## Consultant Activities

The successful proposal will provide a mix of research, analysis, surveys, in-region interviews and facilitated group discussions. All proposals should include travel, room rentals and catering (where appropriate) as part of the cost. Although not required, consultants are encouraged to utilize WCO members for services as often as possible.

The activities in this project will be completed in three phases:

- Outreach & Data Collection
  - At a minimum, the following outreach events will be required to support evaluation and definition phase of the project:
    - Surveys of membership and partner network
    - Kickoff meeting and download with PA Wilds Center
    - 1:1 meetings - some in person and some virtual
    - At least three stakeholder engagement events (businesses, business service providers, and others), catered, with registration coordination
    - Virtual meetings with these stakeholders: visitor bureaus, heritage areas, four local development districts, State Partners (DCED, DCNR and PCA)
- Evaluate & Define
  - Based on outreach, data collection, and research, define what an evolved WCO Governance Structure could look like and make recommendations for how it could function.
  - Define and memorialize the relationship between the WCO Governance Structure, the umbrella nonprofit (staff and Board of Directors), and other core stakeholder groups, including the PA Wilds Planning Team, Heritage Areas and Visitor Bureaus, Local Development Districts, and State Partners.
  - Define and memorialize the relationship between the WCO Governance Structure and the larger ecosystem of services it is connected to.
  - Define how recommendations from the governance structure are ultimately resourced and implemented.
  - Evaluate current input and feedback loops and make recommendations for strengthening these processes and partnerships.
  - Identify common challenges and opportunities of the network that align with the WCO mission by utilizing information gathered in the Outreach & Data Collection phase.
  - Review the current annual survey provided to WCO members, and make recommendations for how to improve its content, review, frequency, and follow up.
  - Evaluate past/current social enterprise (including, but not limited to, the PA Wilds Conservation Shop, the online PA Wilds Marketplace at ShopThePAWilds.com, and PA Wilds licensing initiatives) and impact investment approaches, and make recommendations for new ones (recommendations to include a description of the offering, who it targets and at what funding level, recommended frequency of the offering, and potential funding and technical assistance partners to stand it up, and level of difficulty to stand up).
  - Evaluate how different stakeholder groups can better engage with the broader services offered through the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (including business development, regional marketing,



brand licensing, regional partnerships and planning, sustainable commerce)

- Recommendations & Outcomes
  - Provide a formal Governance Plan for The Wilds Cooperative of PA that:
    - Addresses the goals of this project
    - Details qualitative and quantitative data
    - Provides an action plan for reaching goals and measuring performance
    - Includes images that reflect outreach completed
    - Includes graphics for easy digestion of concepts or recommendations
  - Make recommendations for toolboxes, new or upgraded platforms/channels, or human capacity needed to support an evolved governance structure.

Consultant will debrief with PA Wilds Center team following the completion of each phase of this project.

### **Consultant Requirements**

Consultant must:

- Be familiar with
  - The PA Wilds as a place and a regional strategy
  - Microsoft Suite and its companion tools in Google Drive
  - Client relationship management software
  - Running reports and interpreting data
  - Place-based rural economic development strategies
- Understand entrepreneurial spirit and thinking
- Participate in training and professional development opportunities offered by Center staff to become more informed about the nonprofit; its mission, programs and services; and its partnership network

### **Proposal Requirements**

Proposals will be accepted from individuals, organizations, and firms with experience supporting strategic planning and developing governance frameworks for complex partnership entities.

Proposals should cover and/or include the following:

- Cover Letter summarizing:
  - Why this project speaks to you personally or professionally;
  - Your qualifications and an overview of your experience, including results from similar projects, especially in rural communities; and
  - General description of your operation (do you have all of the required talent in-house or will you need to sub-contract), identification of who will be assigned as the lead in your organization for fulfilling the contract, and your mission statement (if applicable).
- Proposed Work Plan summarizing:
  - Your approach to managing this project, including budget scope, data, research, outreach, and evaluation methods;



- Your approach to allocating time to accomplish the project outcomes and availability to participate in routine meetings with project managers and stakeholders; and
- Major milestones within the contracting period which will inform review and feedback from PA Wilds Center and help shape the outputs, outcomes and final deliverables.
- Reference Materials
  - Provide 3-5 references who can speak to your services; and
  - Provide 3-5 detailed case studies or relevant evidence of past projects to demonstrate their impacts and sustainability.

### **Selection Criteria**

The PA Wilds Center will evaluate each proposal according to the criteria listed below, considering the information provided in the proposal, references, and any other information about the Consultant and its performance.

#### **Project Work Approach, Deliverables, And Organization (40 points)**

- Firm grasp of the project scope and objectives
- Quality and organization of response to proposed work program and proposed deliverables
- Quality of creative approach to the deliverables
- Organization and completeness of the response
- Writing skills, as shown through the submission and any other submitted work examples

#### **Related Experience, Work Examples, And Innovation (40 points)**

- Quality of submitted work examples
- Experience and demonstrated ability of consultant(s) in a multi-stakeholder planning process
- Past performance of consultant(s) on similar projects
- Demonstration of an innovative and high-quality approach to similar projects

#### **Cost (20 points)**

- Demonstration of successful budget performance and previous experience in meeting project budgets
- Description of the approach to budgeting

#### **Location (5 points)**

- Bonus points for PA-Wilds-based companies

Proposals that are not complete or do not meet requirements of this RFP may not be considered. PA Wilds Center reserves the right to request additional information, site visits, interviews or presentations, from one or more of the Consultants.

### **Submission Instructions**

Please email your proposal as a pdf attachment to [fellow@pawildscenter.org](mailto:fellow@pawildscenter.org) by COB June 7, 2024.

Thank you for your interest in responding to this RFP. We look forward to your response.