



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2021 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2021-186

Proposal Title: The Voyageurs Classroom Initiative

Project Manager Information

Name: Christina Hausman Rhode

Organization: Voyageurs National Park Association

Office Telephone: (612) 333-5424

Email: vnpa@voyageurs.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The Voyageurs Classroom will connect 6,000 Minnesota youth to Voyageurs National Park over three years to learn about its waters, wildlife, forests and skies, and engage in its preservation.

Funds Requested: \$409,000

Proposed Project Completion: 2024-06-30

LCCMR Funding Category: Environmental Education (C)

Project Location

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

Region(s): NE

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

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project

Narrative

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

This project will connect Minnesota youth to Voyageurs - their National Park.

To protect our park for generations to come, we must create meaningful contexts for youth to become Voyageurs' stewards and champions—this begins with environmental education, for all ages.

Voyageurs is both a state treasure and an exceptional outdoor classroom encompassing ecological, cultural, and geologic wonders. However, its public programming is extremely limited. Voyageurs is 40% water which creates barriers for many to experience the park's waterways.

The park's current environmental education program serves only 1,200 youth annually. Opportunities for high school/college youth are particularly limited. Internships lack stipends and structured partnerships which limits diverse representation and access to career pathways.

Community surveys and exploratory meetings tell us families, teachers, and partners are eager for increased education opportunities in the park. A life-long International Falls resident remarked, "I didn't step foot in the park until I was 18 years old. I'm trying to change that for my kids."

Currently, Voyageurs National Park has no sustainable programming for environmental education beyond K-6, internships, distance learning, or neighboring families. VNPA will address this need and remove barriers for more youth to experience the park.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? i.e. What are you seeking funding to do? You will be asked to expand on this in Activities and Milestones.

With support from LCCMR and private philanthropy, VNPA will grow its public-private partnership with the National Park Service and drastically expand public engagement by implementing a Voyageurs Classroom suite of programs for children, college students, and families. VNPA and the Park Service will collaboratively launch a joint education initiative - the Voyageurs Classroom - to grow the number of youth and young adults we serve from 1,200 to over 3,000 annually by the end of phase one.

By establishing new partnerships with schools and colleges, growing volunteerism, and leveraging existing resources, VNPA will deliver bolstered environmental education programs for a wider and more diverse audience, including:

- Additional programs for K-6 students including floating classroom experiences and virtual learning
- An expanded Teen Ambassador initiative
- Field Fellows program for students 18-25
- In-park event and program opportunities for families

VNPA is the only dedicated 501c3 program partner of the park. Since 2012, VNPA has engaged 200 high schoolers in the award-winning National Park Teen Ambassador program, and piloted 'Love Your Park' events reaching over 2,500 people in 2019. VNPA recently hired an education manager to support growth innovation in park programs alongside NPS staff.

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?

Voyageurs National Park's 218,000 acres comprise lakes and wetlands designated as Outstanding Resource Value Waters, rare geology, diverse species and ecosystems, and 655 miles of undeveloped shoreline. The park provides for current and potential land management, research, education, and preservation opportunities. Yet without the means to reinforce personal connections to Voyageurs, public support for its ongoing stewardship will wane. Established programming that provides meaningful and reliable opportunities in the park and in the classroom will ensure increased access for younger and more diverse audiences, and an ongoing partnership with park neighbors empowering them to care for the park.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Engage 6,000 K-12 youth in Voyageurs Classroom programs in the park and in the classroom.

