

## **Request for Proposals**

*"Finding a home for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Water Network"*

**Posted:** Monday, December 20, 2021

**Information Session:** Friday, January 7th, 2022 @ 10am

**Proposals due:** Tuesday, February 1, 2022

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Questions about the RFP and the selection process can be sent via this [Google Form](#). The point of contact for this process is Miriam Hacker, Water Center at Penn ([hackerm@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:hackerm@sas.upenn.edu)).

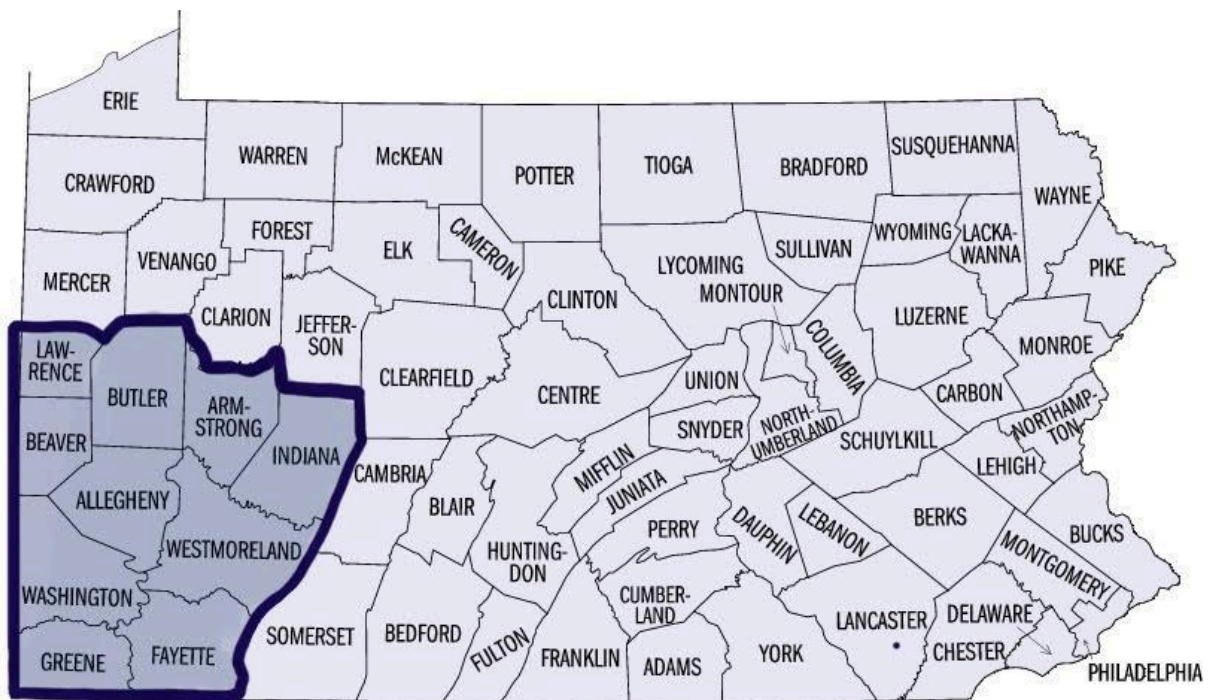
## Request for Proposals

### *“Finding a home for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Water Network”*

## Objective

For the past three years, local individuals and organizations involved with water resources and management in the Southwestern Pennsylvania region have collaboratively developed a water network to ensure that water resources are sustainably, equitably and collaboratively managed to protect public health and the environment, enhance community and system resilience, and deliver economic, ecological and social benefits for all people in the ten counties within the region (see Fig. 1). Currently, the SW PA Water Network has well over 170 individuals coming from over 65 organizations in the region to build a centralized network for open communication and knowledge exchange.

This request for proposals is to determine a host organization where the Southwestern Pennsylvania (SW PA) Water Network might live, to best enable the network in achieving its vision, purpose, and goals. This is to be done through a thorough, transparent process.



