

# REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Strategic planning work with Shenango River Watchers.

Shenango River  
Watchers, Inc.

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### **Request for Strategic Planning Proposal**

#### ***1) Introduction, Summary & Organization Background***

Shenango River Watchers, Inc. (SRW) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization formed in 2001 to clean up, preserve and protect the environmental, scenic and recreational attributes of the 1,092 square mile Shenango River watershed. SRW is a membership organization that once had nearly 1,000 members. Recently, due to lack of oversight of the membership program, membership dropped to just 25. Board members are working to restore membership to its previous numbers, currently exceeding 280. The organization is volunteer driven with a moderately active board who oversees a part-time office assistant. There is currently minimal structure to the organization, and it lacks true board committees, policies and procedures. There has never been a strategic plan completed for the organization.

The organization holds cleanup days both by foot and by rivercraft four times a year. To date volunteers with SRW have picked up over 2.2 million pounds of litter and illegal dumping. Tire recycling days are held in the spring, through the years collecting over 100,000 tires and keeping them from being dumped in our watershed.

SRW hosts two paddle events each year, one in spring and one in fall. On average, 200 paddlers participate in each event. The events celebrate the 23-mile Pennsylvania State designated water trail and highlight some of the six canoe/kayak launches maintained by SRW.

This year, the organization also hosted a trail-running race, the first of its kind in Mercer County. This 10-mile trail run had 60+ participants, was well received and will now be an annual event. The race was run on the Shenango Trail, an 8.75-mile-long hiking trail along the Shenango River also maintained by a team of SRW volunteers. The trail is a multi-use trail, used for hiking, trail running, horseback riding and birdwatching. This year alone, over 1,300 people have used the trail. SRW also hosts hikes along the trail to showcase its history as part of the Erie Canal Extension, guided by local historians; a guided spring wildflower hike and a leisurely hike on National Take a Hike Day in November.

The organization had a period of undermanagement, and board members are ready to revitalize it and take it to the next level. A prestigious funder recently stepped forward and offered a grant to assist with organizational development, providing SRW with much-

needed resources to complete a strategic framework within which we can operate over the next ten years.

## **2) Project Scope or “Who Are We Looking For?”**

We are looking for a strategic consultant who has experience with watershed groups, grassroots organizations, and/or volunteer-led initiatives. The organization is currently facing several challenges:

- 1) Poor participation by some board members. The SRW board needs to be revitalized; we are looking for a consultant who can help us determine what needs we have related to building a strong, cohesive and diverse board.
- 2) The organization is stagnant. We feel the organization could become better stewards of the watershed with additional staff, possibly even an executive director. We cannot fund an executive director without having a strategic framework that informs that decision-making.
- 3) The organization has limited governance, policies and procedures.
- 4) The organization lacks a marketing and communications strategy. We struggle with how to engage our members and non-members.
- 5) The organization lacks committee structure.
- 6) There is only one part-time employee. She has no true direction and is doing her best to provide support to multiple board members.
- 7) The organization lacks a funding strategy. Currently there is only one fundraiser that supports the entire year’s operations with small fundraisers supplementing. This fundraiser is a 5K on Thanksgiving morning and is dependent upon weather.
- 8) The organization lacks a strategy for grants. When funding becomes available, we are scrambling to create projects for which we can request funds.
- 9) There is no strategy for the growth of the organization – how to add volunteers, committees, employees, etc.
- 10) The organization lacks an diversity, equity, inclusion plan and currently is not diverse in membership of the board or general members. We would like to learn how to incorporate diversity into our leadership and planning.
- 11) The organization has no data collection and interpretation plan and no ability to collect stories.
- 12) The organization’s webpage lacks presence and needs an overhaul.
- 13) The organization does not publish annual reports.

Ideally, we would like our strategic plan to span 5-10 years. We would like to start the planning process in May and have allotted up to 8 months. The strategic plan must be user friendly for volunteers of all ages and should not be “cookie-cutter.”

We hope our consultant will be fun, creative and will “think-outside-the-box.” We are open to a consultant who uses new tools and analysis methods. We would enjoy a consultant who will work with our board, key members, and will include our membership and external stakeholders in the planning as much as possible. We would be open to a single-day board retreat format, or a series of shorter meetings. We hope for a set of guardrails that includes operational plans within which to grow the organization and are looking to the consultant to bring your expertise to help us achieve the best results.

### ***3) Timeline***

We would like to begin our strategic planning in May, once we find out the grant has been awarded. Because April begins our busy season of cleanups, tire recycling and paddle events, we are hoping to have a small group of dedicated volunteers/board members who will be the point of contact for most decision-making related to the planning, with larger decisions being escalated to the full board. With the planning potentially ending in December, it will allow us a few weeks during the month of December to allow for time with the full board.

### ***4) Application and Selection Process***

A committee is available to meet to answer any questions you might have prior to submitting your proposal. Please submit a proposal with estimated costs, breakdown of anticipated invoicing, and including travel if necessary. Please keep your proposal to under 10 pages and share your possible strategic models with us. We would be interested in seeing a summary of any planning you have completed with other watershed or grassroots environmental groups. We would prefer three referrals and have an ability to call each referral.

**Please submit your proposal to: Shenango River Watchers, 730 Forker Blvd. Hermitage, PA 16148, on or before January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025; or by email to [shenangoriverwatchers@gmail.com](mailto:shenangoriverwatchers@gmail.com). We can also be reached at 724-342-5453.**