

TrailNation

SUMMIT

Hosted by Rails to Trails Conservancy

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: 2028 TRAILNATION SUMMIT

RTC's TrailNation Summit in spring 2028 will be a transformational gathering of 500 trail network visionaries, innovators and practitioners from across the country coming together to explore strategies to catalyze the development of trail and active transportation networks, essential infrastructure for American towns, cities, states and regions.

SECTION 1: TRAILNATION SUMMIT OVERVIEW

Rails to Trails Conservancy is the country's leading advocacy organization for trails, walking and biking, working to build a nation connected by trail by reimagining public spaces to create safe spaces for everyone to walk, bike and be active outside. RTC's TrailNation™ initiative is one of the organization's signature initiatives focused on accelerating the pace of trail development nationwide by bringing together model projects, leaders and champions, and the resources necessary for progress.

The TrailNation Summit is RTC's premiere educational event, uniting a network of partners, leaders and advocates representing diverse geographies, sectors and areas of focus over several days of robust, in-person programming and activities. This high-impact learning experience is curated to foster deep relationships and skill-building necessary to catalyze development of this infrastructure nationwide.



RTC's most recent summit took place in Cleveland, Ohio, in October 2025, attracting nearly 500 participants from 6 sectors and 40 states. Learn more about TrailNation and the most recent summit at railstotrails.org/summit.

The next TrailNation Summit is scheduled for spring 2028. RTC is seeking bids for locations to host the 2028 summit, with an interest in bringing the convening to a region that illustrates the innovation, partnership and advocacy needed to advance trail network development. Proposals should be submitted by a lead organization representing a coalition of local agencies and organizations that, if selected, would form the 2028 TrailNation Summit Host Committee. Regions hosting the Summit will receive national recognition as a model for trail network development with our network of 8,000+ professionals in trail planning, advocacy and allied fields, as well as recognition in media surrounding the event.

A summary of event guidelines and proposal selection criteria follows.

PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIALS:

"Besides making new friends, and sharing our dreams and difficulties, the connections [made were] a great opportunity... I left the event Refreshed, Inspired and filled with the often overlooked JOY. Joy to the World, the Trail is coming!"

"The mobile tour was the best part of the conference because you could see and learn from the people who worked on the projects that were implemented."

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LOCAL PARTNER TESTIMONIAL:

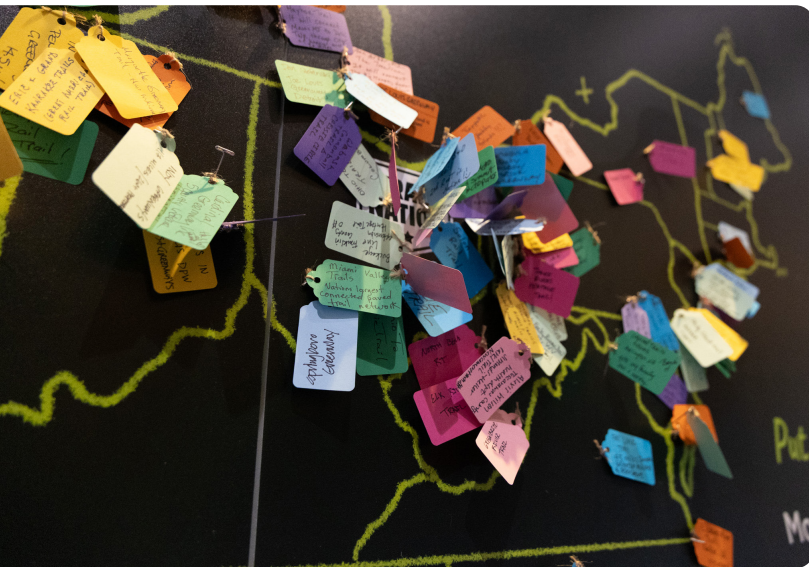
“Last week, I had the pleasure of providing a tour of Canal Basin Park and the Towpath Trail to the Urban Cohorts at the Rails to Trails Conservancy Trail Nation Summit... I loved telling the story of the collaboration between Cleveland Metroparks, the City of Cleveland, Cuyahoga County and Canalway Partners that brought the Towpath Trail into reality, as well as highlighting the history that makes Canal Basin an important location to Cleveland and to Ohio. The conference did a great job illustrating how other cities are accomplishing similar work, and I’m excited to see how we can use some of these ideas to build Canal Basin Park and other trail connections here. Nothing beats seeing Cleveland through the eyes of an excited visitor.” ~ Canalway Partners, member of the 2025 host region.

SECTION 2: SELECTION PRIORITIES

Proposal review will include an assessment of the region that will be featured during events. Priorities for selection include:

- Proximity to an existing or emerging multiuse trail network that includes urban, suburban and rural connections
- Defined host committee comprised of organizations and agencies that represent collaborative cross-sector partnerships, with lead organizations identified in the proposal
- Options for adequate meeting space and lodging:
 - Primary meeting space to accommodate 500–750 event participants over two consecutive days (mandatory include plenary space to accommodate all attendees; minimum 5 spaces for breakout sessions to accommodate 100 attendees; availability for event set and pre-event meetings up 2 days in advance of summit start date, and 1 day following)
 - Reception locations to accommodate 400 people
 - Lodging within ½ mile of primary meeting location that can accommodate 500, with the ability to meet federal per diem rates for a minimum of 25% of attendees
 - All venue locations must be ADA accessible
 - Final contracts and negotiations will be managed by RTC.
- Opportunities to host mobile workshops within a 30–60 minute driving, walking or bicycling radius that highlight trail development in urban, suburban and rural communities
- Options for convenient travel, including airports and train, accessible to attendees participating from across the country

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SECTION 3: ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The TrailNation Summit attracts ~500 national leaders in trail development, tourism and economic development, transportation, public health, outdoor recreation and community development for a multi-day gathering that puts the host region on full display. Direct spending associated with the summit includes 1,200–1,500 hotel room nights and significant spending at local restaurants, cultural destinations and businesses.

