



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-214

Proposal Title: Mississippi River Learning Center

Project Manager Information

Name: Mary deLaittre

Organization: Great River Passage Conservancy

Office Telephone: (612) 398-5989

Email: Mary@GreatRiverPassage.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The Mississippi River Learning Center will be a place of restoration, reconnecting Saint Paul to the river and protecting and enhancing this vital area's landscape, water, and habitat.

Funds Requested: \$1,818,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2025

LCCMR Funding Category: Methods to Protect, Restore, and Enhance Land, Water, and Habitat (F)

Project Location

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

Region(s): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

When will the work impact occur?

In the Future

Narrative

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

One of the Conservancy's three key projects, the Mississippi River Learning Center and National Park Service Headquarters addresses urgent ecological needs: due to pollution and loss of vital floodplains, the Mississippi is the 6th-most endangered river in the country, according to an April 2022 report by American Rivers, an influential Washington, D.C., environmental advocacy nonprofit.

This area combines nature, culture, and history in a part of the Mississippi River without tow boat traffic, making it a safe and accessible site for river visitors. However, the 25-acre area has ecological and landscape challenges caused by previous attempts to develop the area. Due to the abandonment of a previous apartment building development attempt in 1969, 800 steel pilings are lodged 90 feet deep in the land between the two marina bays. Additionally, the land between the two bays is a jumbled landscape, infested with buckthorn. The overgrowth hides piles of concrete and asphalt, miscellaneous steel fragments, parts of boats and trailers, and concrete jersey barriers.

These environmental issues have compromised the wildlife in the area, notably the migratory waterfowl that use the Mississippi River Flyway, as well as the endangered rusty patch bumblebee.

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.

Located at the Watergate Marina at Crosby Farm Regional Park, the Mississippi River Learning Center will transform this currently isolated area into an easy-to-reach hub that strengthens the community's connection to an incredible natural resource and inspires the next generation of park users and environmental stewards.

With its two sheltered bays opening up the waterway in new ways, the Mississippi River Learning Center has the unique opportunity to become the gateway to the Mississippi River. To achieve this in an ecologically sustainable way requires the Conservancy to use design and implementation solutions that are light on the land and respond to the interplay of the site's dynamic river conditions and sensitive riparian ecology. Our work at the RLC will solve environmental challenges by:

- Reducing the spread of invasive species to heal the RLC area's ecosystems and increase biodiversity
- Supporting floodplains and other natural features that restore and preserve the vitality of the river and landscape to create a healthy environment for a range of wildlife, flora, and fauna
- Connecting the landscape to adjacent restoration efforts at Crosby Farm and Hidden Falls Park

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?

At the Mississippi River Learning Center site, we will complete a forward-thinking, light-on-the-land design and begin implementation to:

- Heal an environmentally disturbed landscape by advancing sustainable restoration, conservation, and resilience plans that protect flora and fauna, restore the flood plain, remove invasive species, and more—all coinciding with the City's clean-up initiative
- Create community spaces, trail systems, and features that protect and restore the area's natural resources while also providing new access to the RLC for communities historically excluded from the site
- Protect sacred and significant Dakota sites that are an essential part of the landscape

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Design Development and Construction Documents

Activity Budget: \$1,154,000

Activity Description:

Building upon schematic design occurring in 2022, the design development and construction documents activity continues to gather community and stakeholder input while beginning to build detailed plans, budgets, and blueprints needed for more complex pieces of the projects. Throughout the process, we will ensure that all design decisions respond to the urgent need to protect and restore the lands, waters, and natural resources of the area. To that end, some restoration work will happen in conjunction with this phase.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Designer hired/engaged	July 31, 2023
Philanthropic fundraising goals established	January 31, 2024
50% of design complete	March 31, 2024
Construction documents complete	November 30, 2024

Activity 2: Community engagement

Activity Budget: \$52,000

Activity Description:

