



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2023 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2023-216

Proposal Title: West Central Young Citizen Scientists Project

Project Manager Information

Name: Jill Amundson

Organization: West Central Initiative

Office Telephone: (218) 739-2239

Email: jill@wCIF.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: West Central Initiative seeks to engage families in exploring, understanding, and protecting the region's ecology through regionally-based activities at home, through child care, and in partnership with existing enrichment centers.

Funds Requested: \$187,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2025

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary Category: Environmental Education (C)

Project Location

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

Region(s): NW

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

Region(s): NW

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.

In the last year, West Central Initiative has published and distributed a children's book titled "Let's Go." This book features unique opportunities within our nine-county service area and the White Earth Reservation for children to play outdoors. This book has been well received, and feedback from the region's families is that they appreciate the book's message about the communities' assets.

Alongside this effort, the region has been steadily experiencing the impacts of climate change. This includes more frequent extreme weather events, increased rainfall, and increased heat waves/indexes. These things threaten our local ecology in ways not fully realized by the general public.

While we know that there are great numbers of nature enthusiasts, conservation-minded citizens, and businesses that rely on the natural environment, we don't yet see wide-spread action related to climate adaptation nor high adoption of personal implementation of mitigation strategies.

Through this project, WCI seeks to engage families in exploring the natural environment, assist them in conceptualizing the region's ecological systems, and inspire further conservation efforts.

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 project will have five activities: creation of species identification campaign, activities/curriculum development, speaker event, the creation of a Children's Environmental Film Festival, and coordinated outreach of the project along the way.

To begin, WCI will create a project on the iNaturalist app and via a social media hashtag to facilitate a species identification campaign, with the purpose of mapping and photographing as many species within our region as possible. Staff will engage with partners, such as libraries, DNR and parks staff, University of Minnesota Extension, and other organizations that have or are interested in naturalist activities for families. WCI staff will release and distribute family activities already available and those that are created through this project that identify pieces of the ecological system viewable at the specific time of year. Activities will include past and projected environmental changes and the effects on the species (e.g. increased water temperature effects on fish populations). To promote an annual curriculum, WCI will host an event featuring key speaker and child development author Richard Louv. Lastly, the project will culminate with the creation of a children's edition of the Environmental Film festival that is being created in 2022-2023.

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 short- and long-term outcomes are highlighted in the attached visual. The ultimate impact is that that communities have implemented adaptation strategies for the most vulnerable as well as mitigation strategies to preserve the local ecosystem to the greatest extent possible. In order to reach that goal, WCI will track: the number of people engaged on the iNaturalist app, social media shares of #YouthCitizenScientist; number of regional species identified and promoted; the number of visitors at regional state parks increase; interest in other naturalist enrichment programs increases, and the number of families and child care providers engaged in activities/curriculum.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Outreach

Activity Budget: \$73,492

Activity Description:

Outreach, led by WCI's Strategic Communications department, will include traditional media, social media, visits to clubs and enthusiasts, information at public enrichment places (libraries, parks, museums, etc). WCI will utilize established networks through our 10 Early Childhood Initiatives to reach families and child care providers directly, as well as schools, preschools, and Head Start centers.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
iNaturalist user counts increase	December 31, 2023
Attendance at author event	May 31, 2024
Curriculum is downloaded, printed, distributed	September 30, 2024
Kids submit films to film festival	May 31, 2025

Activity 2: Curriculum Development

Activity Budget: \$39,582

Activity Description:

Working with partners already engaged in naturalist work, WCI staff promote existing activities and resources as well as develops additional materials. These materials will focus on children playing outdoors, families learning about the local ecology, and information on projected climate changes and potential effects on species in the region. Materials will be created in English, Spanish and Arabic, and be posted online so they can be accessed by screen reading technology. Activities will be focused on all ability levels to create accessibility for parents and children alike. Materials will be available to be downloaded. WCI will also work with partners to distribute materials in an eco-friendly manner.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Weekly activities are created and distributed	May 31, 2024
Full annual curriculum is developed including multiple species	August 31, 2024

Activity 3: Speaker event

Activity Budget: \$20,583

Activity Description:

Speaker Richard Louv, author of "Last Child Left in the Woods" will help launch this special book project with a presentation to regional advocates in early childhood and youth development. Held at the Prairie Wetlands Learning center in Fergus Falls (also home to the Prairie Science School for grades 4 and 5), the presentation will focus on time outdoors, outdoor play and how advocates can facilitate this process. The combination of this book launch with an acclaimed speaker will motivate educators and parents to encourage more time in the great outdoors with "no child left inside".

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Event held, recorded and available online post-event	July 31, 2024

Activity 4: Environmental Film Festival - Children's Edition

Activity Budget: \$25,259

Activity Description:

Through a partnership with Lead for Minnesota, West Central Initiative will be creating a film festival akin to CDEFF30, that accepts entries from with Minnesota that feature nature and environmentalism. This film festival will be created in 2022-2023. Through the Youth Citizen Scientist project, WCI hopes to include a children's festival in 2024-2025, which would accept entries from youth under the age of 18. WCI hopes to work with local station Pioneer Public television on the development of this festival.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Film festival entries are accepted and distributed to celebrate local environmentalism	June 30, 2025
Collection of films is available online for school enrichment	June 30, 2025

Activity 5: Species Identification Campaign

Activity Budget: \$11,017

Activity Description:

WCI staff will utilize the iNaturalist app to create what is labeled as a "project." This allows anyone with an iNaturalist account to take photographs of birds, mushrooms, butterflies, wild flowers, mammals, fish and other species. The app assists them in identifying and mapping that species. This creates a repository for the region, where enthusiasts can celebrate their finds, including catch-and-release fishing. Staff will be able to utilize this repository to generate a social media campaign that highlights the wildlife in all its forms. Alongside this information, WCI can publish species population changes, including projected changes due to habitat loss or climate change. This also encourages outdoor play, conservation discussions, and mitigation strategies to be shared on a personal basis.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
iNaturalist project is created	July 31, 2023
Social media posts are created	July 31, 2023
Traditional media is offered opportunity to use photograph repository	October 31, 2023

Activity 6: Administration/oversight

Activity Budget: \$17,067

Activity Description:

Administration fee for WCI has been established by the federal de minimus rate of 10%. This will include annual fiscal audit.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Completion Date
Project will complete successful spenddown with all reports turned in on time	June 30, 2025

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?

