



Request for Proposals (RFP) Strategic Planning Facilitation Services

Issued by:

Chicago Wilderness Alliance (CWA)
chicagowilderness.org

Laura Reilly, Managing Director
Elizabeth S. Kessler, Chair

Submission Deadline: November 26, 2025, 5 p.m.

1. Overview

The Chicago Wilderness Alliance (CWA) invites proposals from qualified consultants or firms to facilitate and guide the Alliance through a comprehensive Strategic Planning process beginning in January 2026, with completion by October 2026. The resulting plan will be launched and presented to partners at the Alliance's 30th Anniversary - 2026 Congress (scheduled for November 6, 2026).

The Strategic Plan will serve as a roadmap to guide CWA's collaborative conservation initiatives, partnership priorities, and organizational structure for the next 5–10 years.

2. About the Chicago Wilderness Alliance

The Chicago Wilderness Alliance (CWA) is a regional coalition of public agencies, nonprofit organizations, research institutions, corporations, and community partners working together to sustain and restore nature and people across the greater Chicago Wilderness region—encompassing northeast Illinois, southeast Wisconsin, northwest Indiana, and southwest Michigan.

Rooted in collaboration and guided by science, the CWA unites partners to turn shared conservation priorities into lasting regional impact. From restoring prairies and wetlands that strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience, to connecting communities with nature through education, stewardship, and equitable access to open space, the Alliance translates vision into action.

Over the past three decades, CWA and its partners have advanced a series of transformative initiatives, including the Biodiversity Recovery Plan (1999), Green Vision

Infrastructure (2004; updated 2012), Climate Action Plan for Nature (2010; currently being updated as Climate Action for People and Nature), Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights (2011), Excellence in Ecological Restoration Site Certification Program (2012), Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan (2015), Native Landscape and Ecological Restoration Guide (2016), Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan (2024), Geo-Spatial Data HUB, the first Native-Led Climate Summit (2025) and regional online Equity Training and Resources.

In addition to these strategic frameworks, CWA partners have contributed to on-the-ground conservation successes—supported by voter-approved referenda and national models of large-landscape collaboration, such as the establishment of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Conservation Action Planning in the Calumet Region. Together, these efforts continue to shape a more resilient, connected and equitable natural landscape for the region.

3. Purpose of the Strategic Planning Process

CWA seeks a skilled facilitator or facilitation team to:

- Guide the Alliance through an inclusive, transparent, and actionable strategic planning process.
- Engage Steering Committee, Green Vision Initiative (GVI) Working Groups/Teams Executive Council, and Alliance Partners in identifying shared goals, priorities, and governance framework. Align the Alliance’s mission and structure with evolving regional conservation challenges and opportunities.
- Assist partners in identifying and creating an actionable plan for one to three large-scale regional initiatives that are both ambitious and achievable.
- Produce a clear, inspiring, and implementable Strategic Plan to be endorsed and launched at the 2026 Congress on November 6, 2026.

4. Budget

CWA has allocated \$15,000 to support this strategic planning process. Proposers should present a cost-effective and transparent budget that reflects the scope of work, schedule and desired outcomes.

5. Scope of Work

The selected consultant will be responsible for designing and implementing a participatory planning process that incorporates the following phases and deliverables.

In the proposal, consultant(s) should clearly outline:

- What services and deliverables are included within their proposed fee and timeline.
- Any services or tasks that would be considered à la carte, including estimated costs or hourly rates for those items.
- Any information, data, or resources needed from CWA to successfully complete the work.

- Whether the consultant(s) can provide all aspects of the scope as outlined, and if not, what modifications or support would be required.

Phase 1: Preparation & Discovery (January-March 2026)

- Review existing Chicago Wilderness Alliance materials, previous strategic plans, reports, and institutional documents.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews and/focus groups with audiences including funders Steering Committee members, and regional leaders.
- Analyze and summarize findings from both qualitative and quantitative engagement efforts to inform subsequent planning phases.

Phase 2: Facilitation & Engagement (April-June 2026)

- Facilitate a series of workshops and meetings with:
 - Strategic Planning Steering Committee
 - Green Vision Initiative (GVI) Working Groups/Teams
 - Alliance Partners (Executive Council)
- Guide discussions on priorities and measurable goals across (short-, mid-, long-term horizons (3-, 5-, and 10- year timeframes).
- Synthesize input into emerging themes, strategic directions, and frameworks.

Phase 3: Plan Development & Finalization (July-October 2026)

- Draft and refine the Strategic Plan in collaboration with the Steering Committee and Executive Council.
- Present a near-final draft for partner review and feedback.
- Deliver final plan to Steering Committee by October 9, 2026, ready for presentation at the November 2026 Congress.

Deliverables

- Detailed project work plan and timeline.
- Written statistical survey instrument, analysis and summary report.
- Summary of stakeholder engagement findings.
- Draft and final versions of the Strategic Plan.
- Facilitation materials, meeting summaries, and documentation of the process.

6. Desired Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience facilitating strategic planning for nonprofit, networked, or alliance-based organizations (preferably in the environmental or conservation sector).

- Strong background in stakeholder engagement, consensus-building, and collaborative governance.
- Familiarity with regional conservation planning, equity in nature access, and climate resilience topics.
- Excellent communication, writing, and presentation skills.
- Ability to work effectively with diverse partners and across organizational boundaries.

7. Project Timeline

Milestone	Target Date
RFP Released	October 23, 2025
Proposals Due	November 26, 2025, 5:00 p.m.
Consultant Selected	December 19, 2025
Project Kickoff	January 2026
Phase 1: Preparation & Discovery	January–March 2026
Phase 2: Facilitation & Engagement	April–June 2026
Phase 3: Plan Development & Finalization	July–October 2026
Draft Plan Presentation to Steering Committee	Summer 2026
Final Plan Presented to Steering Committee	October 14, 2026
Final Plan Approval by Executive Council	October 21, 2026
Public Launch at Congress	November 6, 2026

8. Proposal Requirements

Proposals should include the following components:

1. Cover Letter summarizing your understanding of the project, your approach, and why your team is well-suited.
2. Proposed Work Plan and Methodology (including key milestones and engagement approach).
3. Qualifications and Experience (including bios/resumes of key team members).
4. Relevant Project Examples (up to 3 recent strategic planning projects, especially in collaborative or conservation settings).
5. Budget and Fee Structure (include hourly or daily rates, estimated hours, travel, and other anticipated expenses).
6. References (minimum of three).

9. Submission Instructions

Please submit proposals electronically in PDF format to:

LReilly@chicagowilderness.org

Subject line: CWA Strategic Planning Facilitation Proposal – [Your Organization's Name]

Submission Deadline: November 26, 2025, 5 p.m.

Questions regarding this RFP may be directed to:

Laura Reilly, Managing Director, LReilly@chicagowilderness.org - 312.282.0481

Elizabeth S. Kessler, Chair, EKessler@MCCDistrict.org - 815.338.6223

10. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- Demonstrated understanding of CWA's mission and collaborative structure.
- Quality and clarity of proposed methodology.
- Experience and success with similar facilitation or strategic planning efforts.
- Cost effectiveness and value.
- References and past performance.