

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Consultancy to Develop and Implement a High-End, Low-Footprint Eco-Tourism Strategy for the Mpala Research Centre

OBJECTIVES

The Mpala Research Centre seeks to hire a consultant or firm with expertise in developing tourism models within conservation and research landscapes. The objective is to design a strategic framework for high-end, small-scale eco-tourism that generates sustainable revenue while safeguarding Mpala's core mission of research, teaching, and conservation.

This will be Mpala's first structured exploration of tourism, requiring thoughtful analysis, stakeholder facilitation, and benchmarking of comparable models across Africa and globally. The consultancy will help Mpala and its Board identify an optimal tourism footprint, assess land-use trade-offs, and guide the institution in positioning itself as a premier, low-impact, research-aligned destination. Beyond design, the consultant will also guide Mpala through the implementation phase, including identification, assessment, and onboarding of a suitable eco-tourism partner or operator consistent with Mpala's mission and governance structure.

ABOUT MPALA RESEARCH CENTRE

The Mpala Research Centre, established in 1994, is a premier ecological research and teaching institution located on 48,000 acres in Laikipia County, Kenya. It operates as a partnership among Princeton University, the Smithsonian Institution, the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Kenya Wildlife Research and Training Institute, and the National Museums of Kenya.

Mpala functions as an environmental studies campus and a living laboratory for cutting-edge research in conservation, ecology, and sustainable land use, hosting long-term ecological experiments, field courses, a genomics and endocrine laboratory, and international collaborations. New research and teaching in the humanities, arts, engineering, and social sciences is underway. Mpala's 30-year legacy includes research that has led to over 750 scientific publications, and deep engagement with local communities.

Mpala's new Strategic Plan (2025–2030) emphasizes diversification of revenue streams and a commitment to research excellence, sustainability, and local benefit, priorities that frame this consultancy.

PROJECT SCOPE

The consultant will work closely with the Mpala Eco-Tourism Working Group (a subcommittee of the Mpala Board) to:

- Position Mpala as a unique, high-end, low-footprint research-conservation tourism destination.

- Develop a prospectus articulating Mpala’s value proposition to potential investors and partners.
- Guide the site-selection and footprint planning process, ensuring ecological, research, and teaching sensitivity.
- Benchmark against comparable models globally (e.g., conservation-linked lodges, research-based tourism ventures, and philanthropic safari models).
- Evaluate potential land-use interactions and trade-offs between tourism and ongoing research, education, livestock, and conservation operations.
- Guide Mpala through implementation steps, including development of selection criteria, evaluation of potential tourism operators or partners, facilitation of due diligence, and support during negotiation and onboarding.

KEY DELIVERABLES

A. Strategic and Technical Framework

- Tourism positioning and vision document.
- Benchmarking analysis.
- Stakeholder mapping and engagement plan.
- Site selection and land-use advisory.

B. Implementation and Financial Guidance

- Prospectus and investment guide.
- Operational framework defining governance and partnership models.
- Roadmap and timeline.
- Detailed criteria and processes for partner selection.
- Due diligence support for shortlisted operators.
- Facilitation of contracting and onboarding of the selected partner.

C. Presentation and Facilitation

- Workshops and board sessions.
- Final Presentation to the Mpala Board of Trustees.

CONSULTANT REQUIREMENTS

The consultant or firm must demonstrate:

- Proven experience in developing high-end or conservation-linked tourism projects (preferably in Kenya).
- Experience in tourism project implementation, operator onboarding, or public-private partnership facilitation will be strongly preferred.
- Familiarity with research stations or multi-use conservation landscapes.
- Expertise in site planning, feasibility assessment, and stakeholder facilitation.

- Strong analytical capability to assess financial sustainability, ecological footprint, and socio-economic impact in Kenya.
- Excellent communication and report-writing skills.
- Sensitivity to Mpala's academic, scientific, and conservation mission.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

Interested consultants or firms should submit:

1. A cover letter outlining relevant experience.
2. A technical proposal describing methodology, approach, timeline, and deliverables.
3. Team composition and CVs of key personnel.
4. Examples of similar projects.
5. Work plan and timeline.
6. Financial proposal including itemized costs.
7. References from comparable assignments.

SUBMISSION AND TIMELINE

All proposals should be submitted electronically with the subject line:

MPALA ECO-TOURISM STRATEGY CONSULTANT RFP RESPONSE

Send to nelly.palmeris@mpala.org by November 3, 2025.

Shortlisted candidates may be invited for an interview in November 2025.

The selected consultant is expected to commence work in January 2026.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- Demonstrated experience and technical expertise.
- Methodological soundness and understanding of Mpala's mission (research, teaching, and conservation).
- Quality and practicality of proposed outputs and roadmap.
- Demonstrated ability to bridge strategy and implementation, including partner identification, negotiation support, and early-stage execution.
- Cost effectiveness.
- Strength of references and track record of delivery.

CONTACT INFORMATION

All inquiries and submissions should be directed to Mpala Research Centre:

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