



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Williams Schoolhouse Interpretation: Exhibit Planning & Design

Preservation Maryland, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Baltimore, Maryland, is soliciting competitive proposals from qualified firms for interpretive planning and design of an interior exhibit for the Williams Schoolhouse, located at 11347 Big Pool Road, Big Pool, MD 21711, within the boundaries of Fort Frederick State Park.

To be considered as eligible, Respondents must meet one or more of the Professional Qualification Standards—or their equivalent—as set forth by the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines. They must also demonstrate prior experience of successful exhibit planning and design for museums, cultural institutions, and/or heritage sites. Preservation Maryland requests that interested parties respond to the solicitation by **4:30 P.M. ET on Wednesday, February 18, 2026.**

1. CLIENT

Preservation Maryland is a statewide non-profit working to protect Maryland’s unique and irreplaceable heritage while creating a more equitable and sustainable future. The organization harnesses the power of historic places to revitalize and reinvest in communities, advocate and build the historic trades workforce for the benefit of all Marylanders. To learn more, visit www.preservationmaryland.org.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

2.1 *Background*

Owned by the State of Maryland and managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources - Maryland Park Service (DNR), the Williams Schoolhouse tells a nuanced story of Maryland’s free Black community both before and after the Civil War. The Williams family and the schoolhouse are important aspects of the rich history of Fort Frederick State Park. As such, Preservation Maryland is partnering with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources to accurately restore the schoolhouse in such a manner as to retain as much historic fabric as possible and prepare the site for expanded interpretation and exhibits for public benefit. This interpretive project will build upon previous construction efforts completed in the fall of 2022—which resulted in the reroofing and exterior restoration of windows, doors, and batten board siding—and set the stage for interior restoration efforts.

Between the 19th and 20th centuries, Fort Frederick and the surrounding property were owned and stewarded by the Williams family. Nathan Williams and his wife, Ammy, purchased the site in 1850 for use as a farm—constructing a house and barn on the property and using the nearby Fort Frederick walls to enclose an orchard, vineyard, and vegetable gardens. Nathan and his family were also very involved in education and politics within the Black community, so much so that, after the Civil War, he established a school on his property for Black children. Upon his death in 1884, the land passed to Nathan’s children, who continued to operate the farm and school. In 1899, the Williams family sold this tract to Washington County for the purpose of constructing a new public schoolhouse, which still stands today and is the site and canvas for this project. The State of Maryland purchased the property in 1973 and recently renewed efforts to preserve and interpret the site to highlight the history of the Williams family and their contributions to Maryland’s storied past.

2.2 *Description*

Serving as project manager on behalf of DNR, Preservation Maryland is seeking consultant services for interpretive planning and design of an exhibit for the Williams Schoolhouse. Sited at 11347 Big Pool Road, Big Pool, MD 21711

(parcel 0073, tax map 0045), the 486 square foot frame structure is a late 19th century, single-story, gable-roofed, board and batten, one-room schoolhouse.

The goal of this project is to plan and design an interpretive exhibit on the rich history of the Williams family and Williams Schoolhouse. It is preferred that the exhibit will also connect these stories to other interpretive themes explored at Fort Frederick State Park. This interpretive work will inform plans for interior restoration of the schoolhouse (ex. exhibit lighting, electrical, climate, etc. needs will inform building's restoration design and construction), which, in combination, will prepare the structure to open to the public as a well-rounded, educational space for visitors. **Please note:** Exhibit fabrication and installation will be bid out separately after final design is completed and approved.

Objectives include, but are not limited to:

- **Plan and design an engaging exhibit:** Produce a conceptual and final exhibit design that transforms the one-room schoolhouse into an educational space for diverse audiences, including school groups and general visitors.
- **Support historic integrity:** Ensure that exhibit design complements and respects the historic character of the schoolhouse; be vigilant in avoiding adverse effects on the historic structure.
- **Integrate select period-appropriate artifacts and furnishings to support interpretation:** Research and recommend a limited selection of period-appropriate artifacts and furnishings (e.g., school-related objects, a stove, teacher's desk, or student desks) that help convey the historic character of the schoolhouse while maintaining priority space for exhibit installation. Provide a proposed acquisition plan and budget for authentic or high-quality reproduction pieces as appropriate.
- **Foster visitor connection:** Incorporate interactive and accessible elements that encourage personal connections to local history and provide multiple entry points for different learning styles.
- **Prepare for future implementation:** Deliver archival findings and artifact/furnishing recommendations, final design documents and specifications for fabrication and installation in a subsequent project phase.

