



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-071

Proposal Title: Transforming Equity in Outdoor Spaces

Project Manager Information

Name: Beth Becker

Organization: YMCA of the North

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Our goals are to engage 100,870 underserved youth and families statewide in environmental learning for conservation and preservation of Minnesota wilderness through immersive and interactive experiences.

Funds Requested: \$1,491,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Environmental Education (C)

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

Narrative

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

For many Minnesotans, access to nature and wilderness is limited or unattainable, and that includes children and families across the state from rural, suburban and urban areas. Camp is expensive, camping and outdoor sports and leisure activities requires a lot of equipment and skills, and many people simply do not know how to access parks and natural wilderness or what they can do there, causing a distinct disconnect for many with nature.

The absence of outdoors increases anxiety, stress, and fatigue reducing wellbeing, something we have known for generations. What is needed is accessible, engaging outdoor spaces that reconnect Minnesotans to their pristine wilderness areas, and to the reasons we need to preserve them. The YMCA of the North is partnering with the University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences (CBS) and Minnesota Community Colleges (e.g. North Community College) who will lend their knowledge and expertise to engage youth and families through this project.

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.

Our program goal will engage 100,870 Minnesotans in nature and outdoor spaces in Minnesota with a focus on learning contemporary environmental issues, such as water quality, climate change, conservation and preservation. Providing free access for Minnesotans to nature and outdoor spaces across Minnesota at parks (regional, community, national), YMCA, and University of Minnesota lands (Unlock It! project), and at YMCA's Camp Northern Lights for an immersive family experience (STEPS). Finally, this funding will allow us to expand the free access through the Unlock It program across Minnesota to 36 new areas in greater Minnesota (12 per year).

Connecting children, youth, and families with the outdoors promotes wellness (reduction of anxiety, promotes creativity and activity, reduces stress and fatigue) of individuals and ensures the continued health of our natural world as future generations who have experienced time in the outdoors, value the preservation of our natural wilderness. This project will bring children (K-12), school groups, families, and community (with a focus on under-represented populations), into outdoor wilderness settings for hands-on, immersive learning in and from nature at no cost.

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?

1. Increased participation in efforts to protect and preserve our natural spaces for current and future generations, by providing state-wide Unlock-it interactive educational activities/challenges, 32 new sites, on public accessible lands for individuals (youth and family) access and access to camp through scholarships to Minnesota families.
2. Increased understanding of participants of the link between clean water, air, and land and their daily and future lives, promoting the conservation and preservation of these (collected through participant surveys)
3. Participation of 100,860 Minnesotans from urban, suburban, and rural areas, outreach targeting underserved communities across the state.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Transforming Equity in the Outdoors

Activity Budget: \$1,491,000

Activity Description:

YMCA Camp Northern Lights STEPS project will provide scholarships to support access and immersive experiences in nature for 870 (over 3 years) youth, environment/biology students, and families to attend camp with a goal of 51% of campers from underserved populations for the project.

And, YMCA Unlock-It! project will provide interactive environmental learning at public spaces (e.g. parks, public lands on hiking and bike trails) where children, youth and families are invited, engaged and challenged to learn more about the environment, conservation and preservation of their surroundings for 100,000 individuals over 3 years. Currently 18 interactive sites are in use, we propose 36 new interactive installations to be added over 3 years statewide, including promotion events and local partnerships for stewardship. Outreach to underserved youth and families throughout the state, and in statewide communities will be part of both programs.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
YMCA STEPS Immersion project at Camp Northern Lights	June 30, 2026
YMCA Unlock-It! Project, statewide interactive environmental learning	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Isaac Patterson	YMCA of the North	Project Manager, STEPS, Camp Northern Lights	Yes
Yohannis Shitta	YMCA of the North, Unlock-it	Unlock-It! Project Manager	Yes

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?

We will work to expand Unlock-it installations across the state, where they will remain in place in public spaces, accessible and free. Program outcome evaluation will provide the YMCA a solid basis for leveraging sustainable funding going forward. The YMCA will use the outcome data to engage funders through foundation and corporate grants, annual giving, events and sponsorships to help sustain this program, and build capacity for this program at all their camps. The Unlock It! program will open new statewide partners and funding and the STEPS program will gain support from schools statewide to also find future funders.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
375 Underserved Youth Learn Minnesota Ecosystems By Canoe	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05f	\$375,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Beth Becker

Job Title: Director of Grants & Foundation Relations

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

Beth is the Director of Grants and Foundation Relations, providing support to the programs and funding for the YMCA of the North. She has worked on behalf of camps and projects over her 7-year tenure with the YMCA, and previously has written and managed grants for more than 15 years, and point person for this project.