Throughout the summit, attendees will participate in mobile workshops, site tours and networking events that highlight the host region's trail network, communities and cultural destinations. Throughout the summit, the host region will have opportunities to showcase regional collaboration and innovation in trail, active transportation and community economic development, while elevating the visibility of the region's trail and outdoor recreation assets. The summit can be leveraged to help advance local trail initiatives, strengthen partnerships, and attract new investment in trail and active transportation infrastructure.

SECTION 4: HOST COMMITTEE ROLE AND EXPECTATIONS

The Host Committee is a coalition of local and regional organizations and agencies that will collaborate and support RTC to shape a meaningful, well-executed summit experience grounded in the region's unique strengths, partners and trail network development stories.

Key activities in partnership with RTC include the following:

- **Mobile Tour Development:** Work jointly with RTC to support the selection, development and planning of mobile tours that highlight innovative trail and active transportation network projects across urban, suburban and rural settings within the region.
- **Keynote and Distinguished Attendee Engagement:** Assist in identifying and, where appropriate, inviting high-profile keynote speakers and distinguished attendees. This includes collaborating with RTC to determine the most appropriate individuals to conduct outreach and leverage local relationships to strengthen invitations and participation.
- **Local Outreach and Participation:** Strengthen regional engagement by cultivating local relationships that broaden event participation, elevate community involvement, and showcase the host region's leadership in trail network development.
- **Local Fundraising Collaboration:** The host committee will lead local fundraising efforts in collaboration with RTC, engaging philanthropic, corporate and civic partners. RTC anticipates a minimum local fundraising goal of \$50,000, to be secured by the host committee to help offset the overall event budget and lower attendee costs. RTC encourages the host committee to identify and cultivate potential financial support from local partners such as convention and visitors' bureaus, tourism agencies, philanthropic organizations, hospital systems, utilities, chambers and corporate sponsors. RTC will lead on fundraising from national sponsors.

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SECTION 5: RTC RESPONSIBILITIES

RTC is the convener of the TrailNation Summit and will have final decision making authority. RTC will lead the overall planning and execution of the convening, and will seek input and collaboration from the host committee as appropriate. RTC expects the host committee to provide local expertise, assist with outreach and mobile tours, and collaborate on fundraising efforts.

RTC's responsibilities include:

- Program development and speaker coordination
- Marketing and communications
- Securing national-level sponsors and donors
- Venue and hotel contracting
- Registration and attendee management
- All financial management of the summit
- Event production and logistics

SECTION 6: PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS:

Proposals will be submitted in PDF format, not exceeding 8 pages. *The proposal must include the following:*

1. Signed letter(s) of commitment from organization(s) that will lead the host committee; lead organization(s) must submit proposal
2. Anticipated members of the host committee, including organizational affiliation and qualifications
3. Profile of the host city or region to include a summary of the featured trail network, along with demographics and socioeconomic profile of the region
4. Venue suggestions to accommodate lodging and meeting space needs identified in section 2; Include estimated room rates, meeting space capacity and general information about proximity between venues and trails
5. Transportation options (local transportation options as well as proximity to nearest airport, major train station if applicable, etc.)
6. Information, including pricing estimates, on additional activities and can't-miss destinations for possible tours and receptions
7. List known dates and event details for any major events expected in Spring 2028 that could impact hosting the Summit

A strong proposal to host the TrailNation Summit should include cross-sector representation from at least three local or regional organizations, such as trails groups, convention and visitors' bureaus, city and county governments, council of governments and metropolitan planning commissions, public health organizations, utilities, philanthropic organizations, economic development organizations, and local chambers of commerce.

RTC will host a **virtual information session on April 16** to answer any questions.

For additional questions, please reach out to Mary Ellen Koontz (maryellen@railstotrails.org).

SECTION 8: SELECTION AND KICK-OFF TIMELINE

Proposals are due by 11:59 p.m. EDT on May 8, 2026. After an initial review, RTC will reach out to finalists by mid-June to coordinate a site visit. For finalists, site visits are expected to be scheduled between mid-July and late-August. The host region for the 2028 Summit is expected to be chosen by October 2026 to secure preliminary venue contracts ahead of a public announcement in January 2027.

Host regions will develop site visit itineraries that showcase the range of venues and locations included in the proposal. All site visits must take place in one business day. Host regions are expected to cover RTC's lodging costs and any costs associated with the site visit, including local travel and activity fees.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE AND REQUIREMENTS:

Proposals should be submitted via email to Mary Ellen Koontz (maryellen@railstotrails.org) with a completed signature page. Proposals may also be mailed to RTC Headquarters:

Rails to Trails Conservancy
Attn: Mary Ellen Koontz
2445 M St. NW, Suite 650
Washington, D.C. 20037

Complete proposals must be received by 11:59 p.m. EDT on May 8, 2026.

All photos of the 2025 Summit by Clum Creative.

