

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

STRATEGIC PLANNING FACILITATION SERVICES FOR THE FOREST PRESERVE DISTRICT OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY, ILLINOIS



April 2026

LETTER TO SUBMITTERS

The Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County (FPDWC) in Illinois, invites proposals from qualified consultants or firms to facilitate and guide the FPDWC through a Strategic Planning process beginning June 2026. The professional consultant will be hired on a contractual basis for this service at a fixed price.

Attached is the Request for Proposal (RFP) which explains the various professional services needed and the scope of the project. Responses to the RFP must be submitted by **1:00 pm CST on Fri. May 22, 2026**, to Daniel Olson, Executive Director, Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, 5500 Northrock Dr. 61103.

Any questions regarding this proposal or project should be directed to Daniel Olson, Executive Director, Winnebago County Forest Preserve District at dolson@winnebagoforest.org.

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Overview

The Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County (FPDWC), Illinois invites proposals from qualified consultants or firms to facilitate and guide the Forest Preserve District through a comprehensive Strategic Planning Process beginning in June of 2026. The Plan will serve as a roadmap to guide the FPDWC's Board and employees, conservation initiatives, personnel priorities, and partnerships for the next three years.

About the Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County, Illinois

The Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County Illinois, is governed by a seven-member elected Board of Commissioners. The Board sets and approves strategies for an efficient and sustainable future that aligns with our mission of protecting, enhancing, conserving, and promoting the County's natural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

Created by a public vote in 1922, and legislated under the Downstate Forest Preserve District Act, the District now encompasses over 45 preserves, 11,500 acres of woods, wetland, rivers, prairies and ponds. Our preserves are home to hundreds of species, some endangered or threatened.

Our core values include:

- Protecting and preserving natural lands and natural communities.
- Connecting people to nature.
- Educating the community on the benefits and history of the land.
- Being responsive to recreational needs while minimizing impact on the environment.

We have unique facilities and partnerships, including Klehm Arboretum and Botanic Garden, Colored Sands Bird Banding Station, three 18-hole golf courses, Macktown Living History Education Center and National Historic District, Severson (dba Wild Roots) Education Center and three campgrounds. We maintain additional partnerships with the County for Information Technology (IT), Finance and Payroll, and a separate agreement with the Sheriff's Department for policing services.

We are well known for our natural areas, our Nature Preserves, extensive walking, cycling and equestrian trails, and miles of rivers available for recreation.

We have thirty-five full-time staff across the county and several seasonal employees. Departmental areas include golf operations and clubhouses, natural resources including wildlife, administration, and operations.

Additional information can be found at:

District Website: [Home](#) | [Winnebago Forest](#) | [Nature](#) | [Illinois](#)

Golf Website: [Rockford Golf](#) | [Play the Preserves - Atwood, The Ledges, Macktown](#)

Klehm Arboretum and Botanic Garden Website: [Klehm Arboretum |](#)
Sand Bluff Bird Observatory Website: [Sand Bluff Bird Observatory | Located at Colored Sands Forest Preserve](#)
Macktown Living History Website: [Macktown Living History](#)
Severson Dells Nature Center (dba Wild Roots) Website: [Home](#)

Purpose of the Strategic Planning Process

The FPDWC seeks a skilled facilitator or facilitation team to:

- Guide the Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County through an inclusive, transparent, and actionable strategic planning process.
- Engage the Board of Commissioners, staff, partners and key stakeholders to help identify shared goals, priorities, and measurable outcomes.
- Produce a clear, inspiring, and implementable Strategic Plan to be endorsed by our Board of Commissioners.

Budget

Proposals should present a cost-effective and transparent budget that reflects the scope of work, schedule and desired outcomes.

Community Survey of Needs

A Community Survey of Needs was developed and distributed by FPDWC staff. The Survey closes on April 30, 2026. Staff will compile and evaluate survey responses, immediately after closing. The information collected from the survey will be shared with the facilitator. This survey will serve as a basis of the Strategic Plan.

