



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### M.L. 2026 Draft Work Plan

#### General Information

**ID Number:** 2026-002

**Staff Lead:** Michael Varien

**Date this document submitted to LCCMR:** October 29, 2025

**Project Title:** Greater Minnesota Children's Museum Coalition Nature Play Curriculum

**Project Budget:** \$300,000

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Crystal Olson

**Organization:** Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota

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#### Project Reporting

**Reporting Schedule:** April 1 / October 1 of each year.

**Project Completion:** June 30, 2028

**Final Report Due Date:** August 14, 2028

#### Legal Information

**Legal Citation:**

**Appropriation Language:**

**Appropriation End Date:** June 30, 2028

## Narrative

**Project Summary:** The Coalition will work collaboratively to share, expand upon, and standardize existing curriculum of nature-based programming to engage children birth-10, fostering environmental stewardship, awareness of natural resources, and sustainability.

**Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

Children today have fewer opportunities to engage with nature due to increased screen time, urbanization, and limited access to outdoor environments. This disconnect from nature hinders their understanding of the environment, natural resources, and sustainability, which are critical for fostering lifelong environmental stewardship. Early exposure to nature-based learning is vital for cultivating curiosity, empathy, and responsibility toward the natural world, yet many children, particularly in underserved communities, lack access to these experiences.

Environmental education is not equally accessible to all children in Minnesota. Limited resources and lack of nature-based learning opportunities prevent many children from developing strong connections to the environment. This disparity hinders their understanding of natural resources, conservation, and sustainability, essential knowledge for fostering lifelong environmental stewardship. Additionally, some children and families encounter barriers such as financial limitations, language barriers, cultural differences, or lack of accommodations for special needs, further limiting access to high quality environmental education.

**What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.**

The Greater Minnesota Children's Museum Coalition recognizes this gap and the need for accessible, high-quality environmental education tailored to children ages birth-10. By leveraging the collective expertise, resources, and existing curriculum of member museums across the state, the Coalition seeks to standardize curriculum that will be shared and introduces young learners to the wonders of nature. To ensure equity, Coalition members already have access initiatives, such as free/reduced memberships, in place that support those experiencing barriers, ensuring all children can access these environmental programs.

This initiative expands upon the coalition's existing environmental programs, enhancing them with interactive, age-appropriate content that aligns with Minnesota State Science Standards. It will engage children in learning about ecosystems, conservation, and the importance of protecting natural resources. As a foundation for this effort, the Coalition has compiled an inventory of 20 pre-existing nature-based programs at its disposal (see supplemental attachments).

Environmental learning begins in early childhood, inspiring the next generation to value and care for the environment. Structured programs, paired with books, expert discussions, and hands-on exploration, enhance environmental literacy in youth. This project strengthens environmental education by uniting expertise and resources throughout Minnesota, ensuring a broader statewide impact.

**What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?**

The way children play today shapes the adults they become, influencing their appreciation for nature and their role in environmental stewardship. This project will foster stewardship by educating children ages birth-10 about Minnesota's ecosystems, conservation practices, and sustainable resource use. Outcomes will be demonstrated through the statewide launch of a standardized curriculum, implementation across all Coalition museums, and consistent reporting of locations, participation, and modules taught. A final evaluation report will aggregate data and feedback, providing clear evidence of reach, impact, and progress toward cultivating lifelong environmental responsibility.

## Project Location

**What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?**

Statewide

**What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?**

Statewide

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project and In the Future

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Curriculum Refinement

**Activity Budget:** \$86,400

#### **Activity Description:**

The Coalition will collaborate with environmental educators, naturalists, early childhood specialists, and accessibility experts to refine and standardize environmental education programming for children birth–10. Building on the existing programming inventory, this activity will analyze current offerings to identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. Special attention will be given to alignment with Minnesota State Science Standards, developmental appropriateness, and cultural and accessibility considerations.

Expert consultations will provide recommendations on age-specific learning needs, inclusive practices, and effective approaches for building environmental literacy. These insights will guide the development of draft curriculum materials—including lesson plans, hands-on modules, and educator support tools—tailored to three age groups: birth–2, 3–5, and 6–10. As needed, equipment and supplies will be purchased to support pilot implementation.