**Fig 1.** Current geographic boundaries of the SW PA Water Network. Source: FedStats, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

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### Host organization description

While the exact nature of the agreement between the host organization and the Network requires further discussion, an ideal host organization will likely include functions to support network activities such as member coordination and connections (e.g. managing some kind of online community platform), information sharing, coordinating workgroups and safe spaces for conversations, seeking funding, supporting onboarding of new members, and other tasks.

Specific scope for the host organization includes...

- **Role.**

The host organization <b><u>does</u></b> ...	The host organization <b><u>does not</u></b> ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Administer funding for SW PA Water Network</li><li>- Serve as the official employer for local coordinator</li><li>- Support ongoing development of network through insight, supportive guidance</li><li>- Provide operational support (e.g. email accounts, website, etc.)</li><li>- Encouraging creative freedom for the network to represent itself in communications materials, with space for guidance and collaboration/knowledge transfer</li><li>- Provide indirect support for securing ongoing funding to cover costs for maintaining the network operations</li><li>- Acknowledge the role of the local coordinator as a liaison rather than a key decision-maker</li><li>- Encourages open exchange of data and information within network (i.e. Strategic WG, members, coordinator) and host organization</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Serve as supervisor for local coordinator (Strategic WG does this)</li><li>- Determine the agency, scope, vision or direction of the SW PA Water Network (this has already been, and will continue to be decided by network members)</li><li>- Adjust the network to fit the host organization's organizational structure or mission</li><li>- Provide direct funding support for the network - this is the role of the Strategic Working Group and other network members to identify and pursue funding sources</li><li>- Necessarily provide physical space for the local coordinator and administrative staff, these positions may operate remotely</li></ul>

- **Posture.** The host organization will maintain a supportive posture, providing insight into decision-making while encouraging autonomy in network decision-making, keeping agency amongst network members and the Strategic Working Group. Key characteristics that is being sought in a host organization include:
  - Alignment and like-mindedness with the SW PA Water Network vision, purpose and goals
  - Interest in continuing to help connect the Network with organizations and funders in the region

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- **Operational capacity.** An ideal host organization will be in a financially and organizationally stable position to sufficiently support the longevity of the SW PA Water Network. Other operational capacity should include:
  - Communication support, such as development and support of website development and means for members to communicate
  - The host organization will provide indirect support as the Strategic Working Group and network members identify and pursue securing ongoing funding to cover costs for maintaining the network operations.
  - Provide technical assistance as it relates to water issues and the development of safe drinking water, economic development and recreation of the waters of Southwest PA

***PLEASE NOTE: Transitional funding (\$140,000) is available for a full-time local coordinator, part-time administrative staff, and direct expenses in the first year. Funding will be provided by the Heinz Endowments and administered through the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies.***

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# Background on the SW PA Water Network

## Origin

In late 2018, Heinz Endowments funded an initiative to work with local stakeholders in exploring challenges and opportunities related to the Three Rivers Watershed Regions. This very broad remit focused on talking to many people from a variety of sectors, reviewing many reports and prior efforts, and based on that, making a range of recommendations for a path forward. Due to the limited capacity of the network in the early stages of its development, the geographic scope has been limited to the ten counties highlighted in Figure 1. Network and Strategic Working Group members have expressed an interest to re-evaluate the geographic boundaries, but has chosen to postpone this conversation until the transition has started with the host organization selected through this process.

A network approach is being taken to form the SW PA Water Network, progressing through the following areas:

- **People** - *those who are involved in these efforts*. Members of the network have expressed a desire to create inclusive participation, representative of different geographies, stakeholder groups, and lived experiences.
- **Purpose** - *establishing a guiding vision and goals for the network*. The Strategic Working Group and the broader group of leaders in the SW PA Water Network recently developed a Vision/Purpose/Goals guiding document in 2021, detailing the ideal direction for the future network.
- **Process** - *who guides and who decides within this network*. A recommendation for the leadership structure of the network was developed to help support the recently developed vision, purpose, and goals.

## Network vision and purpose

Currently, the vision for the network is to ensure that water resources in SW PA are sustainably, equitably and collaboratively managed to protect public health and the environment, enhance community and system resilience, and deliver economic, ecological and social benefits for all people in the ten counties within the region.

