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Subject: MSTU Special Projects Funding FY25 Application Form Submission Result #31816510
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Full Legal Organization Name (Required) Whispering Souls African-American Cemetery Restoration Project

Street Address (Required) 690 Elm St.

City (Required) Safety Harbor

State (Required) FL

Zip Code (Required) 34695

Organization Website (URL) (Required) <https://www.wsaac.org/>

Organization President / Executive Director (Required) Jacqueline Hayes

Title (Required) President

Phone Number (Required) (617) 359-1552

Email Address (Required) h.jacqueline40@yahoo.com

501(c)(3)? (Required) Yes

Registered in Florida? (Required) Yes

Year Established (Required)	2018
Total Organization Annual Budget (Required)	4417
Taxpayer / Employer ID # (Required)	83-0878460
Brief Description of Organization and It's Mission (approx. 600 characters) (Required)	We are dedicated to the renewal, preservation and support of Whispering Souls African-American Cemetery, where the first known burial was in 1896 and operations ceased in the 1970s. Before our organization's involvement, the cemetery had fallen into disrepair. Since securing clear title to the grounds, we've cleared vegetation, conducted ground-penetrating radar to identify unmarked graves, and installed a memorial, historical marker, benches, and fencing. Our mission is to continue restoring dignity to these hallowed grounds while educating the community about their historical significance.
Project Name (Required)	Whispering Souls Cemetery Irrigation and Environmental Revitalization
Requested Program Budget (Required)	8823
Community Need: Describe the problem or need to be addressed by this project. (Required)	<p>At its heart, the Whispering Souls African-American Cemetery Restoration Project exists to restore dignity to sacred ground long neglected. Our logo, the Sankofa bird from West African tradition, symbolizes going back to reclaim what was lost — an apt reflection of our mission.</p> <p>The cemetery's creation was a direct result of Jim Crow-era segregation that barred Black residents from burial in white cemeteries. Its long-term deterioration reflects this history of racial inequity. Even after significant improvements, the site still bears the marks of that past.</p> <p>We are committed not only to physical restoration but to educating the public about the lives and legacies interred here — many of whom were denied the dignity of headstones because of economic hardship. Our long-term goal is to provide a space for reflection, learning, and reconciliation.</p> <p>A vital next step is restoring water service and installing irrigation. Nearly all the cemetery's trees — some centuries old — were lost during the 2024 hurricane season. We've begun</p>

replanting, including some mature trees, but without running water, maintenance has relied on labor-intensive hand watering, which is unsustainable. This grant will provide the infrastructure needed to support regrowth and environmental stewardship.

Project Summary:
Describe how the project will be fully implemented and how it will address the need or gap in the community.
Identify and describe other funding sources, if any, for this project/program. (Required)

This project represents the second phase of our environmental revitalization plan. With support from donors and the Safety Harbor Garden Club, we've begun planting trees and planning a memorial garden and walkway. The requested money will be used exclusively for irrigation infrastructure, including a storage shed for supplies.

Once funding is secured, our selected vendors will begin installation. We will continue working with certified arborists and conservation professionals to develop a sustainable irrigation schedule that ensures tree health and conserves water.

As the environment recovers, the cemetery will become a more welcoming space for community engagement, allowing us to expand our educational initiatives and interpretive programming focused on the history and legacy of Whispering Souls.

Our ongoing relationship with the media has provided a platform to share this story with a wider audience. Coverage of our efforts has framed Whispering Souls as a unique success in the preservation of lost and erased cemeteries — momentum we plan to build on.

Program Outcomes:
Describe the timeline by which the project will be implemented including short-term and long-term results. (Required)

Short-term:

- Water service reactivation will take about two months once grant money is available.
- Irrigation system installation will follow, taking an estimated 2–3 weeks.
- Board members and volunteers will be present throughout to support and oversee planning and execution.

Long-term:

- Certified conservation professionals will advise on an irrigation schedule that promotes tree health and environmental efficiency.
- With a more sustainable and inviting landscape, we can fully implement our educational outreach, especially to youth and historically underserved populations.
- Public interest and visitation will continue to grow, fostering deeper engagement with this site's history and meaning.

Describe how your

Deliver First Class Services

**project aligns with
the County's
Strategic Plan:
(Required)**

Once the site's physical restoration progresses further, we aim to make Whispering Souls a focal point for community education about local history and race. It will be a place not only to honor the past but to consider the kind of future we want to create.

Promote Public Health and Safety

The loss of tree canopy during hurricanes dramatically reduced comfort and accessibility, especially during Florida's hottest months. Restoring shade through healthy tree growth is critical to making the cemetery safe and usable for all visitors.

Practice Superior Environmental Stewardship

Our new trees were selected with arborist guidance to support biodiversity and resilience. We continue to follow expert advice, and the irrigation system will allow for optimal water use without waste. This reflects a long-term commitment to environmental responsibility.

Foster Economic Growth & Vitality

Though the cemetery doesn't generate revenue, it contributes to broader economic awareness. Many of the interred were buried without headstones because of poverty — some graves were marked with broken dishware, seashells or wood. Educating the public about these disparities fosters community conversations about equity, justice, and sustainable economic decision-making.

Maintain Social, Economic, Cultural Equitability

Whispering Souls represents a local and national legacy of injustice — and an opportunity to redress it. We've partnered with students from Hillsborough and Pinellas counties on memorial projects and hope to expand these educational partnerships.

Thanks to restoration efforts including mowing, fencing, a historic marker, and a memorial listing the names of the interred, the site welcomes descendants and visitors once again. It stands ready to teach, provoke thought, and honor lives once at risk of being forgotten.

**Additional
Information**

[WhisperingSoulsCOMBINEDQuotes.pdf \(1.75 MB\)](#)

**Authorized
Signature (Printed
Name / Title)
(Required)**

Jacqueline Hayes

Authorization Date

09-11-2025

(Required)

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