#### Milestones & Deliverables

Analyze Existing Programming Inventory – Deliverable: Written report identifying strengths, gaps, and opportunities.

Expert Consultations – Deliverable: Summary of expert recommendations.

Curriculum Development – Deliverable: Draft lesson plans, activity guides, and educator tools.

Purchase Equipment/Supplies – Deliverable: Itemized list of purchases supporting pilot implementation.

Finalize and Distribute Curriculum/Materials (final) – Deliverable: Completed, standardized curriculum distributed to all Coalition museums.

The specific deliverable for this activity is a finalized curriculum ready for distribution.

#### **Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Analyze Existing Programming Inventory	December 31, 2025
Expert Consultations	June 30, 2026
Curriculum Development	June 30, 2026
Purchase Necessary Equipment, Tools, and Supplies	August 31, 2026
Finalize and Distribute Curriculum/Materials (final)	August 31, 2026

### Activity 2: Curriculum Launch, Evaluation & Reporting

**Activity Budget:** \$213,600

#### **Activity Description:**

The finalized environmental education curriculum will be launched across all Coalition museums to ensure consistent, high-quality programming. This activity begins with distributing standardized materials and providing training for museum educators on developmentally appropriate practices, inclusive teaching strategies, and alignment with Minnesota State Science Standards.

Each site will then implement the curriculum as part of its regular offerings, documenting where, when, and what modules are taught, along with participant numbers. An evaluation framework will be established to measure outcomes, using educator feedback, participant observations, and family surveys. Data will be compiled semi-annually and shared

with stakeholders and LCCMR.

Findings from the first year of implementation will inform iterative improvements to curriculum content and educator supports, ensuring the program remains responsive, accessible, and impactful statewide.

**Milestones:**

Complete staff training

Curriculum launch at all Coalition sites

Semi-annual data collection, evaluation, and interim reporting

Final evaluation report aggregating participation, locations, and outcomes (final)

The specific deliverable for this activity is a comprehensive evaluation report documenting statewide curriculum implementation, participation data, and demonstrated progress toward cultivating lifelong environmental stewardship in Minnesota's youngest learners.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Final Evaluation and Reporting (final)	June 30, 2026
Staff Training	September 30, 2026
Curriculum Launch	October 31, 2026
Semi-Annual Evaluation, Reporting, and Refinement	May 31, 2028

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Sheila Bolt	Wonder Trek Museum, Brainerd	Communications Manager	Yes
Marissa Woodruff	The Works Museum, Bloomington	Director of Education	Yes
Megan Long	SPARK, Rochester	Education & Program Manager	Yes
Janie Heitz	Children's Discovery Museum, Grand Rapids	Executive Director	Yes
Janelle Benson	Children's Discovery Museum, Grand Rapids	Program & Visitor Services Manager	Yes
Jessi Wendland Boike	Wheel and Cog, Hutchinson	Chair	Yes
Drew Jensen	Duluth Children's Museum	Executive Director	Yes
Tasha Oliver	Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota	Program Facilitator	Yes

## Dissemination

**Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.**  
Dissemination, Presentation, and Sharing Plan:

The Greater Minnesota Children's Museum Coalition will implement a multi-faceted dissemination strategy to ensure that the curriculum, findings, and impact of this project are shared broadly, equitably, and sustainably across the state.

### 1. Statewide Distribution of Curriculum & Program Materials

The standardized environmental education curriculum will be implemented across all 12 Coalition member museums, reaching children and families in both urban and rural areas. Materials—such as educator guides and activity toolkits—will be made available in digital formats, ensuring adaptability across museum settings.

### 2. Documentation

We will document best practices and lessons learned during implementation and share them across Coalition members.

### 3. Community Engagement and Outreach

Through museum programming, community partnerships, and public events, we will share this project with parents,

caregivers, educators, and local stakeholders. Programming will be designed to promote behavior change by encouraging families to engage with local ecosystems, adopt conservation habits, and better understand their role in protecting natural resources.

#### 4. Reporting, Evaluation, and Public Access to Results

Program outcomes—including participation data, equity metrics, and evidence of increased environmental literacy—will be documented and reported to LCCMR and made publicly available. We will also contribute key findings to relevant networks to support broader implementation and replication.