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.
- Any services or tasks that would be considered à la carte, including estimated costs or hourly rates for those items.
- Proposed timeline to completion.
- Any information, data, or resources needed from the District 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

- Review of most recent Community Survey set to close April 30, 2026.
- Review existing Forest Preserve District of Winnebago County materials, previous strategic plans, reports, and institutional documents.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews and/focus groups with audiences including Board of Commissioners, employees, partner groups and community key stakeholder groups.

- Analyze and summarize findings from both qualitative and quantitative engagement efforts to inform subsequent planning phases.

Phase 2: Facilitation & Engagement

- Facilitate a series of in-person workshops and meetings with the Board of Commissioners, staff and key stakeholders (Partners, volunteers, community members)
- Guide discussions on priorities and measurable goals across a three-year timeframe.
- Synthesize results into emerging themes, strategic directions, and frameworks.

Phase 3: Plan Development & Finalization

- Draft and refine the Strategic Plan in collaboration with the senior staff and the Board of Commissioners.
- Deliver a near-final draft for review and feedback.
- Present final plan to Board of Commissioners during a public meeting.

Deliverables

1. Detailed project work plan and timeline.
2. At least one in-person facilitation process with all members of the Board of Commissioners.
3. At least one in-person facilitation process with District employees.
4. At least one in-person facilitation process with key stakeholders.
5. Facilitation materials, meeting summaries, and documentation of the process.
6. Summary of engagement meetings findings (electronic).
7. Electronic version of the final Strategic Plan.
8. Final presentation of the Strategic Plan to the Board during a public meeting.

Desired Qualifications

- Demonstrated experience facilitating strategic planning for nonprofit, recreational, local government or alliance-based organizations (preferably in the environmental or conservation and golf 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.

Project Timeline

Milestone	Target Date
Community Survey Closes (internal)	April 30, 2026
Community Survey Results Available (internal)	May 30, 2026
RFP for Facilitators Due Back to FPWC	Fri. May 22 at 1:00 pm
Consultant Interviews (online)	Week of June 1, 2026
Consultant Selection by Board of Commissioners	Wed. June 17, 2026
Project Kickoff	July 2026
Phase I: Preparation and Discovery	July – October 2026
Phase II: Facilitation and Engagement	November 2026 – February 2027
Phase III: Plan Development and Finalization	February – June 2027
Draft Plan Presentation to Steering Committee	July 2027
Staff Review of Draft Plan	July 2027
Final Plan Presentation Approval by Commissioners	October 2027
Public Launch of Plan	October 2027

Submission 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 for the District.
2. Proposed Work Plan, timeline and methodology (including key milestones and engagement approach).
3. Qualifications, certifications and experience (including biographies and resumes of team members).
4. Relevant project examples (up to 3 recent strategic planning projects, especially in collaboration with conservation, environmental and recreational groups).
5. Budget and fee structure (include hourly or daily rates, estimated hours, travel, deliverables and other anticipated expenses).
6. Provide phone numbers and email addresses for a minimum of three professional references.

Submission Instructions

Submissions must be received by **1:00 pm CST, May 22, 2026** in a sealed envelope at 5500 Northrock Dr., Rockford, IL 61103 with **“Strategic Planning Facilitation Services RFP”** clearly labeled on the outside of the envelope. **Attn: Daniel Olson, Executive Director, Forest Preserves of Winnebago County.**

Questions regarding the RFQ may be directed to the Daniel Olson at dolson@winnebagoforest.org.

The Forest Preserves of Winnebago County is a local government organization and information contained within the RFP responses will be subject to disclosure unless the vendor claims

privilege as proprietary information and it can be withheld pursuant to a specific exemption base on law. If requested, the vendor shall supply any documents in its possession within two days of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following:

- Demonstrated understanding of the Forest Preserves mission, values and collaborative structure.
- Quality and clarity of written material and proposed methodology.
- Experience and success with similar facilitation or strategic planning efforts.
- Experience facilitating public, private or not-for-profit agencies with a similar environmental and natural resources missions.
- Cost effectiveness and value.
- Ability to meet schedule and budget.
- References and past performance.

Interview Expectations

An internal committee of five Commissioners and staff will review all proposals and invite three to five finalists to interview. Interviews will take place via Zoom during the week of June 1, 2026. A committee recommendation on the top candidate will be taken to the full Board of Commissioners for approval on June 17, 2026.