Activity Budget: \$286,730

Activity Description:

Activity 1 focuses on expanding K-12 learning opportunities through the Voyageurs Classroom Initiative. Program capacity will expand by adding staff, training volunteer educators, providing teacher stipends, and collaborating with University of Minnesota-Duluth's environmental education program. VNPA will also adapt current curriculum for classroom and virtual learning and host collaborative workshops with teachers and students to innovate current programs with new subject matter that is relevant to diverse audiences and aligns with school standards. Activity 1 has three main components:

- VNPA will increase programs for K-6 students to experience park trails, field days, and floating classroom opportunities that get children in the park via its waterways. Activities will provide hands-on enrichment on ecology, history, and geology.
- The successful Teen Ambassador program will expand to serve 300 high school youth, especially from local, urban, and tribal areas. Students will participate in single and multi-day park excursions centered on our changing lakes and forests, and environmental careers. In turn, future Voyageurs stewards will be more representative of diverse communities.
- Current park programs will be adapted to include virtual and classroom components, broadening the reach of VNPA's environmental education programs to those beyond the park's neighboring communities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Facilitate 1 partner planning retreat and 2 listening workshops with teachers and students.	2021-11-30
Train 8 volunteer and teacher educators.	2022-10-31
Engage 2,200 K-6 youth in education programs at Voyageurs National Park and in the classroom.	2022-10-31
Adapt two existing K-6 programs for virtual and classroom learning and pilot to 15 classes.	2022-10-31
Engage 3,500 K-6 youth in education programs at Voyageurs National Park and in the classroom.	2023-10-31
Engage 300 high school students in 1-day and multi-day Teen Ambassador program experiences.	2024-06-30
Develop and implement program evaluation and create project report.	2024-06-30

Activity 2: Establish Field Fellows program to empower young adults with environmental career experience at Voyageurs National Park.

Activity Budget: \$91,040

Activity Description:

Voyageurs National Park offers an exceptional outdoor classroom for future conservation professionals to gain hands-on experience. However, the park currently lacks a structured internship program and established college/university partnerships. VNPA will launch a Field Fellows program to ensure the Voyageurs Classroom Initiative creates professional opportunities for students, aged 18-25.

In phase one, VNPA will support 15 Field Fellows (high school graduates/college students ages 18-25 years old) over a 3-year period in coordination with National Park Service staff. Fellows will perform project and research activities involving water quality, invasive species, wildlife science, environmental education, and historic preservation, among other areas. Paid internships for undergraduate and graduate students will help increase accessibility and diversity. Projects will be designed with both university and park priorities in mind. Under the Voyageurs Classroom, Field Fellows will contribute

to educational programs, field work, and conservation efforts in VNP, while representing a new and diverse generation of public land professionals.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Establish position descriptions and university/college partnerships.	2021-09-30
Sponsor seven Field Fellows in park positions engaging in hands-on career experience.	2022-10-31
Sponsor eight Field Fellows in park positions engaging in hands-on career experience.	2024-05-31
Evaluate program effectiveness and impact.	2024-06-30

Activity 3: Deliver Love Your Park series to connect regional families to the National Park in their backyard.

Activity Budget: \$31,230

Activity Description:

By establishing the park as a truly accessible resource that provides real experiential value for local kids and families, we can further develop a local conservation ethic and love of the park. Tension that existed between Voyageurs National Park and its neighboring communities in the park’s early formation lingers today. VNPA will expand its Love Your Park program series piloted in 2019 with an education and recreation series for families to further reinforce lessons kids experience in K12 programs. Love Your Park aims to get people of all ages, abilities, and skill levels recreating in and connecting to Voyageurs National Park. Programming will be year-round and include guided hikes and winter snowshoe walks, volunteer work days, ‘how to’ workshops, and special speakers and performances. VNPA will work with current partners and programmatic leaders, such as the Boreal Observatory, to bring learning opportunities to the park. Through this effort, local families and community members will gain a greater understanding of the park's resources, how they can recreate safely, and an increased sense of responsibility for their public lands.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Pilot monthly series to engage families in learning and recreation in Voyageurs National Park.	2022-06-30
Deliver year-round monthly series to engage families in learning and recreation in the park.	2023-12-31
Evaluate program effectiveness and impact.	2024-05-31

