

## Sharpening Your Project Focus: Tips for More Competitive Proposals

Competition for Gateways Grants grows keener each year. To further assist you in developing effective proposals, we are providing information here to illustrate (using recently funded projects) how your project might most effectively compete for financial assistance this year.

In 2009, we will **ONLY** accept grant proposals in four categories (indicated below in bold italics), so your proposals must be very strategically targeted. Further, all proposals will be judged most competitive when they:

- Support multiple Network goals; for example:
  - a stewardship project that has an interpretive component;
  - an access enhancement project that is constructed by volunteers; or
  - a project to develop a new segment of water trail that will be a contributing segment of the CAJO and/or STSP
- Enhance the Gateways and Watertrails Network as a whole; for example:
  - Cooperative project proposals that involve multiple Gateways in development and implementation to build working relationships;
  - projects that have clear demonstration value for other Gateways; or
  - products that are transferable or easily customized for use by other Gateways
- Directly involve citizen volunteers in project development and implementation to build their understanding and appreciation of Chesapeake Bay resources and stewardship.
- Include specific objectives to “green” the project, such as developing environmentally sensitive designs, incorporating low impact development approaches (e.g., incorporating green roofs and rain gardens, reducing impervious surfaces, etc.), incorporating eco-friendly materials into structural elements of your project, and using green procurement practices (e.g., buying recycled and recyclable materials and/or recycling existing materials for use in your project).
- Offer a significant leveraging of Federal funds in excess of the minimum qualifying requirement of a 1:1 non Federal match

To further sharpen your thinking and to help you determine the competitive advantages for projects you are considering, we have listed a few examples (each a recently funded project) that would be responsive to this year’s priorities. Each example includes notes on competitive advantages these sample projects would have for this year’s competition.

***Projects that promote a broadly applicable stewardship ethic and actively foster citizen stewardship of the Chesapeake.***

*What kinds of projects are eligible?*

- Projects that demonstrate and promote exemplary conservation stewardship and sustainability and serve as models for others to follow.
- Restoration, conservation and preservation projects that incorporate and build on-going volunteer/visitor involvement.
- Interpretive or educational programming at sites that provide visitors with information on their role in Chesapeake stewardship.

*Project Examples:*

A project at the **Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center** educates visitors on ways to reduce the use of natural resources through green home building and conservation landscaping. Visitors see functioning low impact designs, and environmentally friendly products and systems in use in the new educational center that are available to private citizens/homeowners. In addition on-site interpretive signage, “take home” materials inform visitors on actions they can take at home. The Center's staff and docents were trained in how to interpret their stewardship efforts.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—a stewardship project with a strong interpretative component.
- Directly involved citizen volunteers to expand the network of stewardship advocates
- Incorporated eco-friendly materials into the design and construction of the Educational Center.
- Stewardship “take homes” to help transfer ideas for home use

The **Virginia Living Museum** developed a "green" house exhibit center with surrounding “Bayscapes” habitat garden. The exhibit showcases a living (plant covered) green roof, rain barrels, renewable energy options, low energy light fixtures, environmentally-friendly building materials and a computer kiosk to calculate one's environmental "footprint." The garden displays options for homeowners to create a more environmentally-friendly yard. This project uses environmental information and interactive displays to encourage citizen stewardship.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Interpretation focused on promoting citizen stewardship options.
- Use of eco-friendly materials in the exhibit construction.
- “Stewardship “take homes” to help empower individual action
- Also, the project wasn't simply matched but was used as leverage in a capital fundraising campaign for the museum

***Projects that clearly aid in telling your Gateway's part of the Chesapeake Bay story.***

*What kinds of projects are eligible?*

- Planning projects that help new or developing Gateways evaluate and establish thematic priorities, visitor experience objectives and interpretive techniques for connecting their resources and stories into the larger context of the Chesapeake Bay.
- Clearly defined products (especially ones prioritized in an interpretive plan) that help people understand how your Gateway relates to the Chesapeake Bay.

*Project Examples:*

The **Adkins Arboretum** undertook a comprehensive interpretive planning program to evaluate how to integrate the most effective and measurable messaging of Bay stewardship. The project involved the public and volunteers, staff and consultants, and utilized visitor surveys, program evaluations, workshops and program testing. The results guided visitor experience, education and interpretation objectives in the visitor center, on the grounds and in their outreach programs.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—comprehensive interpretation focused on Chesapeake stewardship
- Project involved staff and site volunteers to build buy in for follow-up and implementation
- Note: A follow-up component provided training for volunteer docents to assist them in mastering techniques for interpreting their sites and linking their resources to the Chesapeake Bay. This training was offered to other Gateways and organizations on Maryland's Eastern Shore to strengthen their programs and build regional partnerships.

