2027 National Parks Service Chesapeake Gateways Grant
ShoreRivers: Watershed Discovery Expeditions

Project Overview

Purpose: ShoreRivers is an environmental non-profit whose mission is to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement. The waterways of Maryland's Eastern Shore are integral to our sense of place, shaping the identity, culture, and history of our communities. However, pollution has degraded these waterways, threatening biodiversity, human health, and economic vitality. At the same time, limited public access has weakened people's connection to our rivers. To restore both the health of our rivers and our community's relationship with them, ShoreRivers proposes the continuation and expansion of our Watershed Discovery Expeditions — immersive experiences that foster deeper connections between people and the waterways they depend on. ShoreRivers has been hosting expeditions since 2020 and in 2026, 565 people attended these thoughtfully curated events, 85 of whom were repeat participants. With funding from this grant, ShoreRivers seeks to expand these programs by making more programming free, more available to a wider variety of communities, and more collaborative.

Goal: To host engaging events that connect Eastern Shore communities and visitors with the Chesapeake Bay watershed through outdoor recreation and natural, historical, and cultural tourism. Through river-based tours, local museum visits, and other immersive experiences, these events will expand access to, and awareness of, the region's rich heritage, inspire environmental stewardship, and support local businesses and community economic development.

Objectives:

- **Strengthen local partnerships and support economic development** by collaborating with local businesses, cultural organizations, and community partners to create tourism experiences that celebrate the Chesapeake Bay watershed while supporting local economies.
- **Expand access to outdoor recreation and environmental stewardship** by creating meaningful opportunities for residents and visitors to explore Maryland's Eastern Shore, connect with its natural landscapes, and develop a deeper appreciation for the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- **Celebrate and preserve the Eastern Shore's rich history and cultural heritage** through immersive experiences, interactive activities, and storytelling led by local historians, residents, and organizations, encouraging visitors to explore the region's unique communities, places, and traditions.

Grant Category: Linking Tourism and Economic Impact Projects. Our expeditions will connect residents and visitors with the Chesapeake Bay watershed through immersive experiences highlighting the Eastern Shore's natural, historical, and cultural heritage. By partnering with local businesses, museums, and community organizations, these events will promote heritage tourism, support local economic development, and celebrate the unique stories and traditions of Chesapeake communities.

Deliverables: This proposal includes 11 unique Watershed Discovery Expeditions, each accommodating an average of 20 participants. Each experience will be designed with tailored learning objectives and measurable outcomes ranging from creating first-time access to a Chesapeake waterway to generating increased understanding of local ecosystems. To best understand the impact of these expeditions and create the most meaningful experience for participants, ShoreRivers will:

1. Increase the capacity of our expedition partners by providing grant funding for their programming at cost.
2. Engage at least 200 people in these meaningful experiences and increase their connection to our waterways and the history of the Eastern Shore.
3. Purchase all supplies, food, and equipment from the local businesses where the expedition takes place, stimulating and supporting local economies.
4. Conduct pre- and post-expedition engagement, including participant surveys to assess impact and gather feedback for future engagement programs.
5. Recruit 25% of participants as volunteers and members to ShoreRivers and/or our partnering organizations.

Project Location: The expeditions will occur in the four watersheds of Maryland's Eastern Shore where ShoreRivers focuses its work: (1) the Sassafras River and the Bayside Creeks; (2) the Chester River; (3) the Miles and Wye rivers, and Eastern Bay; and (4) the Choptank River. These efforts will engage local non-profit organizations, businesses and communities across five counties: Kent, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Talbot, and Dorchester.

Watershed Discovery Expeditions Information Table: Every partner planning to co-host an expedition with ShoreRivers has verbally committed to the proposed plan. Three of the expeditions will occur with a designated Chesapeake Gateways location — indicated by an asterisk (*). Each expedition title, partner organization, and event description are listed below:

Title	**Partner**	**Description**	**Watershed/ County**
On the River's Trail: History and SAV of the Kent Narrows Aboard Chesapeake Water Tours	Chesapeake Water Tours, The Hyatt Place and Kennard African American Cultural Heritage Center-Grasonville, MD, and Chesapeake Heritage and Visitors Center*	Natural history and cultural heritage tour focusing on the story of Shantytown, an African-American enclave working for the seafood industry. We will also observe underwater grass beds of the local rivers' and learn their impact on river health aboard a pontoon boat. Includes a meal on board catered by a local food vendor.	Eastern Bay/ Queen Anne's
On the River's Trail: History and Ospreys of the Choptank Aboard the *Ellen B*	River City Cruise Company-Denton, MD	Natural history and cultural heritage tour focusing on how the river has been used as a transport system over time. We will also observe the osprey life cycle	Choptank/ Caroline