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Joel Halvorson	Boreal Observatory	Joel Halvorson is a Science Communications Consultant and a designated External Service Provider, supporting the University of Minnesota-Duluth's public engagement efforts. VNPA will partner with the Boreal Observatory and its collaborators to expand learning opportunities in the park for children and families.	No
Brian Meyer	Southwest High School & AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination)	Brian Meyer partners with VNPA to connect Teen Ambassador program opportunities to students he works with.	No
Brian Harmon	National Park Service	Brian C. Harmon, Chief of Cultural and Natural Resource Management at Voyageurs National Park, will help oversee internship program development and supervision for the Field Fellows program.	No
Laurie A. Bitter	Indus School	Laurie Bitter, principal, will collaborate with VNPA and NPS to connect her K-12 students to our environmental education programs in the park.	No
Bob DeGross	National Park Service	Bob DeGross, Superintendent of Voyageurs National Park, will oversee and advise on the growth and development of the Voyageurs Classroom Initiative and help support outreach to partners and communities.	No
Julie Athman Ernst	Center for Environmental Education, Department of Applied Human Sciences, University of Minnesota - Duluth	Julie Athman Ernst, Ph.D., Director of Master of Environmental Education Program, will advise on education program development and support student recruitment for the Field Fellows program.	No
Ingrid Schneider	Forest Resources, University of Minnesota	Ingrid Schneider, Ph.D. will advise on program development and support student recruitment for the Field Fellows program.	No
Joseph K. Bump	Conservation Sciences Graduate Program, University of Minnesota, Institute on the Environment	Joseph K. Bump, Ph.D. will advise on program development and support student recruitment for the Field Fellows program.	No
Suzanne Huggett	Wilderness Inquiry	Suzanne serves as our partner on trip coordination for multi-day aspects of the National Park Teen Ambassador program. VNPA contracts with Wilderness Inquiry to lead these trips.	Yes
Tawnya Schoewe	National Park Service	Tawnya Schoewe is Chief of Interpretation at Voyageurs National Park and will serve as the lead National Park Service liaison on all joint education program planning.	No

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 be funded?

Voyageurs National Park Association is completely supported through philanthropy and is fortunate to receive funding from a wide variety of sources including individuals, businesses neighboring the park, Minnesota corporate partners, and local and national foundations. VNPA is committed to including the Voyageurs Classroom Initiative as a key component of our programming and our diverse sources of support will ensure continuity. VNPA will leverage the LCCMR grant to scale up environmental education and to attract additional private donations.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Christina Hausman Rhode

Job Title: Executive Director

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.

While an Education and Outreach Manager will coordinate implementation, VNPA's executive director will oversee and ensure project success in close partnership with the National Park Service.

Christina Hausman Rhode has been the executive director of Voyageurs National Park Association since 2014. She has over 12 years experience working in community outreach and program and partnership development in the nonprofit industry. She has previously worked for The Nature Conservancy and the Hennepin Health Foundation. Rhode holds a bachelor's degree in biology and political science, and a minor in journalism from Augustana University in Sioux Falls, SD. Rhode is a graduate of the Institute of Executive Leadership Development at the University of St. Thomas and is currently enrolled in the National Park Foundation's first-ever National Park's Friends Leadership Institute. In 2016, she was recognized with a Midwest Region Champion Award from the National Park Service.

Rhode has been able to build in-roads and establish strong, positive relationships between regional communities, the National Park Service, and Voyageurs National Park Association. She has successfully managed large-scale projects, like the Land Preservation Initiative, and been able to launch new public engagement efforts, like the National Park Teen Ambassador program.

Organization: Voyageurs National Park Association

Organization Description:

Voyageurs National Park Association (VNPA) serves the community as an official nonprofit partner to the National Park Service, supporting recreation, preservation, public engagement, and land and water conservation at Voyageurs National Park. VNPA's main initiatives include:

Keep Voyageurs Wild

VNPA works with the National Park Service to protect Voyageurs' lands, waters, wildlife, night skies, and wild character through public education, advocacy, funding restoration and research work, and purchasing land to add to the park. Priority efforts include the Land Preservation Initiative, Dark Sky Initiative, wetland restoration, and aquatic invasive species prevention.

