



July, 2026

Request for Qualifications

Signage and Signage Guidelines for Green Stormwater Infrastructure Sites

1. Project Overview

UpstreamPgh is seeking to commission an artist/artist team to create signage guidelines for our green stormwater infrastructure sites. The guidelines would help us standardize our signage across our existing and future sites and take the form of 3-5 digital templates. In addition, the artist would use those guidelines to create and install signage at a green stormwater site located at 1301 E Swissvale Ave, Pittsburgh PA 15221.

The goal of our signage is to promote brand identity, encourage site exploration, and educate the public about the benefits of green stormwater infrastructure like rain gardens. As we have several gardens, we are looking for signs that are durable and cost-effective to replicate. We are also looking to go beyond traditional placards through artistic and interactive elements that encourage people to engage with our sites.

This opportunity is open to artists working across various visual art mediums with a preference for someone with experience creating public education materials and installing durable signage.

2. Budget

The budget for this project is \$10,000 total, including artists' time, materials, supplies, and installation.

3. Background

UpstreamPgh

UpstreamPgh was originally founded as the Nine Mile Run Watershed Association in 2001 to involve residents in the restoration and protection of Nine Mile Run, a stream once called "stink creek" due to its high pollution levels. The restoration of the stream transformed the lower part of Frick Park from a safety hazard into a regional asset and is one of the country's largest urban stream restoration projects. In 2020, Nine Mile Run Watershed Association transformed



into UpstreamPgh, focusing on protecting the Nine Mile Run Watershed and the region by looking at water-related issues “upstream.” That includes managing rainwater before it causes flooding, preventing pollution before it reaches our waterways, educating residents on how to be stewards of the land, and advocating for access to clean water for all. As part of that approach, UpstreamPgh installs and manages green stormwater infrastructure projects (such as rain gardens) throughout the Nine Mile Run watershed, including the Swissvale Hill Rain Garden, which is currently being expanded. These projects make the watershed more climate-resilient and restore native habitat.

Recently, we unveiled Ripple, the Nine Mile Run Watershed Environmental Justice Plan. The plan outlines several new and large-scale green infrastructure projects that we will be working on implementing over the next several years. These new signage guidelines will help us engage the public with these projects.

Swissvale Hill Rain Garden

The first phase of the Swissvale Hill Rain Garden project was completed in 2021. It transformed three vacant lots owned by the Borough of Wilkinsburg into a green stormwater infrastructure site that can capture an estimated 750,000 gallons of rain a year, keeping water off the streets and diverting it from the sewer system. A catch-basin on Hill Ave captures and delivers water to a rain garden system, which releases excess water into underground storage. The plants on the site are native and designed to deal with the changing conditions of the garden.

UpstreamPgh is currently working on the second phase of this project, which will be on three vacant lots on the other side of Taft Way. This will greatly increase the amount of rainwater the garden is able to capture.

This project (phase I and II) is funded by the Department of Environmental Protection’s Growing Greener program, the Richard King Mellon Foundation and the Heinz Endowments, designed by UpstreamPgh and Ethos Collaborative, and constructed by C&R Landscape Development.

4. Application Process and Eligibility

Eligibility Requirements:

- Experience in creating durable public art pieces
- Ability to work with established brand guidelines
- Experience working collaboratively with partners and responding to feedback
- Strong project management skills, including managing a timeline and budget
- Ability to work within the proposed timeline (below)



Application Process:

Interested applicants should send the following materials by August 10th, 2026 to Erica Jackson, UpstreamPgh's Community Engagement Manager, at erica@upstreampgh.org:

- Statement of interest (250 words or less). Express your interest in the project and address how your past experience demonstrates that you can successfully meet the goals of this project.
- Resume
- Portfolio with past work. Please provide up to five (5) work samples of completed projects or artworks. Work samples may be either JPEG, PDF, or URL links to third-party websites for video or audio samples. For all work samples, please provide the following: title, medium, dimensions, year, and a brief description.
- References. Please provide the name and contact information for at least two (2) professional references. References will not be contacted unless you are selected for an interview.

UpstreamPgh will invite a select group of artists to interview.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria include:

- Quality of work and originality of past designs
- Project management experience
- Passion for climate justice, community engagement, and/or placemaking

5. Project Goals and Priorities

The first part of the project involves creating 3-5 templates for signs. This would include site names and educational content about green stormwater infrastructure, which may be stand-alone or incorporated into site infrastructure (for example, on monitoring equipment, embedded into stepping stones or street curbs, or incorporated into landscape design). The final product would look like digital mockups as well as written descriptions of materials, maintenance requirements, and installation protocol.



The priorities for the guidelines are:

- **Durability:** signage that can withstand weather, graffiti, and vandalism to the best extent possible
- **Cost-effective:** signage that can be replicated across lots of various sizes and layouts
- **Branding:** signage that incorporates UpstreamPgh's branding to increase our organization's visibility
- **Engaging:** signage that welcomes people into the site and encourages exploration
- **Creativity:** signage that goes beyond traditional placards, incorporating artistic elements
- **Accessibility:** signage that is clear and easy-to-understand, with accessibility considerations such as high contrast letters, clear typography, and tactile or audio elements

The second part of the project involves using these guidelines to create signage for the Swissvale Hill Rain Garden in Wilkinsburg. The priorities for part two are the same as those listed above.

Collaboration Requirements:

- Regular virtual meetings (2-3 times a month during the Fall to create guidelines, and then roughly once monthly until Swissvale Hill project installation)
- Collaborate with UpstreamPgh staff on educational content incorporated into signs
- Participate in a community workshop and/or focus group to solicit feedback
- Incorporate feedback from UpstreamPgh staff as well as Wilkinsburg residents



6. Project Site Details



The first phase of the Swissvale Hill Rain Garden. Photo by Nathan J Shaulis/Porter Loves



The Dornbush Rain Garden located at 8224 Bricelyn Street, which could benefit from upgraded signage in adherence with the new guidelines



The Wilkinsburg Stormwater Resiliency Project on South Avenue, which could benefit from upgraded signage in adherence with the new guidelines



7. Project Timeline

This project is set to begin in August 2026. The first part of the project, the guidelines, should be completed by October 31, 2026. The second phase of the project, the Swissvale Hill signage creation and installation should be completed by April 1, 2027.

It's expected that the commissioned artist will be able to work within this general timeline, which is subject to slight changes.

Timeline

Application Deadline: August 10th, 2026

Artist Interviews: Week of August 10th or August 17th, 2026

Finalist Selected: Week of August 24th

Draft Renderings: Mid-October 2026

Finalize Guidelines: October 31, 2026

Fabrication of Swissvale Hill Signage: November, 2026 - March, 2027

Swissvale Hill Project Installation: April 1, 2027

8. Contact information

All questions regarding this RFQ should be submitted to Erica Jackson, erica@upstreampgh.org, 412-371-8779 x 116