This project is being executed in partnership with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. As such, both Preservation Maryland and DNR staff will be involved throughout the entire project. Preservation Maryland will serve as the main point of contact, contract signatory, invoice recipient, and liaison between the hired project professionals and relevant government agencies, which will include coordination of document submittal. It is anticipated that DNR will be involved in the kick-off and status meetings, project documentation review, and site visits and will serve as final authority on decisions.

2.3 Timeline

Work is expected to begin immediately upon execution of the contract and conclude as expeditiously as possible, allowing for a final project completion date no later than seven months from contract execution. Respondents should account for periods of review (on both general project materials, such as meeting agendas and presentations, and deliverables) and at least two revisions to incorporate Preservation Maryland and/or DNR.

3. SCOPE OF WORK

The precise scope of work is subject to feedback from the selected Respondent(s) and budget limitations. However, anticipated work to be undertaken by the selected consultant(s) may include, but is not limited to, the following project services and deliverables:

Services	Deliverables
<p>Conduct project meetings with DNR and Preservation Maryland staff, both virtually and in-person as appropriate. This includes at least one (1) virtual kickoff meeting, one (1) virtual meeting to review the interpretive plan, one (1) virtual meeting to review draft exhibit design, one (1) closing meeting, regular progress update meetings, and site visits as needed. Communicate project updates regularly.</p> <p>Note: While DNR has indicated that exhibit space should take priority in the 486 sq. ft. schoolhouse, a small segment should be allocated to period-appropriate furnishings. Consultant will need to confirm with DNR in an early stage meeting the precise exhibit size.</p>	<p>Provide agendas prior to, allowing time for revision, and meeting notes following.</p> <p>Submit quarterly progress memos (as applicable within the project period) summarizing project progress, challenges, and next steps.</p> <p>Upon project closeout, submit project completion memo, including a record of what was accomplished, lessons learned, and any recommendations/follow-up items for Client to address moving forward.</p>
<p>Refine stakeholders with DNR and Preservation Maryland and pursue stakeholder engagement (virtually/in-person) to enrich project deliverables.</p>	<p>Conduct formal stakeholder meetings (approx. 3-4 virtual meetings at project initiation and one collective virtual or hybrid meeting to review draft exhibit design), providing agendas prior to and meeting notes after. Follow-up with stakeholders as necessary to acquire additional information.</p>
<p>Research historical site documentation and archival resources to inform exhibit content and design. Perform descendant and community outreach to obtain oral histories, archival documents, and potential artifacts.</p> <p>Note: See Attachment A for existing documentation and historical research.</p>	<p>Provide a bibliography of all sources used in the creation of exhibit content.</p>
<p>Identify and locate a limited selection of period-appropriate artifacts and furnishings (such as a stove, teacher's desk, student desk(s), and/or chairs) for potential future acquisition.</p> <p>Note: Consult with DNR and descendant representatives to determine whether any suitable artifacts already in-hand may be incorporated into the exhibit. While exhibit space remains the priority, a small number of furnishings is desired to help convey the historic character of the schoolhouse.</p>	<p>Develop a concise list of recommended period-appropriate artifacts and furnishings, as well as an accompanying cost estimates for acquisition. Note: Acquisition is not included in the scope of work for the Consultant.</p> <p><u>Alternative:</u> If efforts to locate period-appropriate furnishings are unsuccessful, the Consultant will need to develop cost estimates for the development of replica furnishings.</p>
<p>Pursue interpretive planning, determining exhibit's target audience/visitors, concept, and interpretive themes.</p>	<p>Produce exhibit concept and interpretive themes, grounded in the study of visitor demographics, motivations, and learning styles, with careful attention to accessibility and inclusivity. Exhibit concept should define such elements as typography, color scheme, envisioned fabrication materials, etc.</p>
<p>Develop and provide Client with comprehensive exhibit content and design package, including</p>	<p>This package should encompass conceptual renderings; exhibit designs with text (headings,</p>

conceptual renderings, exhibit designs with specifications, and production-ready design files.	narrative, captions, labels, etc.), images, artifact recommendations and accompanying cases; production-ready design files for future fabrication and installation; and suggestions for programmatic and digital engagement opportunities. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design must comply with applicable ADA accessibility requirements.• Upon Client approval, the Consultant shall secure high-resolution image files, as well as rights and permissions for any images not in the public domain. All associated usage fees are the responsibility of the Consultant.• Any image files and artifacts obtained should be credited as requested by the providing entity.
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4. BUDGET

The target budget is within the range of \$40,000 - \$50,000 and will include all research, planning, and design fees, plus any additional costs incurred in connection with the work outlined herein. However, competitiveness of the budget will be considered as part of the proposal review process. **Please note:** Exhibit fabrication and installation will be bid out separately after final design is completed and approved.