Community engagement is integral to the Conservancy's mission, informing and strengthening all the activities we will plan and implement throughout the River Learning Center project timeline. In partnership with the selected design team, our robust community engagement process will feature stakeholder meetings (e.g. business owners, tenants and community members in the project area, etc.), community meetings, surveys, and focus groups for communities historically excluded from design process. Community engagement also includes working with a Dakota consultant to lead Dakota-specific engagement. This effort is essential given that the area surrounding RLC is Dakota homeland, and we are committed to designing the RLC in ways that support cultural and historic preservation.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Dakota consultant hired to lead Dakota-specific engagement	July 31, 2023
Dakota Tribal Convening held	January 31, 2024

Activity 3: Restoration, conservation and resilience plan implementation

Activity Budget: \$612,000

Activity Description:

Implementation plans identified in the design process such as site landscape restoration will likely include removal of 800 pilings, site and landscape clean-up as well as invasive species removal. This activity will also be coordinated with restoration work occurring in Crosby Farm and Hidden Falls Park.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Restoration, conservation, resilience as identified in planning begins	September 30, 2024
Initial landscape restoration work completed including clean up RLC site.	October 31, 2024

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Alice Messer	City of St. Paul, Parks and Recreation	Landowner and oversight of capital projects related to design and implementation in Mississippi River Learning Center	Yes
Sam Olbekson	Full Circle Indigenous Design	Community engagement of Dakota Peoples throughout design process of Mississippi River Learning Center.	Yes
Matthew Tucker Blythe	National Park Service	Superintendent of Mississippi National River and Recreation Area, programming in and around Mississippi River Learning Center and community engagement in design process and implementation for Mississippi River Learning Center.	No
Katie Nyberg	Mississippi Park Connection	Fundraising, programming in and around Mississippi River Learning Center and community engagement in design process and implementation for Mississippi River Learning Center landscape	No
Erika Rivers	Wilderness Inquiry	Fundraising, programming, community engagement and future tenant of building at Mississippi River Learning Center	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 work be funded?

The RLC will benefit from the Conservancy's River Balcony capital project being further along on its timeline, allowing us to use that implementation approach as a model. Funding-wise, sustainability will be strengthened by being part of our combined capital campaign effort, whose public/private fundraising strategies were informed by our partnership with the City. RLC program collaborators Mississippi Park Connection and Wilderness Inquiry are fundraising. The National Park Service and Wilderness Inquiry will move their headquarters here and become tenants providing annual operating revenue into the future.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Mary deLaittre

Job Title: Executive Director, Great River Passage Conservancy

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

Mary deLaittre is the Founding Executive Director of the Great River Passage Conservancy and former Manager of the Great River Passage Initiative. Drawing on 25 years of community design experience, she conceives major city-building projects and develops sustainable organizational structures to ensure the long-term success of projects.

As founder and principal of Groundwork: The Foundation for City Building, she has focused on enhancing waterfront development. She led Wayzata's Lake Effect Park Project, the transformation of the city's Lake Minnetonka shoreline and the creation of the private fundraising entity for the park – the Lake Effect Conservancy. On behalf of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, she developed and managed RiverFirst, a revitalization effort along 5.5 miles of the Mississippi River. Finally, she co-founded and consulted for 2020 Partners, a public-private partnership that facilitated the transformation of a downtown Minneapolis industrial district into a new urban center.

Previously, deLaittre was the executive director of the Minneapolis Parks Foundation, where she galvanized the organization around a new mission of creating the Next Generation of Parks™. She received a bachelor of arts in art history from Brown University and a masters of architecture with a focus on urban design from the University of Minnesota.

Organization: Great River Passage Conservancy

Organization Description:

The Great River Passage Conservancy rallies philanthropic support for the City of St. Paul's Great River Passage Initiative. Our mission—to raise resources that support the community's vision for connecting Saint Paul's two greatest assets, its people and the Mississippi River—responds to environmental challenges as we partner with the city to advance forward-thinking initiatives that preserve and protect our 17 miles of river. To that end, the Conservancy is focused on three key capital projects:

- The Mississippi River Learning Center is a city-led project combining a mixed-use, river-focused space that will serve as a national gateway to the Mississippi and provide year-round experiences of the land, water, and culture of the river.
- The River Balcony is a proposed 1.5-mile promenade along the downtown river bluff that will connect public spaces, civic landmarks, and development sites, providing new connections to the river.
- The East Side River District (ESRD) encompasses a dynamic 1000-acre urban landscape that reveals the complex systems and stories of the East Side, heals a compromised landscape, connects the area to the broader city, and protects culturally sacred sites and sensitive ecological systems.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
Mary delaittre	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Strategic direction and oversight of project management; partner and collaboration management				0.27		\$48,000
Laura Bray	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Communications support for community engagement				0.13		\$24,000
City of St. Paul	Sub award	Project Management of design development, construction; Will hire and engage designer				0.38		\$1,100,000
Full Circle Indigenous Design	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Community engagement for Dakota Tribes				0.25		\$36,000
AmplifyDMC	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Communications, copy-writing and graphic design				0.06		\$10,000
City of St. Paul	Sub award	Contractor to remove pilings on site				0.06		\$400,000
City of St. Paul	Sub award	Site clean up and restoration of flood plain				1		\$100,000
Mississippi Park Connection	Sub award	Site cleanup and landscape restoration; engagement of Conservation Corps				1		\$100,000
							Sub Total	\$1,818,000
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								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$1,818,000

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	-

Acquisition and Restoration

Parcel List

Name	County	Site Significance	Activity	Acres	Miles	Estimated Cost	Type of Landowner	Easement or Title Holder	Status of Work
Mississippi River Learning Center	Ramsey	Sits within the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and is adjacent to the West 7th neighborhood in Saint Paul, Minnesota. It lies within B'dote, a sacred site to Dakota people, which is located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers.	Restoration	25	-	\$8,500,000	Public	City of St. Paul	Has Not Begun
Totals				25	0	\$8,500,000			

Restoration

1. Provide a statement confirming that all restoration activities completed with these funds will occur on land permanently protected by a conservation easement or public ownership.

The location of the Mississippi River Learning Center is owned by the City of St. Paul and managed by the Parks and Recreation Department.

2. Summarize the components and expected outcomes of restoration and management plans for the parcels to be restored by your organization, how these plans are kept on file by your organization, and overall strategies for long-term plan implementation.

The Mississippi River Learning Center planning was prompted by the 2013 long term master plan created by the City of St. Paul for the Great River Passage. Once finalized, the restoration and management plan will be a part of public record via the City of St. Paul website as well as part of Great River Passage Conservancy organizational records.

Restoration of the area will seek to clean up neglected landscape and restore the flood plain to native species.

3. Describe how restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines” in order to ensure ecological integrity and pollinator enhancement.

Great River Passage Conservancy will partner with the City of St. Paul and Mississippi Park Connection (MPC) for any identified restoration efforts. MPCC has conducted previous restoration efforts along the Mississippi River Recreation Area. Restoration efforts will utilize and follow the Board of Soil and Water Resources “Native Vegetation Establishment and Enhancement Guidelines.”

4. Describe how the long-term maintenance and management needs of the parcel being restored with these funds will be met and financed into the future.

The restoration effort will be managed in the long term by landowner, the City of St. Paul. Great River Passage Conservancy will continue to be the City’s partner organization that seeks out additional private, philanthropic support that may be needed in the future.

5. Describe how consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for any restoration activities.

Consideration will be given to contracting with Conservation Corps of Minnesota for some restoration activities via our partnership with Mississippi Park Connection. The Mississippi River Crew is a dedicated Corps that is a partnership between Mississippi Park Connection and Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa. The work of the crew is directed by Mississippi Park Connection and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area and supports local land managers, including the City of Saint Paul's Natural Resources Department in invasive species management, habitat restoration, and native tree and shrub planting.

6. Provide a statement indicating that evaluations will be completed on parcels where activities were implemented both 1) initially after activity completion and 2) three years later as a follow-up. Evaluations should analyze improvements to the parcel and whether goals have been met, identify any problems with the implementation, and identify any findings that can be used to improve implementation of future restoration efforts at the site or elsewhere.

Restoration sites will be evaluated on the success of invasive species control and changes in biodiversity of flora and fauna surveys conducted by our partner and collaborating organizations.

Attachments

Required Attachments

Map

File: [fced00a9-1d2.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Map

Two maps. One showing location of Mississippi River Learning Center in City of St. Paul; second more detailed map of the area surrounding the future site of Mississippi River Learning Center...