Love Your Park

VNPA works to grow the community of park stewards by implementing events and programs that expand volunteerism and public connection to park experiences, and celebrate the park's legacy.

Youth Ambassadors & Voyageurs Classroom

Through school field trip grants, environmental education programs, the Teen Ambassador project, and an emerging Field Fellows program, we work to ignite a passion for Voyageurs and conservation in a younger, more diverse audience.

Voyageurs Experience

VNPA helps NPS improve the visitor experience by providing resources for access and sustainable recreation projects and improvements. It also works to create resources to enhance public understanding around ways they can learn and explore in Voyageurs.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Education and Outreach Director/Project Manager		Oversee implementation of Voyageurs Classroom programming, develop partnerships, coordinate volunteers, oversee program evaluation and expansion			20%	3		\$187,000
Environmental Educator		Deliver K-12 and Love Your Park programming and train others to deliver programming			10%	1		\$47,000
							Sub Total	\$234,000
Contracts and Services								
Wilderness Inquiry	Sub award	Transportation, equipment, guides, food, gear for 150 students on multi-day excursions in Voyageurs				0		\$59,100
Kristin Shardlow Consulting, LLC	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Print and graphic design for program materials				0		\$2,600
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Making program materials 508 compliant				0		\$1,600
							Sub Total	\$63,300
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Education Trunks	Materials for educators to use in roving or classroom formats (\$480 x 8)					\$3,840
	Equipment	Virtual Classroom Equipment	Set up and technology needs excluding computer (based on estimates from other parks with virtual ranger systems)					\$5,000
	Tools and Supplies	Discovery Packs	For independent and roving learning (\$65 x 20)					\$1,300
							Sub Total	\$10,140

Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage (\$0.58 per mile) and lodging (2 trips x 3 years) VNPA headquarters to park	For education program planning, teacher and student workshops, volunteer training					\$6,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage (\$0.58 per mile) or car rental	For program manager and educator travel to deliver education programs throughout park and regionally					\$8,660
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Mileage (\$0.58 per mile) or car rental	For Field Fellows program outreach					\$1,600
							Sub Total	\$16,260
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Outreach and dissemination materials	Flyers, brochures and postcards to promote environmental education learning opportunities (\$.30 x 8000)					\$2,400
	Printing	Classroom kits	Materials for classroom and virtual learning (\$1.10 x 2000)					\$2,200
							Sub Total	\$4,600
Other Expenses								
		Zoom web based platform	For virtual classroom learning opportunities.					\$1,500
		Environmental education graduate student stipend (\$8,000 x 3 years)	To support the adaption and expansion of current curriculum for classroom and virtual learning and					\$24,000

			improve relevancy for diverse audiences.					
		Field Fellowship stipends (\$3000 x 15)	To remove financial barriers for students to be able to engage in hands-on environmental career experience.					\$45,000
		Volunteer/teacher stipends for programs (\$150 x 15 x 3 years)	To expand people resources to engage more youth in environmental education programs at Voyageurs National Park.					\$6,750
		Honorariums for speakers (\$300/speaker)	To expand opportunities for regional families to learn and recreate in Voyageurs National Park.					\$2,700
		Facility rental and permit fees	To secure locations for programming.					\$750
							Sub Total	\$80,700
							Grand Total	\$409,000

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
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	National Park Service	Staff time, boat transportation, housing, curriculum and program materials	Pending	\$115,000
In-Kind	Voyageurs National Park Association individual, business, and foundation donors	Additional staff support from the Voyageurs National Park Association Executive Director and Operations Coordinator (\$10,822 x 3 years)	Secured	\$32,466
			Non State Sub Total	\$147,466
			Funds Total	\$147,466

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [fb7ef8d9-c53.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Three photos depict:

- 1) A young adult taking a water quality sample with text "Launch Field Fellows program giving young adults National Park Service and environmental career experience"
- 2) An adult and two children in a canoe with the text "Deliver Love Your Park family program series"
- 3) Two high school students swimming in a Voyageurs lake with the text "Connect 5,000+ K-6 students, 300 Teen Ambassadors to Voyageurs on the water and in the classroom"

Financial Capacity

File: [fb5ce8be-062.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
VNPA Board Resolution	276abf8d-df8.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
Letter of support from National Park Service	ccb08967-096.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have patent, royalties, or revenue potential?