As this project is supported by grant funding, the final budget will be subject to discussion and approval by Preservation Maryland and DNR. This may result in necessary modification(s) to the scope of work, which Preservation Maryland and DNR staff will discuss with the selected Respondent as necessary. In no event shall the selected Consultant be entitled to receive more than the amount specified in the project agreement—which will be executed after the selected Consultant has been notified and accepts the project—unless authorized in advance and in writing by Preservation Maryland.

5. INSTRUCTIONS TO RESPONDENTS

5.1 *Where to Deliver Proposal*

All proposals must be submitted as a single PDF attached to an email delivered to Colleen Poulton at cpoulton@presmd.org.

5.2 *Proposal Due Date*

Proposals are due by **4:30 P.M. ET on Wednesday, February 18, 2026.**

5.3 *Preparation of Proposal*

Respondents must submit the following:

- Qualifications for the project, including names, titles, and demonstrated experience of key personnel in exhibit research, planning, and design;
- Description and visual examples of recent interpretive planning and exhibit design experience on projects similar in scope and scale (see Section 5.5);
- Project proposal outlining approach and methodology, adequately addressing project goals and objectives;
- Project timeline that indicates durations for key tasks and the overall project;
- Itemized project budget for exhibit research, planning, and design;

- Resume(s) of proposed personnel who will be directly involved in the execution of the project showing recent project experience—completed within the last five (5) years)—that demonstrates historical and cultural expertise in at least one (1) of the following:
 - a. Black history in the United States – especially free Black communities in the 19th century, Reconstruction era, and education history
 - b. Maryland state history expertise – demonstrated knowledge of Maryland's 19th and early 20th century history
 - c. Descendant/community engagement – experience conducting outreach with descendant communities and incorporating oral histories or community narratives into interpretation
- Three (3) client references, including the full name, phone number, and email address for the primary point of contact and a one-to-two sentence description of the nature of the project worked upon.
Note: Please include at least one reference in relation to project personnel's historical and cultural expertise.

Respondents shall submit one (1) digital copy of the submittal package as an attachment to an email and are encouraged to include as much pertinent data and information within reason to ensure proper evaluation. To reduce page count, it is encouraged to include hyperlinks to project examples.

5.4 Subcontracts

Respondents must identify all portions of the work intended to be performed through subcontractors. Acceptance of the proposal does not constitute approval of the subcontractors identified therein.

5.5 Minimum Qualifications

Respondents must meet one or more of the Professional Qualification Standards—or their equivalent—as set forth by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines. They must also demonstrate prior experience of successful exhibit planning, design and fabrication for museums, cultural institutions, and/or heritage sites.

- For purposes of this solicitation, “similar project” shall be understood to include multiple of the following elements:
 - 1) interpretive planning – ability to translate research into compelling storylines and themes that resonate with diverse audiences;
 - 2) exhibit design – including layout planning for small historic spaces, integration of text, graphics, artifacts, and digital/interactive elements;
 - 3) audience engagement and education – experience designing for school groups, family visitors, and lifelong learners with varied learning styles;
 - 4) accessibility and inclusion – knowledge of ADA standards, Universal Design and best practices for making interpretation accessible across age, ability, and background;
 - 5) historic preservation sensitivity – experience designing exhibits for historic structures where protecting historic fabric is critical;
 - 6) research and acquisition of artifacts and period furnishings and/or coordinated recreation of period furnishings; and/or
 - 7) architectural coordination – ability to thoroughly communicate exhibit needs (lighting, electrical, climate, etc.) so they align with building restoration.

5.6 Small Business Enterprise (SBE), Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) and/or Woman-Owned Business Enterprise (WBE)

Respondents are not required to be or have subcontractors who are certified SBE, MBE, and/or WBE companies. However, use of SBE, MBE, and/or WBE companies is encouraged and may be weighted as an element of the evaluation process.

5.7 Inquiries

Every request for a written interpretation or correction must be received at least ten (10) business days prior to the RFP due date—no later than **4:30 P.M. on Wednesday, February 4, 2026**—in order to be considered. Requests may be submitted by e-mail to cpoulton@presmd.org. Interpretations, corrections and supplemental instructions will be communicated by written addenda to this solicitation to all prospective Respondents no later than **4:30 P.M. on Wednesday, February 11, 2026**.

Submission of a proposal constitutes acknowledgment of receipt of all addenda. Proposals will be construed as though all addenda had been received. Failure of the Respondent to receive any addenda does not relieve Respondents from any and all obligations under the proposal, as submitted.

