**2025-2026 Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation**

**Mini-Grant Funding**

**Overview and Application**





**SECTION 1: OVERVIEW**

**Important Dates**

**Application Deadline:** November 21, 2025

**Grant Awards Announced:** February 2026

**Purpose:**

As part of the Community Conservation Partnership Program (C2P2), Rivers of Steel’s Mini–Grant program will assist heritage-related sites and organizations, as well as municipalities and counties, within our heritage area borders. The Mini-Grants may be used to develop new and innovative programs, partnerships, exhibits, tours, and other initiatives that are consistent with the regional themes and activities suggested in our Management and/or Journey Area Plans. We encourage mini-grant proposals that will**:**

* Increase heritage tourism,
* conduct historic preservation,
* develop interpretation or exhibits,
* include collaborative partnerships, and
* involve stewardship of natural resources

**Eligibility:**

Nonprofit organizations with tax-exempt status 501(c)(3) (which MUST also be registered with the Pennsylvania Bureau of Charitable Organizations), municipalities, and counties are all eligible for the Mini-Grant program. All projects must be within Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Washington, or Westmoreland County and have a significant connection to the mission of Rivers of Steel.

Grant requests for a minimum of $1,000 to a maximum of $25,000 will be considered, but most past grants have averaged between $8,000 - $10,000. Applicants must match (at a 1:1 ratio) these funds with additional funding and/or pre-approved eligible non-cash (in-kind/volunteer) services.

***Note:*** The Mini-Grant Program is funded through a DCNR, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation grant in partnership with Rivers of Steel. ROS invites proposals that increase heritage tourism, conduct historic preservation, develop interpretation or exhibits, include collaborative partnerships, and involve stewardship of natural resources.

**For questions about this application or the review process contact:**

Ryan Henderson, Interpretive Specialist and Grant Writer

Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation

rhenderson@riversofsteel.com

**Proposal Review: Process and Criteria**

Applications are reviewed by a program committee made up of Rivers of Steel board members, staff, and the DCNR Regional Advisor. The program committee reserves the right to request additional information to supplement a submitted application as needed.

***Applicants must be available to make live presentations via Zoom or a similar application to the program committee regarding their projects. Presentation dates will be announced in advance of the selected dates, most likely occurring in mid to late January.***

Applications are ranked using the following criteria:

**Criteria A: Detailed and Complete Project Narrative**

25 points—Project description, deliverables, objectives, and timeline / scope-of-work are described with sufficient detail to demonstrate that the project is feasible and achievable within the project dates (January 2026 – March 31, 2027). Priority will be given to projects that are ready to go, have matching funds secured, and can begin rapidly once awards are made.

**Criteria B: Budget**

20 points—The project budget clearly demonstrates the total project cost, the source(s) of matching funds, and the requested grant amount and how these funds will be expended. Projects with match funding that are firmly secured as of the application deadline will rank higher than projects with undetermined or unknown funding. Refer to the DCNR Community Conservation and Partnership Program match guidelines. [Click Here for Guidelines](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1739118&DocName=Partnership%20eligible%20and%20ieligible%20costs%20policy%20final)

**Criteria C: Alignment with Heritage Tourism Development**

20 points—**Advances Mission and Goals**—Relates to projects and areas of interest identified by the [Rivers of Steel’s Management Action Plan](https://riversofsteel.com/_uploads/files/final-ros-map-update.pdf), the [Journey Area Descriptions](https://riversofsteel.com/exploring-the-heritage-area/), the [Statewide Historic Preservation Plan](https://www.pa.gov/content/dam/copapwp-pagov/en/phmc/documents/preservation/preservation-plan/documents/historic%20preservation%20the%20keystone%20of%20community%20pa%20statewide%20plan%202025-2035.pdf) and/or [DCNR’s 2025-2029 Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan.](https://www.pa.gov/agencies/dcnr/recreation/pa-outdoor-rec-plan)

15 points—**Partner Collaboration**—Project builds and sustains collaboration; more weight will be given to collaborative projects that engage diverse partners.

**Criteria D: Project Outcomes**

20 points—Project completion produces measurable outcomes or creates measurable opportunities; quantifiable metrics should be identified to evaluate success in the short and long term.