No

Does your project include research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No




VOYAGEURS
NATIONAL PARK
ASSOCIATION

Voyageurs Classroom Initiative

Removing barriers and
expanding resources to
connect more youth to
their National Park

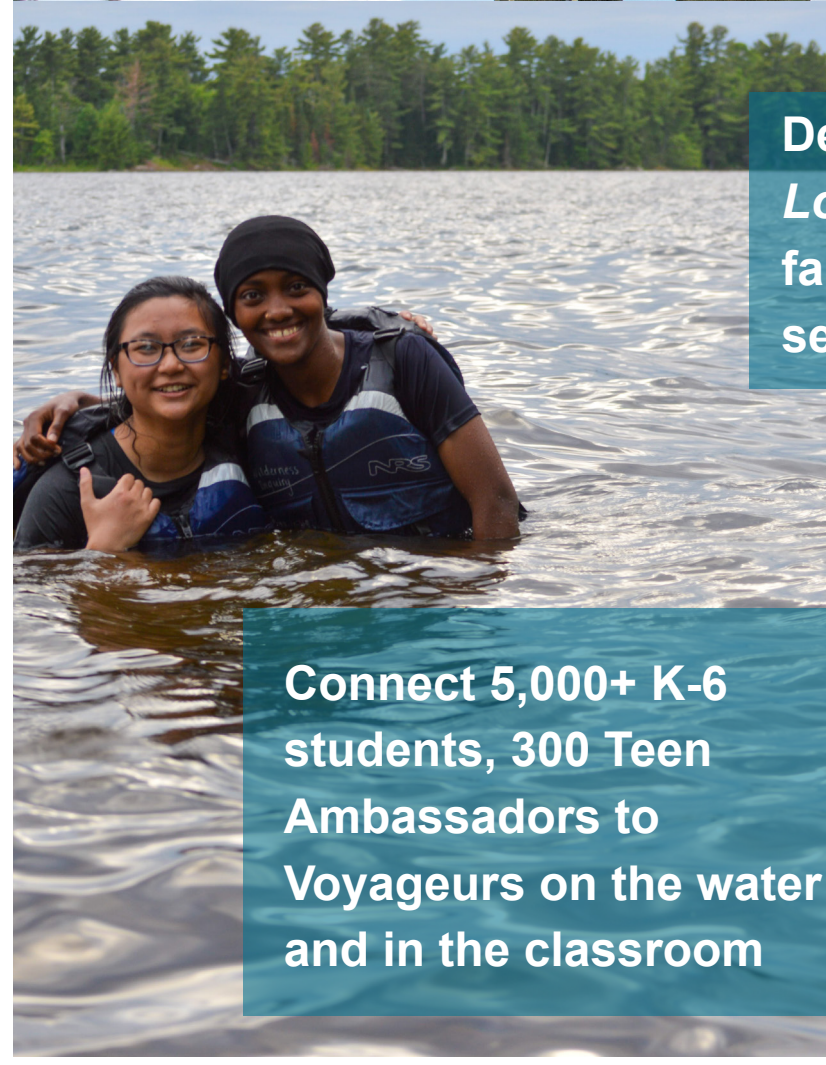
Phase 1: 2021-2024



Launch
Field Fellows
program
giving young
adults
National Park
Service and
environmental
career
experience



Deliver
Love Your Park
family program
series



Connect 5,000+ K-6
students, 300 Teen
Ambassadors to
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