		aboard a pontoon boat while enjoying a meal catered by a local food vendor.	
On the Rivers Trail: A Historical and Ecological Oyster Tour of the Choptank on the *Skipjack Nathan*	Skipjack Nathan-Cambridge, MD	Natural history and cultural heritage tour focusing on the ecological impact of oysters and different harvesting methods over time aboard the skipjack *Nathan of Dorchester.* We will enjoy oysters from a local oyster farmer following the tour.	Choptank/ Dorchester
Reconnecting with Nature at Minary's Dream Alliance on the Chester River	Minary's Dream Alliance-Chestertown, MD	Families and community members learn about the local fauna of the Chester River through fishing, seine netting, and oyster dissections. Discover the healing properties of engaging in a community produce and meditation garden and learn the importance of native and pollinator-friendly plant species. After the activities, participants will enjoy a meal together and continue the conversations around the importance of connecting with local waterways.	Chester/ Kent
On the Rivers Trail: Exploring the History of Waterfront Communities in Oxford and Bellevue on the Tred Avon River	Bellevue Passage Museum-Bellevue, MD and Water's Edge Museum-Oxford, MD	Guided tour of both museums to learn about the important role that black watermen played in the culture and economy of the Eastern Shore. Participants will travel from one museum to the other via the Oxford-Bellevue Ferry across the Tred Avon River. A meal will be provided by a local food vendor.	Choptank/ Talbot
Underground Underwater: Harriet Tubman Freedom Center Tour Around Dorchester County	Harriet Tubman Freedom Center-Cambridge, MD*	Participants will go on a guided bus tour through Dorchester County exploring Harriet Tubman's legacy and the Underground Railroad. The tour will highlight how the region's natural landscapes aided Tubman's journey and how flooding is impacting these	Choptank/ Dorchester

		historic sites today. The experience will conclude with a meal from a local business at the Harriet Tubman Freedom Center.	
For a Healthy Bay, Let Grasses Stay: Exploring the Submerged Aquatic Vegetation Beds with Defensores De La Cuenca	Defensores De La Cuenca and the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center*	Families and community members will learn about the local fauna of the Eastern Bay through fishing, seine netting, and oyster dissections. Discover the healing properties of engaging in a community produce and meditation garden and learn the importance of native and pollinator-friendly plant species. After the activities, participants will enjoy a meal together and continue the conversations around the importance of connecting with local waterways.	Eastern Bay/ Queen Anne's
Guided Eco-Paddle: Kayak with Choptank Riverkeeper	Choptank Riverkeeper	Learn about the state of the Choptank River and how a Riverkeeper works to keep rivers healthy.	Choptank/ Dorchester
Guided Eco-Paddle: Kayak with Sassafras Riverkeeper	Sassafras Riverkeeper	Learn about the state of the Sassafras River and how a Riverkeeper works to keep rivers healthy.	Sassafras/ Kent
Guided Eco-Paddle: Kayak with Chester Riverkeeper	Chester Riverkeeper	Learn about the state of the Chester River and how a Riverkeeper works to keep rivers healthy.	Chester/ Kent
Guided Eco-Paddle: Kayak with Miles-Wye Riverkeeper	Miles-Wye Riverkeeper	Learn about the state of the Miles and Wye rivers and how a Riverkeeper works to keep rivers healthy.	Eastern Bay/ Queen Anne's

Key Tasks/Milestones:

- Establish tailored learning objectives, itineraries, and outcomes for each expedition with our partners.
- Create pre- and post-expedition surveys designed to evaluate the effectiveness of learning objectives and measure the economic impact of the expeditions on local communities.
- Identify local businesses and restaurants that will provide necessary supplies, including food and beverages, for each expedition.
- Schedule a date and time for each expedition within the grant timeline period.
- Finalize targeted audience for each expedition for specific outreach strategies.
- Develop communication and marketing plans and materials for use in participant recruitment and promotion.

Strategic Intent

Connection to Chesapeake Bay Initiative Act: These expeditions provide engaging learning opportunities about the history, ecology, and health of key waterways on Maryland's Eastern Shore using formal lesson plans, with nine of the expeditions conducted on boats or kayaks for an immersive, on-the-water experience. Three of our current expeditions are partnering with a current Chesapeake Gateways Partner, including the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Education Center, the Harriet Tubman Environmental Education Center, and the Chesapeake Heritage and Visitors Center. We intend to identify more Chesapeake Gateways Partners for our kayak expeditions such as Mount Harmon, Wye Island, Tuckahoe State Park, Eastern Neck Island, or the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Connection to Chesapeake Economic Impact: Our proposal aligns closely with economic development goals for Maryland's Eastern Shore by fostering tourism and strengthening the rural economy. Tourism plays a crucial role in the local economy, contributing $20 billion annually to Maryland and directly supporting more than 150,000 jobs statewide. Initiatives like our Watershed Discovery Expeditions tap into this economic engine by attracting both locals and tourists to participate. As demonstrated in our previous expeditions, we recruited participants from across the Bay Bridge and throughout the Delmarva peninsula, with many of them coming to the Eastern Shore for the first time. Dining and recreational sectors accounted for significant portions of Maryland's tourism revenue in recent years, highlighting the potential for these expeditions to boost the economy by promoting local services and creating direct business opportunities during these events.