**SECTION 2: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Who can apply?**

Municipalities, municipal agencies, counties, academic institutions, and authorized nonprofit organizations are all eligible applicants. Organizations must be both tax-exempt under Section 501(c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code and **must be registered with the PA Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations at the time of application.**

**May we use a fiscal sponsor?**

Yes. In the case that the applicant organizaiton does not meet the above eligibility requirements, a fiscal sponsor that does may apply on their behalf. This organization must meet the above criteria. **Please note: no grant or match funds may be used to pay any administrative fees related to a fiscal sponsor.**

**When is the deadline for the application?**

Applications must be submitted no later than 5:00 p.m. EDT on November 21st, 2025. Grant award decisions will be announced in February 2026.

**What are the Grant request limits?** Applicants may submit proposals that range in size from a minimum of $1,000 to a maximum of $25,000. Applicants should note that most past grants have averaged between $8,000 – $10,000, and that awards have been granted at a dollar amount lower than the proposed ask.

**What kinds of projects are eligible?**

All projects must be located within Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Washington, or Westmoreland County and have a significant connection to the mission of Rivers of Steel. Projects funded as part of the 2025/26 grant cycle must close out by March 31, 2027.

**What kinds of projects are not funded?** Mini-grants may not be used to cover the costs of events, festivals, and/or other similar activities. Funds may also not be used to cover direct personnel or operating costs, although these expenses, if directly related to the project, may be used as a match. Contact Rivers of Steel with any questions.

**Who decides what applications are awarded funding?**

A program committee of Rivers of Steel Board Members and the DCNR Regional Advisor review and rank the proposals. Priority will be given to applicants that have their match funding in place.

**Should I contact the Rivers of Steel Heritage Area to let them know I will be applying?**

*Yes, you are highly encouraged* to contact Rivers of Steel to discuss your application before you submit it. You can reach out to Ryan Hendersonby e-mail at rhenderson@riversofsteel.com. **Note: there will be an Applicant Workshop held via Zoom on Wednesday, October 29, 2025 from 11:00 – 12:00 AM. The application forms, budget sheets and attachments, as well as grant guidelines will be reviewed and prospective applicants' questions will be answered. Applicants are strongly encouraged to attend, as one-to-one discussions are not guaranteed depending upon the applicant pool.**

**Does this Grant program require a match?**

Yes. A 1:1 match is required. For example, if a $2,500 mini-grant is awarded, there must be an additional $2,500 in match funds for a total of $5,000 in expenses.

**When do we need to have the cash match available?**

Your cash should be in hand OR have a firm commitment from the funding source when you list the match on your grant application. Unsourced cash match will negatively impact scoring.

**Your grant application MUST include a letter of commitment from all project match providers that clearly indicates their funding support for the project match or a plan for how the remaining match funds will be obtained.** Applicants should expect to expend match funds first.

**Can a non-cash match be used?**

Yes. With pre-approval, a non-cash match may include donated materials, professional services, volunteer time, etc., **but it must be detailed in the submitted application.**

**Can I match the Mini-Grant to a DCNR grant?**

No. The Mini-Grant program is funded through a DCNR funding source, and organizations cannot match DCNR funds to DCNR funds. Funds can be matched with private donations, federal grants, and some state grants (including DCED, PCA, PHC, PHMC). If unsure about match eligibility, contact Rivers of Steel.

**If awarded a Grant, how much money would we get up front?**

Match funds must be spent first. Rivers of Steel will then reimburse expenses with grant funds when the paid invoices and canceled checks are submitted.

**When and how will my organization be reimbursed if awarded?**

All reimbursements must first be evaluated to ensure eligible spending and proper financial proof, and given approval for reimbursement. Following approval, grantees can expect to receive a check by mail within 30 days. Please bear in mind that this grant requires 1:1 match spending for all reimbursed funds. **Please ensure that this process will work for your organization’s cash flow.**

**What are the terms and conditions of the grant agreement if I am awarded a Grant?**

Mini-Grant funds are provided by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) as part of the Heritage Areas Program Fund. Rivers of Steel is the grant administrator but requires recipients to comply with the standard DCNR terms and conditions. Please see the [DCNR non-discrimination/sexual harrassment clause](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1738778&DocName=Nondiscrimination%20-%20Sexual%20Harassment%20Clause.docx).