Isaac Patterson will manage the YMCA STEPS program providing all the support for outreach, scholarships, and working with the immersive program at Camp Northern Lights. He will both teach and bring in field experts to the project to bring environmental learning to life in the outdoor classroom. Angela Wunderlich leads the STEPS program and will provide outreach activities to youth and families across the state. Yohannis Shitta has the oversight of the Unlock-It! project. He is a champion of getting children, youth and families outdoors, and active and a champion of nature and the outdoors. Unlock-it is the visionary project he is leading in YMCA across Minnesota. Yohannis Shitta will be the project manager for Unlock-It as we expand to more sites across the state!. Resumes attached.

Organization: YMCA of the North

Organization Description:

The YMCA of the North (YMCA) opened in 1856 in Minnesota, remaining relevant to generations as they adapted and changed to meet the needs of Minnesotans. The YMCA owns and operates 8 overnight camps in Minnesota, six of which have been in existence for more than 100 years offering youth and families access to experiences and learning that

broaden and enrich their world. We have maintained these camps in pristine wilderness and taught youth and families over generations to recognize the importance of preservation and conservation of these spaces. YMCA Unlock-It, the design of (and in collaboration with the University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences), takes the learning further across the state into parks, community nature areas, and more with free access to interactive environmental learning. The project will directly impress the preservation of Minnesota wilderness and understanding of the connection of clean water, air, and land to healthy lives.

Our partnership with the University of Minnesota, College of Biological Sciences, and North Hennepin Community College helps with expansion and outreach of the project.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
YMCA STEPS Project Manager, Isaac Patterson		Project Manager			28%	1.2		\$60,000
YMCA Unlock-It! Project Manager		Project Manager, Yohannis Shitta			28%	3		\$150,000
Fringe Benefits		Fringe @ 28% = 66,000 over 3 years Health/Dental (9.45%); Group Life Insurance (0.07%); Long Term Disability (.13%); FICA (7.35%); Worker's Comp (1.2%); and Retirement (9.8%)			0%	0.3		\$120,000
Program Director for Equity		Outreach for camp project STEPS			28%	1.2		\$60,000
Summer Program Manager, STEPS		Provides on-site program management			28%	1.5		\$75,000
							Sub Total	\$465,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	development and distribution of print materials for new installations and events, \$10,000/year x 3 years	Introduce opportunities for interactive installations and events, and for environmental education STEPS opportunity for youth and families.					\$30,000
							Sub Total	\$30,000
Other Expenses								
		Develop Unlock-it digital infrastructure of new installations	\$50,000 per year x 3 years (36 installations over 3 years)					\$150,000
		YMCA STEPS Immersive Experience Scholarships	Camp Northern Lights, scholarships 870 individuals over 3 yrs at \$500.00 per person					\$435,000
		Un-Lock It! events	open new installation sites, bring community to sites, guided hikes, local partnerships promoting stewardship and conservation, \$60,000 per year x 3 years					\$180,000
		Un-Lock It! School field trips	School field trips, guided hikes and outdoor learning \$40,000 per year x 3 years					\$120,000
		YMCA STEPS Minnesota Community College Events	Immersive experience for Environmental Sciences students, offered as part of course work in Spring and Fall, \$7,000 x 3 years					\$21,000

		UN-Lock It! interactive map deveopment	Develop 36 new interactive maps for new locations over 3 years, 12 per year @ \$30,000 per year					\$90,000
							Sub Total	\$996,000
							Grand Total	\$1,491,000

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [5efa3cdd-294.docx](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Youth participating in outdoor learning...

Financial Capacity

File: [24b1fb99-ec2.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
YMCA Board Resolution	fb06720b-4c2.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
A Munro, North Hennepin Community College, brings students to YMCA STEPS	e94f81b3-d6f.docx
Seth Thompson, U of M, College of Biological Sciences	1705bea9-472.docx
Program Manager STEPS, On-site at Camp Northern Lights	af979dfd-ca2.pdf
A. Wunderlich, STEPS Coordinator	a5e50568-247.pdf
Yohannis Shitta Resuma	869a3010-86a.pdf
Isaac Patterson Resume	31ec4658-ca6.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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

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