The Eastern Shore and its counties have historically been underinvested in, despite the abundance of resources, organizations, and human power in the area. As a hyper-local organization, we can work with our local partners and connections to maximize an efficient use of funding and create meaningful programming for the community through these curated events.

Investments in Community Collaborations: Our proposal addresses an ongoing need to expand access to cultural and environmental education, which can also increase visitor interest in these communities, leading to more repeat visits. This engagement also enhances local pride and environmental stewardship, promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both people and our watersheds. ShoreRivers has held previous expeditions with all of the proposed partners, and all have committed to support ShoreRivers and their specific expedition.

Organization/Applicant Overview

Organization mission alignment and capacity: The Development and Community Engagement departments of ShoreRivers started offering expeditions in 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time, our supporters preferred to gather outside in smaller groups rather than participate in our typical fundraising model of events with a large number of guests held indoors or within the confines of a tent. To accommodate this, we pivoted away from relying on our annual gala as our major fundraising event and replaced it with 30 expeditions designed to function as fundraisers while also being educational and fun. Throughout 2022–2024, we successfully hosted 20 expeditions each year, but shifted their focus away from fundraising to being more community engagement and mission driven. In 2026, we hosted 19 more expeditions, 11 of which were funded through a 2025 NPS Gateways Grant. These expeditions were powerful in fostering new connections and fueling future programmatic work. If awarded, our proposal will allow us to engage with our identified local partners, small businesses, and communities at no expense to them — creating free experiences that directly align with ShoreRivers' mission to protect Maryland's Eastern Shore waterways through science-based advocacy, restoration, education, and engagement.

Project Team Members Skills and Experience:

Project Team Member	Description of Skills and Experience
ShoreRivers, Membership Manager	Will oversee expedition programming, coordinate with participants and partnering hosts, attend expeditions, and manage the grant.
ShoreRivers, Community Engagement Coordinator	Will oversee expedition programming, coordinate with participants and partnering hosts, attend expeditions, and manage the grant.
ShoreRivers, Director of Operations & Finance	Will oversee and ensure proper administration of the grant, including financials and reporting for this project.
ShoreRivers, Director of Communications	Will assist in creating advertisements, social media posts, printouts, and outreach for expeditions.
ShoreRivers, Riverkeepers	Will lead kayak trips, overseeing the logistics of the paddle and providing the learning narratives.
Harriet Tubman Freedom Center Director	Will develop and implement the lesson plan, co-lead activities, and coordinate the meal.
Skipjack Nathan, Captain and Educator	Will develop and execute the lesson plan and operate the boat cruise, including safety protocols.
Defensores De La Cuenca, staff	Will develop and implement the lesson plan, co-lead activities, and coordinate the meal.
Minary's Dream, Executive Director	Will develop and implement the lesson plan, co-lead activities, and coordinate the meal.
River City Cruise Co., Owner and History Interpreter	Will develop and execute the lesson plan, operate the boat cruise (including safety protocols), and coordinate the meal.

Chesapeake Water Tours, Owner	Will lead boat cruise operation and coordinate the meal with a local vendor.
Kennard African American Heritage Center, Educator	Will deliver cultural heritage narrative aboard the Chesapeake Water Tour pontoon vessel.
Bellevue Passage Museum, Director	Will lead the tour of the museum and coordinate the meal with a local food vendor.
Water's Edge Museum, Director	Will lead the tour of the museum.

Review by State Under EO 12372: In accordance with Executive Order 12372, ShoreRivers contacted the Maryland State Clearinghouse for Intergovernmental Assistance on November 3, 2026, to initiate the state review process. The project narrative and budget were provided for review, and ShoreRivers is currently awaiting a response from the State.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: There is no conflict of interest between ShoreRivers and the National Park Service with regard to this application, or the work to be supported by the project, or the partners involved.

Uniform Audit Statement: A single audit report has been submitted through the Federal Audit Clearinghouse's Internet Data Entry System.

Disclosure of Lobbying Activities: ShoreRivers is not involved in lobbying and therefore does not use any federal funds to support lobbying activities. A certification regarding lobbying is attached as a separate document in the portal.

Overlap or Duplication of Effort: There are no overlaps or duplications between this application and any of our other Federal applications or funded projects.

Conclusion: The collaborative nature of these expeditions, involving a wide network of partners — each contributing distinct skills and stories — enhances our collective ability to safeguard our rivers while inspiring participants to become lifelong stewards of local waterways. The program also stimulates **local economic growth by increasing tourism in rural towns**.