Rivers of Steel requires quarterly reporting to ensure that projects are proceeding in accordance with the timeline described in the application. **If a grantee’s project does not have forward progress following six months, Rivers of Steel may withdraw funds.**

**SECTION 3: TIMELINE AND CHECKLIST**

Note: Items in red are to be completed by the applicant and items in gray are to be completed by Rivers of Steel Mini-Grant Committee.

**October 2025**

 ☐ Grant Applicants Workshop via Zoom, October 29, 2025 at 11:00 AM

**November 2025**

 ☐ Applicants must submit grant application no later than November 21st, 2025, at 5:00 p.m.

**January 2026**

 ☐ Applicants will be required to make a presentation of their grant projects to the program

 Committee, likely mid-month.

 ☐ The program committee may follow up with applicants to clarify items on applications

 and will deliberate on awards and submit its recommendations to DCNR

 ☐ Final awards are determined

 ☐ Award letters or letters of non-award sent out to all applicants

 ☐ ROS drafts Grant Agreements based on applications

 ☐ ROS meets with grantees via phone to review agreement, explain terms and

 conditions, and discuss any further concerns

 ☐ ROS finalizes grant agreements and sends to grantee both in hardcopy and email

 ☐ Agreement signature page **must** be signed and sent to ROS before any grant funds

 may be disbursed

**February/March 2026**

 ☐ Grantee begins implementation of project (as soon as grant agreement is executed)

 ☐ **Project expenses are eligible for reimbursement once the grant contract is**

 **signed and executed**

 ☐ Grantee installs signage at the project site as per agreement, if applicable

 Funder acknowledgements must be approved by ROS before production

 ☐ Grantee sends ROS invoice and canceled checks when expenses are incurred and

 paid by the grantee

 ☐ Grantee **must** issue a press release about project and copy ROS on said press release

 noting acknowledgment requirements for both ROS and DCNR

**February/March through Duration of Grant**

 ☐ **Grantee MUST initiate project by 7/31/2026 or potentially forfeit mini-grant**

 ☐ Grantee maintains records on all invoices, copies of canceled checks and time spent

 on project, including partner matches

**Project Close-out (Must be on or before March 31, 2027)**

 ☐ Grantee must coordinate a press release or event with project completion

 ☐ Grantee must fill out project closeout form which includes detailed reporting on:

* Direct project expenses and time invoices
* Project Accomplishments Report

 ☐ Grantee submits final invoice

**APPLICATION FOR THE 2023 RIVERS OF STEEL**

**MINI-GRANT FUNDING**

**Deadline: November 7, 2025**

Please complete these sections and submit the completed application electronically **(in a Word-compatible format, NO PDFs)** to Ryan Henderson at Rivers of Steel at rhenderson@riversofsteel.com.

Please do not deviate from this template or alter its current format. Additional attachments will only be accepted with prior approval of the grant administrator.

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**SECTION I: APPLICATION OVERVIEW**

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| **APPLICANT INFORMATION** |
| **Organization Name:**  |
| **Address:**  |
| **Executive Director:** |
| **Project Manager/Contact Person:**  |
| **EIN:** | **BCO Registration #: Expires on:** |
| **Email address:**  | **Phone Number:** |
| **Organization Mission:** |
| **Brief Organization Description (250 words):** |
| **Total Organizational Budget (most recently completely fiscal year):** |
|  |
| **PROJECT INFORMATION** |
| **Project Title:** |
| **Project Site Address:** |
| **Mini-Grant Request: $** | **Project County:** |
| ***Total Project Budget:***  | **Anticipated Project Start Date:** |
| **U.S. Congressional District:** | **Anticipated Project Completion Date:** |
| **PA Senate District:** | **PA House District:** |
| **COLLABORATION INFORMATION** |
| **ONLY list those project partners that are directly involved in providing cash or in-kind match. Use a separate sheet for additional partners. Letters of support (pdf required) for each should be attached to the application.** |
| Organization Name: |
| Contact Person:Phone Number: Email Address: |  |
| Organization Name: |
| Contact Person:Phone Number:Email Address: |  |

**SECTION II: PROJECT NARRATIVE**

**SECTION II-A – BRIEF PROJECT DESCRIPTION.** Briefly (100 words or less) describe the proposed project.

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| **SECTION II-A** | **Answer:**  |

**SECTION II-B – FINAL PROJECT DELIVERABLES and PROJECT OBJECTIVES.** (500 words or less) Identify the direct deliverables of the project, as well as how these deliverables may translate into advancing larger, longer-term objectives.