WCI continues to seek public and private funding sources for the continuation of these activities in perpetuity. Thus far, several private foundations have been identified as potential opportunities to sustain and grow the project in ways that continue to engage citizens around conservation and climate mitigation efforts.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jill Amundson

Job Title: Impact Strategist

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

Jill Amundson joined WCI in the winter of 2018 as part of the Economic Development team. Amundson holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Concordia University, St. Paul, with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Minnesota Morris in Psychology and Human Services. Prior to her work with WCI, Amundson was the director of the statewide asset-building program, the Family Assets for Independence in Minnesota. This program, with nineteen subgrantee agencies, managed \$2.1 million in state, federal, and private grant dollars to match the savings of low-income wage-earners as they invested in education, homeownership and microenterprise. Amundson has 16 years of community development experience throughout the region, from grassroots endeavors to federally funded collaborative initiatives.

Organization: West Central Initiative

Organization Description:

Mission: Serving to improve west-central Minnesota through funding, programs, and technical assistance. A regional foundation and designated economic development organization, West Central Initiative (WCI) provides resources in philanthropy and community development. We invest in local issues. We work with partners to educate, activate and celebrate our region.

WCI's history is rich with examples of strengthening and responding to our region, sustaining early childhood coalitions, expanding business opportunities, training workers, coordinating transportation planning, and assisting community projects. As early as 1989, WCI helped expand the capacity of child care centers and so began what is now a signature program, the Early Childhood Initiative. Environmental initiatives followed. Over time, WCI has provided increased access to food and affordable housing, workforce initiatives, transportation planning, and disaster response and assistance for communities devastated by flooding, tornadoes, and other natural calamities. Future-focused priorities include working with our partners to reimagine what regional means in our part of the world, strengthening local systems and resources, and embracing neighborliness as we care for our natural world and each other.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Community Development Planner		Working with community stakeholders and partners to align assets available with current and future needs.			18%	2		\$129,302
							Sub Total	\$129,302
Contracts and Services								
Richard Louv	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Event speaker				-		\$15,000
ArcStone	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Hybrid event production, social media promotions, advertising				-		\$5,500
Traditional media (multiple)	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Advertising across newspapers and radio stations				-		\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$25,500
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	office supplies	Necessary supplies including laptop and accessories, paper, paperclips, notebooks, etc.					\$2,500
	Tools and Supplies	Connectivity costs	internet, phone, Zoom accounts, and other costs associated with telecommunications					\$4,800
							Sub Total	\$7,300
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Approximately 6,000 miles	In-person outreach, public engagement and partnership development					\$3,331
							Sub Total	\$3,331
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	4500 copies	distribution of printed curriculum, approximately 4500 physical copies					\$4,500
							Sub Total	\$4,500
Other Expenses								
		Administrative costs	10% de minimus administrative and oversight costs, including financial audit					\$17,067
							Sub Total	\$17,067
							Grand Total	\$187,000

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: [7a04a103-0b9.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

project logic model...

Financial Capacity

File: [21d0cca5-68d.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board authorization	5395843d-f23.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

Current reality

- Community members value conservation efforts.
- Early Childhood network is building love of place with "Let's Go" children's book.
- Libraries, state parks, and other public places are a resource to communities and provide opportunities for family enrichment.
- Child care providers look to WCI's early childhood initiative partners for resources.
- WCI is producing a regional climate action plan highlighting probable regional changes, as well as opportunity for community adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Engagement Strategy

- Utilize the iNaturalist app and social media to promote the cataloging of species in the region.
- Create a series/curriculum for families and child care providers that pairs time of year with the species around them, including fish, wild flowers, birds, etc. as well as how each plays a role in the region's ecology.
- Promote adaptation strategies for kids based on projected climate change (the growing importance of tick checks, risk of heat exhaustion when heat index is high, etc.)
- Alongside the WCI Environmental Film Festival, open an opportunity for children to create and enter a regional youth film festival.
- Alongside the WCI Apple Tree project, encourage gardening of all sizes and shapes, including wildflowers and no-mow greenspace.
- Develop and utilize partnerships with organizations and agencies already engaged in similar activities, including University of Minnesota Extension (4-H), DNR, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Coots Unlimited, National Wild Turkey Federation, and other local conservation groups.

Short-Term Goal: Ecological Understanding

- By exploring the ecological system of the region, parents and kids understand the current and potential threats, including projected climate change, to the region.
- Personal initiatives are started that address conservation and climate mitigation, such as decreased lawn mowing, increased tree plantings, increased personal gardening, etc.
- Families engage with their communities around public land usage like parks, trails, and other green initiatives.

Long-term Impact

- Communities across the region have identified likely climate changes and have resiliency plans geared toward adaptation strategies for vulnerable populations, including children and the elderly.
- Communities have implemented mitigation strategies to preserve the local ecosystem to the greatest extent possible.
- Local industries, including farming, manufacturing, and healthcare have community support to increase sustainability measures.