Financial Capacity

File: [f541a8c6-dcc.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Authorization Letter for LCCMR Submission RLC	7512bcf4-596.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter or Other

Title	File
Mississippi River Learning Center Site Photos	de743123-d0b.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

Yes: Restoration,

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?

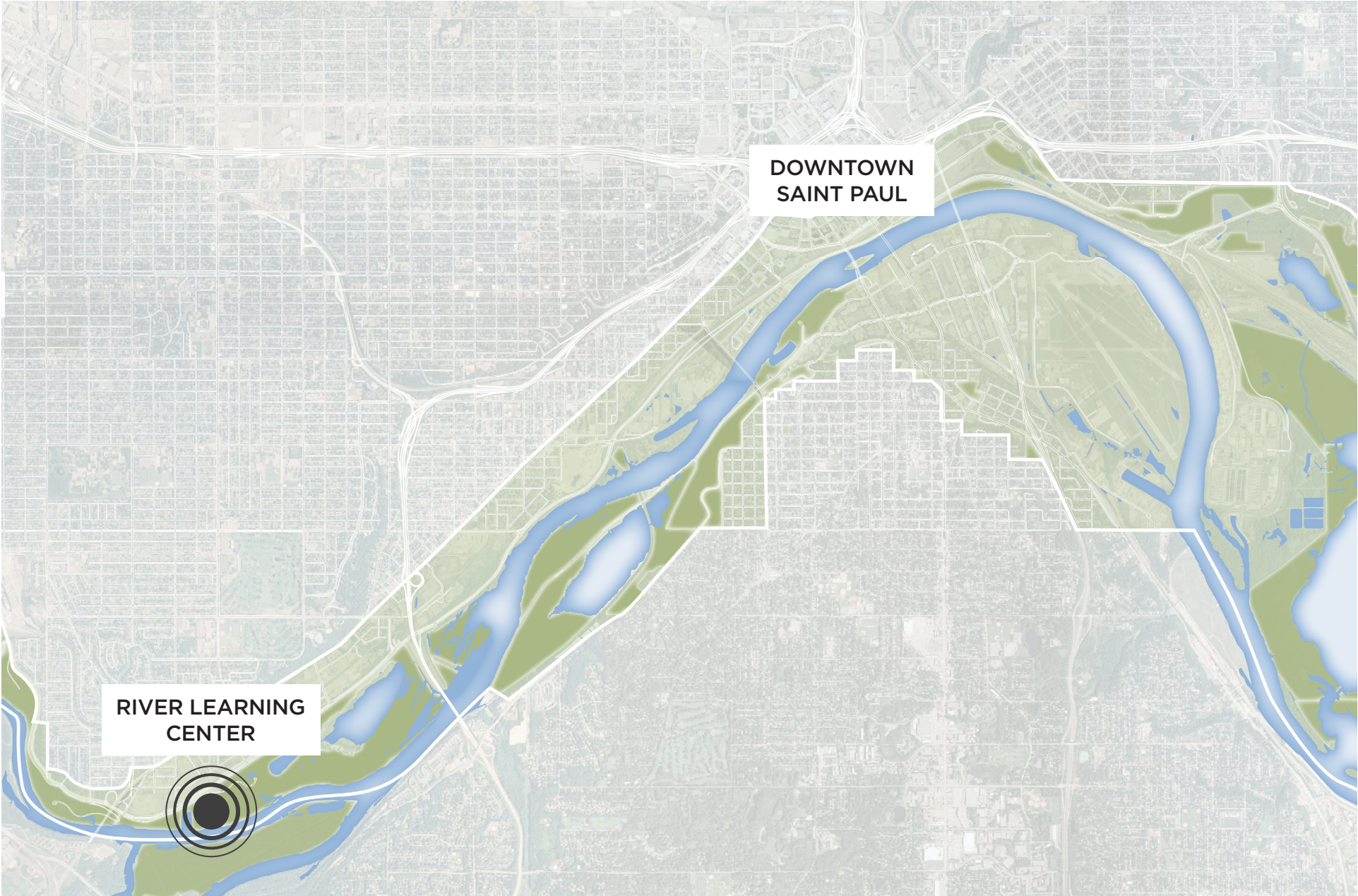
N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

