



REQUEST FOR QUALIFICATIONS

Master Plan for Interpretation of the Vicksburg Campaign and Visitor Center for Vicksburg National Military Park

INTRODUCTION

Civic, business and government leaders in Vicksburg, MS seek to create a compelling, vibrant educational experience that will orient visitors, including families and children, to the rich heritage of the region, widely known for the key role the Vicksburg campaign played in the Civil War.

Vicksburg is at the intersection of the Mississippi River and Interstate 20 in Warren County, about 45 minutes west of Jackson.

The Vicksburg National Military Park (VNMP) is a major Civil War military park managed by the National Park Service. Located about a mile from Vicksburg's revitalizing downtown and riverfront, VNMP draws about 600,000 visitors annually. Most of them tour the battlefield and see very little else before leaving.

Friends of the Vicksburg National Military Park and Campaign ("Friends") is a high-performing non-profit organization that partners with NPS on stewardship, enhancement and other supportive activities. Its Board includes well-networked leaders, some of whom are national in scope.

Legislation was passed in 2014 to allow the addition of three battlefield sites, Port Gibson, Raymond, and Champion Hill, to the holdings of VNMP. Within the next 18 months, it is expected that the first two additional battle-related sites will come under NPS / Friends oversight; both are more than 30 minutes travel time from the main battlefield site. Both have modest interpretive signage and do not yet appear on visitor maps. Friends intends to provide enhanced interpretation and is looking for help in shaping a master plan for interpretation that encourages visitors to stay longer and visit all the sites available.

Over the last 20 years, there has been community interest in creating a heritage museum / visitor center. A 1994 downtown revitalization plan and heritage tourism strategy cited the need for one. Many of the recommendations for downtown revitalization have been implemented, including landscaping, renovation, recruiting retail and restaurants, and bringing residential uses into downtown. Riverboat gaming came early to Vicksburg.

Vicksburg's civic, cultural, and business leaders agree that the Civil War needs to be conveyed better and more thoroughly. The National Park Service visitor center at the VNMP was built 50+ years ago. Its exhibit space allows minimal presentation of the story of the battlefield site, and barely touches on a wider context that would provide visitors with the deeper understanding of the region that could motivate further exploration. Unlike other battlefield sites, Vicksburg was a campaign and a siege, and the story should take visitors beyond the 16-mile tour road of VNMP and into the City of Vicksburg and out to the campaign sites in the region.

NPS readily acknowledges that replacing the visitor center is low on the agency's nationwide backlog of priority needs. They welcome the initiative shown by Friends to help create one and are actively participating.

It is believed that it would be feasible to raise the funds needed through public and philanthropic resources for a new facility and enhancements to the new sites to create a stronger interpretation of the entire Vicksburg Campaign.

THE ASSIGNMENT

Friends and its partners have been working on the expanded interpretive experience with the new battlefield sites and the visitor center initiative for several years and have visited or done research on a number of newer visitor centers, including Gettysburg. That said, a number of key issues remain unresolved. The goal is a master plan for visitor interpretation of the Vicksburg Campaign, and the feasibility of a new or expanded visitor center. Friends seeks consultant insight and expertise to address these issues while moving towards conceptual design:

Location: Does the Vicksburg Campaign need an interactive visitor center to interpret the full Vicksburg Campaign and if so, what are the logistics? Where should a new visitor center / Civil War museum be located given the new broader geographic area covered by all sites?.

Framing the Experience: What over-arching focus would enable the Vicksburg visitor experience to gain a national market? The military aspect of the battle has been the focus. NPS and scholars have in recent years given new attention to the Reconstruction period and the lingering influence of the Civil War on our own times. Vicksburg represents a unique opportunity to explore causes, events, and consequences of the Civil War within a place-based context. In the new sites or in a new facility, how could the battle and other compelling stories be made to resonate with visitors of all generations? How can the Friends assist NPS with creating experiences that resonate across all audiences, especially a new generation of visitors that need to feel a personal connection or message?

Artifacts / Collections: Typically visitor centers and some heritage museums display selected artifacts chosen to stimulate or support interpretive messages. Others also house collections and archives. In addition to the extensive collection held by VNMP, there are impressive collections of artifacts and documents now in private hands in the region. Most are in locations not suitable for long-term stewardship. Yet, providing collections and conservation space would add significantly to capital and operating costs. Is there sufficient philanthropic and public support to further explore the potential?

Overcoming Distance: Although a visitor center would be the hub, there is a desire to encourage visitors to experience the additional remote sites as well. Not only are the sites quite significant, raising their profiles and increasing visitation would benefit the region. Are there strategies that could be incorporated into the proposed visitor center that could increase the likelihood of visitors taking the time to include them?

Size: Besides exhibit galleries, shop, restrooms, and back office, the facility will need classroom space, and space for special events. If it is to house collections, special space will be needed. How large should the facility be?

Sustainability: It is envisioned that Friends and/or a consortium of non-profits will build and manage the facility, securing public and philanthropic funds for design and construction, and raising funds to cover operating costs. It is hoped that the building can accommodate special events, and perhaps even include space for rental income. What can be expected in the way of operating costs?

PRODUCT OF ASSIGNMENT

The consultant will produce a strategic framework document that addresses these key issues and lays out a clear path for implementation. It will include a conceptual plan for the proposed facility if found necessary in telling

the Vicksburg Campaign story, including ROM cost range; and a separate visually engaging “executive summary” for prospective funders.

REQUIRED SKILLS AND BACKGROUND

The ideal consultant (or team) will bring a strategic frame of mind and experience working with clients at a similar early stage of planning a heritage attraction. They will have knowledge or backgrounds in design of museums, interpretive planning, visitor behavior, operations and management of visitor centers / museums, and financial analysis.

TIMELINE AND BUDGET

The study is expected to begin in spring and completed by the end of 2019. For this phase of the project, Friends anticipates investing up to \$125,000.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Interested teams are invited to submit a qualifications package that includes:

- Description of the principal firm and its sub-consultants, along with a history of your previous experience working together during the last 5 years
- Description of the firm’s approach and methodology for an assignment of this nature, including the likely number of trips and time you would spend in Vicksburg and billing rates for principals
- Resumes of principal team members who will be involved in the project.
- One page profiles of at least 3 case examples relevant to this assignment. Profiles should include status of implementation and client contact.
- Client references. Please provide names and contact information for key client participants.

The entire submission package should not exceed 40 pages, excluding resumes and standard marketing materials. Please limit marketing materials to information with direct relevance to this project. Brevity is appreciated. Submitted materials will not be returned. Please submit one original copy and one flash drive with all materials as PDF files. Submittals are due March 22, 2019.

Questions regarding the RFQ will be accepted through February 18, 2019, with answers made available for all interested parties by February 22, 2019. Questions may be emailed to director@friendsofvicksburg.org

Send to submission package to:

Bess Averett, Executive Director
Friends of VNMP & Campaign
PO Box 821286
Vicksburg, MS 39182

SELECTION PROCESS

Friends and its partner organizations will review submittals. One or more of these will be invited to present to the committee. Friends hopes to have the chosen consultant under contract by May 31, 2019.