

## REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

### ALLEGHENY COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN

#### Purpose and Required Product

The Allegheny County Conservation District (ACCD) is soliciting proposals for the development of a three-year strategic plan. This 3-year plan should include a 15-month action plan and position the organization to successfully maintain sustainable funding. As such, the successful strategic plan consultant will explore how much momentum the current program strategy of the ACCD has; whether it is still relevant; and, whether it is financially sustainable. And what strategies need to be put in place to ensure program and financial success over the next three years.

#### Background

In 1945, the first districts were formed under the authority of the Conservation District Law (Act 217). On March 5, 1946, an Allegheny County resolution created the Allegheny County Soil Conservation District to be among the first in the state.

Act 217 established a broad mission and the tasked the state's conservation districts to "provide for the conservation of the soil, water, and related resources of this Commonwealth, and for the control and prevention of soil erosion and thereby to preserve natural resources; assist in the control of floods; prevent impairment of dams and reservoirs; assist in maintaining the navigability of rivers and harbors; preserve wildlife; preserve the tax base; protect public lands; and protect and promote the health, safety and general welfare of the people of the Commonwealth."

In the early years, ACCD worked hard to fulfill this important and broad mission, providing widely recognized leadership in addressing water and soil issues. In more recent years, the ACCD narrowed its focus to the processing of Chapter 102 Erosion and Sedimentation permits. However, beginning in 2009, an expanded focus and role was developed. In 2011, a new strategic plan was adopted with a vision statement of "the ACCD envisions an educated and engaged public, clean water and a sustainable future." The accompanying adopted mission statement was "the ACCD is an urban conservation district that engages and leads through partnerships, innovation, and implementation to conserve, promote and improve Allegheny County's natural resources."

To date, the ACCD has a staff of 19 and an annual budget of \$2.1M. Programming is in the areas of regulatory (Chapter 102 and 105 permitting), agriculture, watersheds and municipal stormwater management.



## Prior Strategic Plans and Work Accomplished

There are three relevant plans: Strategic Plan for the Allegheny Conservation District (January, 2011), ACCD Strategic Plan 2015-17 (October, 2015) and Strategic Plan 2018 Draft (not completed). These plans reflect a growth continuum of organizational development, right-sizing and finally being fully operational with a focus on community engagement and diversified funding.

The 2011 strategic plan is primarily an organizational blueprint for the repositioning of the organization. The 2015-17 strategic plan continues the repositioning of the organization via the expansion of staff, office relocation, the integration of disparate programs under the organizational banner of the conservation solution center and good fiscal management. The 2018 plan was not completed due to the unexpected departure of the Executive Director (due to illness) but a draft as well as findings of focus groups are available. The intent of the 2018 effort was to internally improve services, diversify funding as well as further engage partners and the community.

To assist the selected strategic planning consultant, a summary of these strategic plans has recently been drafted. This summary document is based on the review of all of the plans as well as input from the board and staff. It documents work accomplished and work not undertaken. Questions posed included: if staff and board were familiar with the plans; how the plans were used; whether all of the proposed work was undertaken and if not, why not; what was successfully implemented and if not successful, why not; what were the challenges in implementation; how performance was evaluated; and whether any capacity or funding issues were identified through implementation.

The engagement process used for the drafting of the summary document included interviews of representative staff as well as a board discussion on the draft content. Further, a joint board and staff meeting was held to receive input on the final summary document as well as questions to be addressed in the new strategic plan.

## Questions for New Strategic Plan

With the completion of the new strategic plan, the Executive Team and Board of Directors expect to have strategic direction in programming, capacity, funding, evaluation, messaging and marketing, and Board governance. In undertaking and completing the 3-year strategic plan and 15 to 18-month action plan, the following questions must be taken into consideration:

### *Overall*

- How much momentum does the current strategy (programs and funding) have? Is it relevant? Is it sustainable?



### *Programming*

- What are the emerging regional issues in soil and water? How does ACCD fit in the market place related to these issues? Is there a possible role in stormwater? Clarify the definition for our Stormwater work?
- Is there an unmet or competitive market niche for ACCD programming (both regulatory and non-regulatory)?
- Is this new market niche consistent with ACCD's state driven mission? If not, what are the consequences?
- Is ACCD meeting its mandated requirements per the delegation agreements? Are the PA contract dollars fiscally sustainable? What is the current relationship with DEP?
- How does ACCD benchmark with similar urban conservation districts in terms of budgets, staffing, fees, response time and other mandated requirements? Do these districts provide value added programming?

### *Capacity*

- Within all programming and regulatory offerings, are there capacity issues? If so, what are they?
- Does ACCD have the right talent on the bench? Are job descriptions and work plans in alignment with the strategic plan?
- What are the training needs within ACCD? How can a proactive training plan be operationalized annually?
- Does ACCD need a professional development plan? A staffing plan? A retention plan?

### *Funding*

- As ACCD moves forward, what is the sustainable funding mix?
- What are the opportunities for short- term funding and long- term funding?
- Are there emerging program opportunities? Are there emerging regulatory opportunities? Who are competitors? Who are collaborators?
- To support programming and regulatory activities, should revenue generating funding be shared to cover operations? If so, at what %, for how long and under what circumstance?
- Are there untapped foundation funding opportunities?
- Should the Allegheny Watershed Alliance (AWA) be positioned within ACCD. Should the AWA independently market itself, staff itself and fundraise? Is there any public or funding confusion with its relationship to ACCD
- Should it contribute as is, should it contribute to ACCD operations?
- Does ACCD need a supporting foundation and are AWA, Penn's Corner, RAIN the correct vehicles?

### *Evaluation*

- What kind of impact has ACCD had in the area of soils of water in the region? Is this impact documented? Are there opportunities? Are any changes needed?



- Is the organization tracking the right impacts metrics.

#### *Messaging/Marketing*

- What is ACCD's overall marketing strategy?
- Does ACCD have or need a singular brand identity?
- Does ACCD have the right marketing plan?
- Who are ACCD's constituencies? Is there a constituency for the overall organization?
- What is the elevator speech for the organization?
- Does ACCD have the correct technology to serve its needs? Could more simple cloud based systems assist ACCD meet its communications objectives in a more effective and cost friendly way.

#### *Board Function and Governance*

- Review best practices for ACCD Board of Directors and Associate Directors and recommend action or remediation plan, if needed.

#### Engagement

A robust engagement process is expected during the strategic plan process. The following individuals must be consulted: staff, board of directors, funders, clients, collaborators and competitors. In consultation with ACCD, the manner of the specific engagement outreach is up to the selected strategic plan consultant. This may include in-person and or telephone interviews, meetings, focus groups, and survey monkeys among other things. In terms of understanding opportunities and performance, some analysis on emerging and potential niche issues as well as benchmarking of similar organizations should be included.

#### Available Funding

\$25,000 is available for this effort by ACCD. If additional activities are deemed necessary, respondents should submit a supplementary narrative and budget on the anticipated value of the activity and the associated costs.

#### Submission Requirements

Any questions on this RFP should be directed via email to Heather Manzo, Executive Director, by August 30, 2019, with the subject line, 'RFP questions' at [hmanzo@accdpa.org](mailto:hmanzo@accdpa.org). Answers will be aggregated into one email and replies will be sent to all interested parties by August 4, 2019. Proposals for undertaking the strategic plan should be received via mail Friday September 13, 2019 at noon. Respondents should submit 5 printed copies of the proposal to: ACCD, c/o Heather Manzo, 33 Terminal Way suite 325b, Pittsburgh, PA 15219. Email submissions are not permitted.