#### 5. Sharing with Policy Leaders and Resource Managers

A summary report of the project’s reach and impact will be shared with state legislators, resource managers, and public education leaders to highlight the role early environmental education plays in long-term conservation outcomes. By documenting successful approaches, we aim to inform future decisions about education and environmental management in Minnesota.

#### 6. Sustainability and Longevity of Resources

All curriculum and program materials developed through this project will be shared among Coalition member museums and integrated into their ongoing environmental education offerings to ensure long-term use and impact beyond the funding period.

#### 7. Public Awareness and Recognition of ENRTF Support

We will clearly acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund in all materials, signage, media, and communications related to the project. The story of this initiative and its impact on children and families will be shared through press releases, social media, and feature stories across the state, ensuring that Minnesotans understand how ENRTF funding is making a real and lasting difference in their communities.

### Long-Term Implementation and Funding

**Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?**

The curriculum will be implemented statewide through Coalition museums, ensuring accessibility and consistent delivery. Once developed, the curriculum can be utilized for years, maximizing its long-term impact.

Continuous evaluation will demonstrate effectiveness. Ongoing efforts will be funded through diversified sources, including grants, donations, sponsorships, and partnerships.

Findings and products will be shared within the Coalition, ensuring continued relevance and adaptation to community needs without significant additional development costs.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Program Facilitator		Facilitates the nature-based curriculum - 2 program facilitators, \$21/hour working 70 hours/year			0%	0.14		\$5,850
Playworker		Supports the nature-based curriculum facilitators - 3 playworkers, \$14/hour working, 70 hours/year			0%	0.2		\$5,850
Guest Experience Coordinator		Supports the nature-based curriculum facilitators - 3 GEC, \$18/hour working, 70 hours/year			0%	0.2		\$7,520
Program Director		Program oversight and facilitator - 1 Program Director, \$30/hour working 70 hours/year			0%	0.06		\$4,180
Grant Management		Grant reporting and financial management - 1 Development Director, Operations Manager, & VP of Operations, \$30/hour, 100 hours/year each			0%	0.28		\$6,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$29,400</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Great River Children's Museum - St. Cloud	Subaward	Personnel \$23,400; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$10,440; Printing & Publications \$1,440				0.6		\$35,280
The Works Museum - Bloomington	Subaward	Personnel \$23,400; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$10,440; Printing & Publications \$1,440				0.6		\$35,280
SPARK - Rochester	Subaward	Personnel \$19,500; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$8,700; Printing & Publications \$1,200				0.6		\$29,400
WonderTrek - Brainerd	Subaward	Personnel \$19,500; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$8,700; Printing & Publications \$1,200				0.6		\$29,400
Duluth Children's Museum - Duluth	Subaward	Personnel \$19,500; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$8,700; Printing & Publications \$1,200				0.6		\$29,400
Children's Discovery Museum - Grand Rapids	Subaward	Personnel \$16,570; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$7,400; Printing & Publications \$1,020				0.6		\$24,990

Otter Cove - Fergus Falls	Subaward	Personnel \$16,570; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$7,400; Printing & Publications \$1,020			0.6		\$24,990
Children's Discovery Center - Breckenridge	Subaward	Personnel \$16,570; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$7,400; Printing & Publications \$1,020			0.6		\$24,990
MiniSota - Benson	Subaward	Personnel \$16,570; Equipment/Tools Supplies \$7,400; Printing & Publications \$1,020			0.6		\$24,990
						<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$258,720</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>							
	Tools and Supplies	Exploration Tools - Magnifying glasses, binoculars, misc.	Help children closely observe small organisms, textures, and details in nature, fostering curiosity and critical thinking.				\$725
	Tools and Supplies	Recording & Observation Tools - Notebooks, clipboards, pencils, colored pencils, sketchpads, misc.	Encourage children to document their findings, make sketches, and reflect on their experiences, supporting scientific inquiry and literacy.				\$1,450
	Tools and Supplies	Educational Visuals - Posters, models, books, guides, misc.	Provide reference points for identifying plants, animals, and ecological concepts, making abstract ideas more concrete and accessible.				\$1,450
	Tools and Supplies	Interactive Materials - Sensory bins/table material, fishing equipment, hydroponics set up, misc.	Promote active learning through sensory engagement and hands-on exploration, making ecological concepts more accessible and meaningful.				\$6,815
						<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$10,440</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>							
						<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>							
						<b>Sub Total</b>	-