**Trap Pond State Park** is creating an in-depth exhibit development plan for the revitalization of the Baldcypress Nature Center. The Center is the central educational hub for the park interpreting the cultural and natural heritage of Trap Pond and exploring the changing relationships of people within the Chesapeake Bay watershed to the environment. The interpretive intent is to promote citizen stewardship of the Chesapeake and Delaware water resources.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—comprehensive interpretation focused on Chesapeake stewardship

This **Susquehanna River Water Trail** in Pennsylvania is working on the implementation of a unified signage and branding system. In the first stage of the project, an Interpretive Master Plan, emphasizing the natural, cultural and stewardship components of the water trail, is being completed to strengthen the relationship between the river, its communities and the Chesapeake Bay. A thorough evaluation of existing interpretive and orientation signage has been conducted to guide appropriate revisions to additional signage at water trail access points.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supports the development of the water trail through both access and interpretive enhancements.
- Involve multiple Gateway water trails in the development and implementation of a unified signage program
- The evaluation of the existing interpretive and orientation signage will yield information useful for guiding the development of signage at other water trails throughout the Network.

***Projects to further the development and sustainability of water trails throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.***

*What kinds of projects are eligible?*

- Projects that help developing water trails fulfill baseline developmental needs (including a complete map & guide, safety and orientation signage at access points and sufficient access points and services for anticipated visitor use).
- Projects that incorporate and build on-going volunteer/visitor involvement, particularly in restoration, conservation and preservation of the water trail.
- Projects that create innovative and substantial interpretation conveying the route's themes and drawing clear relationships to the Chesapeake Bay and its watershed.

*Project Examples:*

The **Susquehanna River Water Trail – West Branch** is developing a Stewardship and Conservation Plan for their water trail. The project is identifying needed access sites and facilities (camping sites, rest areas and signage) and creating a checklist / evaluation form for prioritizing facilities and long-term maintenance needs. Trail partners are helping to develop the stewardship plan which will provide guidance, using site-specific examples, for volunteers/organizations taking part in restoration, conservation and preservation activities on the water trail.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—advancing the development of a water trail and engaging citizen volunteers in project development and implementation and on-going trail stewardship
- Project will have demonstration value for other Gateways water trails

The Friends of the Rappahannock are currently developing a management plan to further the sustainability of the **Rappahannock River Water Trail** with a central focus on fostering citizen stewardship of the river. They are developing three volunteer stewardship programs for controlling litter, managing the river's riparian buffer and controlling invasive plants.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—advancing the development of a water trail

- and fostering Chesapeake stewardship
- Directly involving citizen volunteers in stewardship activities to build their understanding and appreciation of Chesapeake Bay resources and stewardship.
- Litter clean-up, riparian buffering and invasive species control projects are “greening” the water trail.
- Project will have demonstration value for other Gateways and water trails

The James River Association is leading a **James River Water Trail** Stewardship Planning and Educational Outreach project to further development of the water trail through interpretive education programs, conservation analysis and outreach to landowners along the trail route. The Association will also develop and conduct education trips on different sections of the trail to interpret the themes of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Supported multiple Network goals—advancing the development of a water trail through both interpretation and stewardship
- Also advancing the development of the Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT
- Outreach to landowners along the water trail to involve them in trail conservation and stewardship

***Projects to improve access, interpretation and education at Gateways along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historical Trail (CAJO) or the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail (STSP).***

*What kinds of projects are eligible?*

- Access to resources on the historic routes; including
  - Land to water and water to land access
  - Waterfront recreational features
  - Walking trails or driving loops to land-based resources (including but not limited to Gateways)
- Interpretive or educational programming at sites that are on the routes or near the routes.

*Project Examples:*

The **Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)** in partnership with the James River Association developed “Captain John Smith's Adventures on the James River”—a water trail and driving tour interpreting Smith's exploration of the James from 1607 to 1609. This trail project, encompassing many Gateway sites as project partners, placed interpretive signage at 15 sites and directional signage at 33 sites to improve accessibility for visitors and tourists.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- Enhancement of a Gateways water trail as a contributing segment of the CAJO, including enhancement of both access and interpretation.
- Strengthening Network partnerships through inclusion of 15 Gateways sites in

project development and implementation

**First Landing State Park, Chippokes Plantation State Park, Kiptopeke State Park & York River State Park** in Virginia are collaborating on a project to promote recreation and stewardship along the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. The project will develop new interpretive signage comparing and contrasting the ecological history of the Chesapeake Bay and river watersheds. The project will also provide teacher training and field-based educational experiences for students, as well as public "paddlefests" to promote safe, responsible boating access to the Bay.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- This project promotes Chesapeake Bay stewardship and strengthens access and interpretation along the developing Captain John Smith Chesapeake NHT.
- The project also has involved four Virginia state park Gateways in project development and implementation, thereby strengthening their working relationships and connections to the Gateways Network.

The Maryland Office of Tourism Development is leading development of an Interpretation, Access and Stewardship Plan for the **Star-Spangled Banner Trail**. This planning project, being pursued in partnership with a number of Gateways along the trail corridor, will identify and prioritize interpretive, access and stewardship projects for water trail segments of the Star-Spangled Banner National Historic Trail.

*Competitive Advantages:*

- The project is advancing development of the Star-Spangled Banner NHT.
- The project addresses access, interpretation and resource stewardship.
- The project has also involved multiple Gateways in the planning effort—strengthening their working relationships and connections to the Network.