5.8 Rejection of Proposal

Proposals must be delivered to the specified location (emailed as an attachment to cpoulton@presmd.org) and received by the proposal due date (**4:30 P.M. ET on Wednesday, February 18, 2026**) to be eligible for evaluation. Proposals will be considered irregular and may be rejected if they show material omissions, additions not called for, conditions, limitations, unauthorized alternate proposals or other material irregularities. Preservation Maryland may consider incomplete any proposal not prepared and submitted in accordance with the provisions specified herein and reserves the right to waive any minor deviations or irregularities in an otherwise valid proposal.

5.9 Withdrawal of Proposal

Respondents may withdraw their proposal prior to the designated due date if they submit such a written request to Preservation Maryland. Respondents may be permitted to withdraw their proposal up to 48 hours after the due date for good cause, as determined by Preservation Maryland in its sole judgment and discretion.

6. EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCEDURES

6.1 Evaluation Procedure

Each response will be evaluated in accordance with the indicated criteria:

1	Background and Qualifications a) Past relevant experience and special expertise of personnel per Sections 5.3 and 5.5 b) Demonstrated experience in project management and collaboration: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Experience working with federal- or state-managed historic sites, especially parks or historic sites with multiple interpretive themes.- Stakeholder facilitation – working productively with state agencies, nonprofits, and advisory committees.- Deliverables management – from archival research to final production-ready design files.
2	Project Approach a) Names and functions of personnel assigned b) Commitment to timely project completion and consideration of budget constraints c) Equipment and resources
3	Technical Merit a) Demonstrated comprehension of tasks to be completed b) Completeness and clarity of proposal c) Adequately addresses project goal(s) and objective(s)

6.2 Selection Procedure

Preservation Maryland will evaluate all proposals and select the most qualified Respondent based on the evaluation criteria above. Following this selection, Preservation Maryland may enter into negotiations with the top Respondent regarding proposed services, scope of work, deliverables, project timeline, and budget. Entrance into negotiations does not constitute a contractual relationship between Preservation Maryland and said Respondent.

Should Preservation Maryland and the top Respondent be unable to come to an agreement regarding proposed services, deliverables, project timeline, and budget, Preservation Maryland reserves the right to terminate discussions and enter into negotiations with the next qualified Respondent.

7. CONTRACT EXECUTION

Upon conclusion of the above, Preservation Maryland and the successful Respondent will enter into contract execution. After successful negotiation, the selected Respondent must provide:

- Contract for review
- Completed Form W9
- Proof of the following insurance coverage, as applicable, with at least the minimum limits required by the State of Maryland:

Commercial General Liability

Each Occurrence	\$1,000,000
General Aggregate	\$2,000,000

Automobile Liability

Combined Single Limit	\$1,000,000, - Includes Owned, Non-Owned & Hired Autos
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Workers Comp

Each Accident	\$1,000,000
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Professional Liability

Limit Per Claim	\$1,000,000
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Umbrella Liability

Each Occurrence	\$2,000,000
Aggregate	\$2,000,000

- If ACH payment preferred: Name and email address of individual to whom a secured form can be sent to obtain necessary information

Submittal of a proposal binds the successful Respondent to perform the work upon acceptance of the proposal and Preservation Maryland's execution of the project agreement. Acceptance of the successful Respondent's proposal does not create a contractual relationship between Preservation Maryland and the successful Respondent.

Preservation Maryland reserves the right to cancel award of the agreement without liability at any time before the agreement has been fully executed by all parties. Failure upon the part of the successful Respondent to execute the agreement or timely submit the required documentation will be just cause, if Preservation Maryland so elects, for award of the agreement to be rescinded.

Preservation Maryland further reserves the right to award the contract to the next available Respondent in the event the successful Respondent fails to execute the contract or the contract with said Respondent is terminated within 30 days of the effective date.

Attachment A:
Existing Documentation

Existing documentation includes but is not limited to the following. If there is any trouble accessing, please email Colleen Poulton at cpoulton@presmd.org.

1. [MIHP File \(WA-V-206\): Hornbaker Property](#)
2. [MIHP File \(WA-V-203\): Fort Frederick State Park, CCC Improvements](#)
3. [Self-Guided Walk | Fort Frederick State Park, African American History, The Williams Family](#)
4. [Walking Tour | Fort Frederick State Park, Nathan Williams, African American Heritage](#)
5. ["Hidden in Plain Sight: The Fort Frederick Colored School," Peter Morrill | Maryland Historical Trust Blog](#)
6. [DNR Exterior Restoration Plans \(2022\) for Schoolhouse](#)
*These were used in the already-executed exterior restoration project (2022).
7. [Schoolhouse Interior Elevations](#)
8. [Modern Photos: Outside/Inside the Williams Schoolhouse](#)
9. [Aerial map \(via MD Dept. of Planning GIS\) of the structure within circle indicating the MIHP record WA-V-206](#)