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| **SECTION II-B** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION II-C – PROJECT TIMELINE AND SCOPE OF WORK**. (500 words or less) Outline the anticipated scope of work for completion of the project in a clear, step-by-step manner. Each step in the scope of work should be listed in chronological order, with a targeted completion date (specific only to the month level) identified for each step. A thorough timeline and scope of work will clearly communicate that the proposed project is ready to go. Be aware that work should begin before 7/31/25 or award may be forfeit.

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| **SECTION II-C** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION II-D – BUDGET JUSTIFICATION.** (500 words or less**)** Use this section to further describe budgeted amounts, how you arrived at the amount or estimated needs, and list details like hourly rates, cost per unit, etc. Also indicate how the project – if ongoing – will be sustained after the end of the grant period.

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| **SECTION II-D** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION III: BUDGET**

**PLEASE USE THE EXCEL SPREADSHEET TO COMPLETE THE BUDGET PORTION OF THIS REQUEST.**

**SECTION IV: ALIGNMENT WITH THE HERITAGE AREA**

**SECTION IV-A – CONNECTION TO RIVERS OF STEEL MISSION.** Describe how the proposed project advances the mission and goals of the Rivers of Steel. (500 words or less)

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| **SECTION IV-A** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION IV-B – PARTNER COLLABORATION.** Explain how collaborating partners will participate in the project. Partner actions should be described here with sufficient detail so that we can clearly understand each partner’s match (as identified in Section III-B)[[1]](#footnote-1). (500 words or less)

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| **SECTION IV-B** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION IV-C – CONNECTION TO PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES or OUTCOMES.** Direct connection to a past ROS activity is not required for a project to be funded, but additional priority may be given to a project that arises as an outcome of a specific activity or partnership. Please list any connection or activity out of which the proposed project emerged.

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| **SECTION IV-C** | **Answer:** |

**SECTION V: PROJECT EVALUATION**

**SECTION V-A – EVALUATION.** Describe what success looks like when this project is completed. Be goal-oriented and specific here in relation to the project. In particular, identify short-term and long-term measures of success in relation to the organization, community, and the entire region. List desired outcomes and outputs. (500 words or less)

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| --- | --- |
| **SECTION V-A** | **Answer:** |

**Acknowledgment of Terms and Conditions:** By typing your name below you acknowledge that you have reviewed a sample agreement that would occur between your organization as the grantee and the Rivers of Steel Heritage Corporation as the grantor, if the project is selected to receive funding. These required terms and conditions come from the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (the original source of funding). Go to [Terms & Conditions](https://elibrary.dcnr.pa.gov/GetDocument?docId=1736716&DocName=GrantTermsandConditions)  to view a sample agreement with terms and conditions.

*My signature below acknowledges that I understand and am aware of the standard Terms and Conditions contained within the agreement.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ***REQUIRED*** | ***Please type your name here:***  |

**Attachment Of Nonprofit Status: (Required)**

Please attach copies of your nonprofit status (501(c)3 with the Internal Revenue Service and registration with the Pennsylvania Department of State Bureau of Charitable Organizations).

Rivers of Steel Heritage Corp. follows the “Municipal Procurement Rules”, which are updated semi-frequently: [Bidding Requirements](http://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pabull?file=/secure/pabulletin/data/vol49/49-48/1790.html)

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| **RIVERS OF STEEL HERITAGE AREA – INTERNAL ADMINISTRATIVE USE ONLY:** |
| **Date Received: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Total Project Cost:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** **Total Grant Request:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |
|  |
|  **Mini-Grant Amount Awarded $\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** |

1. **Letters of support (PDF required) from each matching partner must be attached to this application.**

**Only those partners that are providing a cash or in-kind match should be listed. Support letters should be written on official letterhead and include:**

	* + - **The main contact person that will be collaborating, including contact information;**
			- **A description of the Partner’s match (cash or in-kind) to the project.**
			- **Letters of Support from non-match partners are also recommended.** [↑](#footnote-ref-1)