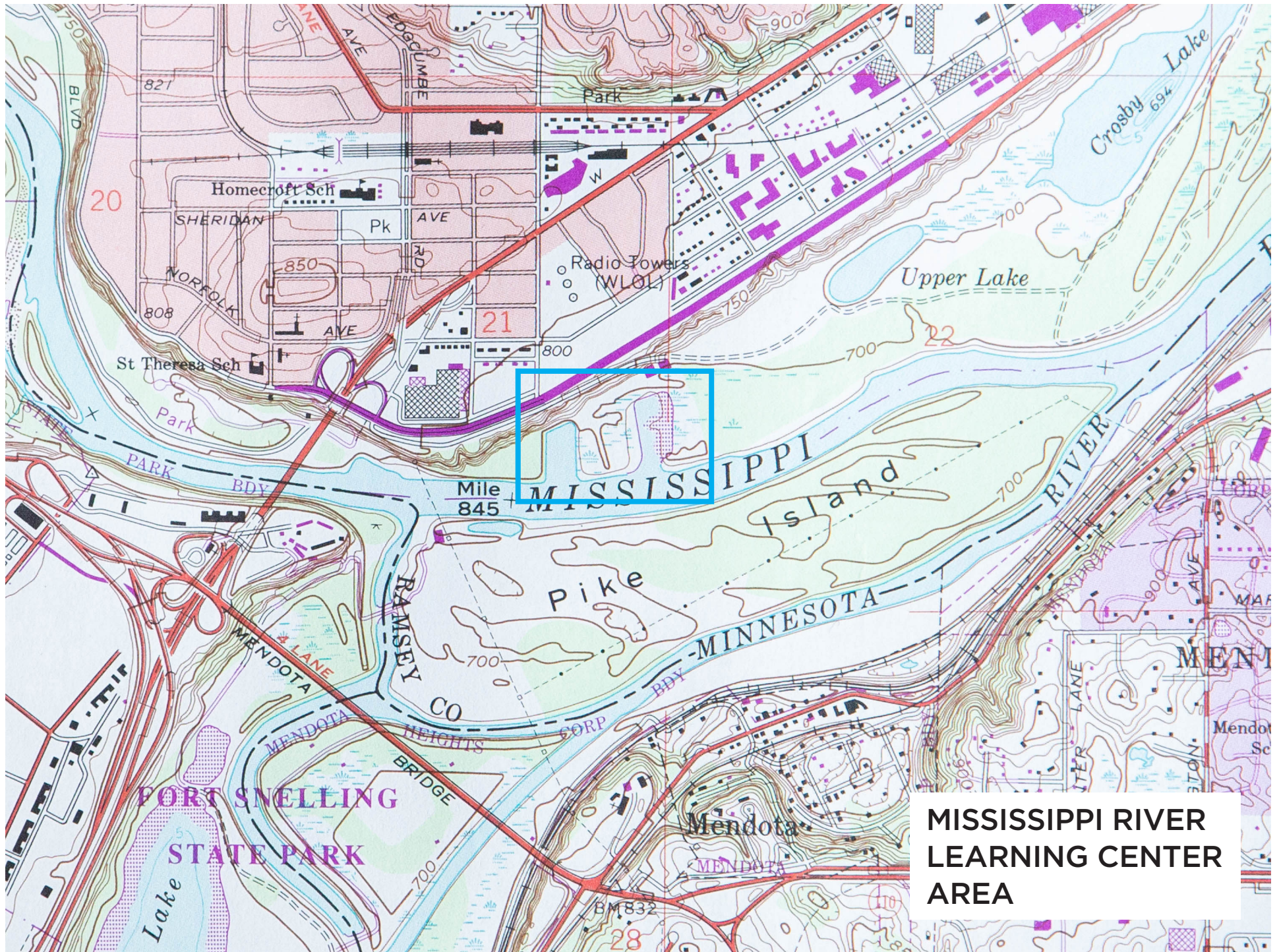
Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No



**DOWNTOWN
SAINT PAUL**

**RIVER LEARNING
CENTER**



**MISSISSIPPI RIVER
LEARNING CENTER
AREA**