<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Signage	Signage for the programs, rotating per program, featuring learning domains, explanation of projects, etc					\$1,440
							<b>Sub Total</b>	\$1,440
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	\$300,000

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	Out of Pocket	Staff Time for Curriculum Enhancement - Each museum is responsible for covering the cost of their own staff time required to standardize and enhance the curriculum.	Secured	\$30,000
In-Kind	Out of Pocket	Staff Time for Grant Administration- Each museum is responsible for covering the cost of reporting to CMSM for LCCMR reports.	Secured	\$10,000
In-Kind	Out of Pocket	Staff Time for Curriculum Task Force – Coalition education staff established a cross-museum task force to lead the environmental programming review, ensuring findings are grounded in direct classroom experience.	Secured	\$5,000
In-Kind	Out of Pocket	Staff Time for Programming Inventory – The task force compiled a shared inventory of existing early environmental education programs, identifying overlaps, gaps, and best practices to guide the development of a standardized curriculum framework.	Secured	\$5,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$350,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [b7603239-cce.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

A collage of photos of the coalition's numerous environmental programming....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
CMSM 2023 IRS Form 990 and Audit	<a href="#">0eb5c5ef-400.pdf</a>
CMSM Secretary of State Certificate	<a href="#">cdf85106-81e.pdf</a>
CMSM 2023 Audit	<a href="#">e1035821-bdb.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
CMSM LCCMR Proposal Letter	<a href="#">5b56558e-4cc.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

#### *Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other*

Title	File
CMSM Nature Based Programs Inventory - Full	<a href="#">488748fd-796.pdf</a>
CMSM Coalition Nature Play Curriculum Tracking	<a href="#">193e781b-ad4.docx</a>

### Media Links

Title	Link
Pollinators at Play	<a href="https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/exhibits/pollinators-at-play/">https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/exhibits/pollinators-at-play/</a>
Children's Discovery Museum Exhibits - Including an Educational Replica of a dam on the Mississippi River	<a href="https://cdmkids.org/exhibits/">https://cdmkids.org/exhibits/</a>
H2OH! Water Table	<a href="https://sparkrochestermn.org/exhibits/h2oh-2/">https://sparkrochestermn.org/exhibits/h2oh-2/</a>
<a href="https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/events/the-great-butterfly-tag-along-2025/">https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/events/the-great-butterfly-tag-along-2025/</a>	<a href="https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/events/the-great-butterfly-tag-along-2025/">https://www.cmsouthernmn.org/events/the-great-butterfly-tag-along-2025/</a>

### Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

#### *Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage*

Activities and Milestones was revised per staff comments.

Project title was revised from LCCMR CMSM 2026 Proposal to Greater Minnesota Children's Museum Coalition Nature Play Curriculum per staff comments.

CMSM 2023 Audit (most recent certified audit report) was uploaded per staff comments.

Visual Component - A collage of photos of the coalition's numerous environmental programming was uploaded to Required Attachments per staff comments.

Dissemination efforts, new to the Work Plan, were outlined

All other new questions asked in the Work Plan were answered.



## **Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:**

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

**Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?**  
N/A

**Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?**

N/A

**Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?**

No

**Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?**

N/A

**Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?**

N/A

**Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?**

No

**Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?**

No

**Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?**

No

**Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?**

Yes

**Do you certify that background checks are performed for background check crimes, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 299C.61, Subd. 2, on all employees, contractors, and volunteers who have or may have access to a child to whom children's services are provided by your organization?**

Yes

**Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:**

Sheila Bolt – Wonder Trek Museum, Brainerd

Marissa Woodruff – The Works Museum, Bloomington

Megan Long – SPARK, Rochester

Janie Heitz – Children's Discovery Museum, Grand Rapids

Janelle Benson – Children's Discovery Museum, Grand Rapids

Jessi Wendland Boike – Wheel and Cog, Hutchinson

Drew Jensen – Duluth Children's Museum

Tasha Oliver – Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota

Louise Dickmeyer - Children's Museum of Southern Minnesota

Will Waggoner - Momentum Advocacy

**Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements**

N/A