The purpose of the SW PA Water Network connects diverse water stakeholders to develop and pursue a shared vision and attract increased resources, for improved integrated water management.

## Network goals

1. Building a regional identity for the headwaters of the Ohio River Basin.
2. Creating a safe, open and productive space for all regional water stakeholders to share water challenges and solutions, highlighting and socializing good practices, listening to

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diverse and historically underrepresented perspectives and identifying common ground on contentious issues.

3. Creating formal and informal forums and working groups to inform, leverage and amplify existing and future efforts, develop and implement a regional vision, and attract additional resources.
4. Be a central hub that connects people to water focused education, knowledge and resources, and that creates and maintains mechanisms for improved information and data sharing to support science-based decision making, prioritization of efforts, and shaping of the public narrative.

## Why a network approach?

In contrast to an organizational, project-based approach to the region's resources, the SW PA Water Network intentionally takes a network approach to achieve its vision, purpose, and goals.

Several critical aspects of how a network functions include:

- **Direction** - Vision, purpose, and goals are co-created by network members and evolves based on who is actively participating.
- **Strengths** - A successful network is built on trust and connection as a fundamental foundation of the work as well as open exchange of information.
- **Activities** - Experimenting with tools, platforms and approaches is critical to make sure the network follows the energy of the group and maintains momentum.
- **Decisions** - Hierarchy is avoided, with decisions made through collective input and consensus.

It is extremely important that the host organization recognizes and respects this network mindset and approach and should be demonstrated in the proposal.

## Network governance

Aligned with a network approach, input is received by all members of the network. Guidance for key directions is provided by the Strategic Working Group, with transparency and feedback from the broader network. These different roles include:

- **Strategic Working Group.** A group of 12-20 leaders from a broad range of backgrounds and demographics who help co-create the vision for the larger network, soliciting and organizing feedback and input from the broader group of leaders for decision-making.
- **Broader group of leaders.** An unlimited number of individuals participating in the water network. Involvement is flexible and can include participating with all-network meetings, or helping organize peer-led initiatives.
- **Coordinator.** A full-time, supportive liaison for the Strategic Working Group and broader group of leaders in pursuing the network's vision, purpose, and goals.

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### Network participation

The SW PA Water Network aims to create a space that is accessible for network members in a way that fits their capacity and interests. As such, participation in network activities can look like a number of things:

- 1) **All-network meetings.** *Frequency: 1-2 times/year.* Meetings are designed to build connections, gauge energy for specific water-related issues, assess network needs and shape the network's direction.
- 2) **Peer-led learning and/or informal networking sessions.** *Frequency: 5-9 times/year.* Sessions help members learn about specific water-related issues, meet and work with other leaders who have shared interest, and identify other resources and people who have expertise that will support on-going work.
- 3) **Working groups.** *Frequency: varies.* Initiated by network members, these are smaller working groups around specific water-related issues. Groups are project-based rather than ongoing with an indeterminate end-date.
- 4) **All-network surveys.** *Frequency: 3-4 times/year.* Surveys may be sent to members to gauge interest in certain issues and activities, or to provide an opportunity for members to give feedback on the direction of the network.

### Relevant documents

[Accelerating Transformational Change in Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Phase 1 Report](#)

[SW PA Water Network Overview](#)

[SW PA Water Network Vision, Purpose, and Goals](#)

[SW PA Water Network Leadership Structure](#)

[Southwestern Best Practices for the Creation and Maintenance of a Collaborative Water](#)

[Resource Network in SW PA](#)

[Pennsylvania Data Landscape Discussion Paper](#)

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### Submission information

#### Proposal Guidelines

Page limit: 20 pages

Formatting: 8.5" x 11", 1" margins, 12 size font, Word Document

[Submit your proposal using this link.](#)

Please provide a proposal document with the following sections included:

1. Cover sheet with organization information and point of contact for the selection process and confirmation of approval to submit by head of organization/entity
2. Motivation to submit a proposal
3. Prior experience with supporting a collaborative entity like a network, alliance or partnership, and or serving as a host or administrator for a network or project.
4. Organization background and alignment with RFP scope
  - a. History of your organization including mission, vision and guiding principles
  - b. Leadership structure/model
  - c. Describe your communication approach (both internally and externally with partner organizations)
  - d. Include number of employees that work remotely and explain communications
  - e. The SW PA Water Network plans to have one full-time local coordinator and one part-time staff person. After the initial transitional funding that has already been made available, will these individuals be employees of your organization or considered contract employees?
5. Prior involvement / knowledge of SW PA Water Network
  - a. List any other organizations that provide similar programs or services to your direct beneficiaries and describe how your program or service is different.
  - b. If you are a member of the network, how would you manage your participation in the network with your role as host organization? Do you see any conflicts of interest with your current involvement?
6. Developing a healthy relationship between the host organization and the SW PA Water Network
  - a. Based on the background information provided in this RFP, how do you see your organization engaging with the SW PA Water Network?
  - b. From your understanding of "hosting with autonomy", please provide information about how you envision the roles/interactions between the host organization, Strategic Working Group, and SW PA Water Network members.
  - c. Based on the information provided about the local coordinator's role, please detail how a local coordinator will integrate in your existing organizational environment.
7. Supplementary information
  - a. Financial information -- audits, 990s, other plans, as you feel is relevant to this proposal.



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- b. Given that the host organization will be administering funding for the Network, are there restrictions on the type of funding you are able to receive?
- c. References or case studies that demonstrate past success with hosting other entities. Please be sure to include a point of contact for the hosted entity, if applicable.

### Selection process timeline

- December 20 - Announce RFP
- January 7, 10 am - Information session
- February 1 - Proposals due
- February 18 - Finalists announced
- Week of February 28 - Group interviews with finalists and Strategic Working Group
- March 18 - Decision announced

### Evaluation criteria, by priority level

#### **High Priority**

- **Autonomy** - How much governance and decision making power will the network have if hosted/ absorbed by this organization? An organization that provides autonomy will...
  - Establish a relationship with the network that is supportive, not restrictive
  - Enable network members/leadership to make decisions with minimal external constraints
  - Give space for the network to operate freely in their established mission with minimal oversight
- **Costs** - Is this a low, medium or high cost option in terms of set up and ongoing operational costs? A host organization that meets this criteria will have...
  - Have minimal start-up costs associated with hosting the network
  - Support the network's operating costs, or offset them to some degree
- **Funding Opportunities** - How does the host organization impact the ability for the network to secure funding for programming and other costs? Ideally, a host organization will...
  - Provide indirect support for funding opportunities, potentially including joint proposals
  - View the network as an opportunity to expand the number of funding opportunities in the region, rather than a potential competitor.
- **Geographical coverage** - How much geographical overlap is there between this organization and that of the network members? An ideal host organization should have a broad area where they work to avoid the network being tied to a very specific area.
- **Level of interest** - How interested will the organization be in hosting the network? Ideally, a host organization will have...
  - Supportive enthusiasm without influencing the strategic direction of the network
  - A governing structure that is collectively supportive of the network's mission, beyond the enthusiasm of one individual

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- **Perceived neutrality** - How 'neutral' is this organization perceived to be in terms of its agenda/interests vis a vis that of the network? Ideally, the host organization is able to maintain a neutral perception with its relationship to the network.

#### **Medium Priority**

- **Experience/track recording of hosting other entities** - How much experience does this organization have in hosting other entities? What was the degree of success in previous hosting arrangements? Ideally, a host organization...
  - Has some previous success with hosting other entities
  - Is large enough to provide support, but not so large to compromise autonomy
  - Has an established and respected reputation in the region
- **Potential for conflict** - To what degree might conflicts arise around issues such as funding, advocacy, political engagement, etc.? Ideally, a host organization has a low or manageable potential for conflict with the network's vision, purpose, and goals..
- **Stability of organization** - How stable (financial/leadership etc) is this organization? An ideal host organization has stable funding sources and governance structure to ensure longevity of the network.

#### **Low Priority**

- **Expertise/capacity related to water** - To what degree does this option directly leverage water or related sector expertise? Ideally, a host organization will have some understanding of work within the water sector.