



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-067

Proposal Title: Immersive Outdoor Experiences for Underserved Youth

Project Manager Information

Name: MaryLynn Pulscher

Organization: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Underserved teens will engage in immersive outdoor experiences to develop an action-based conservation ethic. Teens will learn new outdoor skills, gain environmental knowledge, and create connections with nature.

Funds Requested: \$200,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

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): Metro

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

Region(s): Metro

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.

Based on research conducted by the Metropolitan Parks & Open Space Commission (MPOSC), this proposal seeks to address the youth-identified obstacles for connecting with the outdoors. Teens identified the following obstacles to being in nature: safety (fear of getting lost); nature is unpredictable (weather, animals); nature can cause injuries; low or lack of awareness of parks and amenities; transportation constraints; no one to go to the park/natural area with; and the lack of opportunity to learn skills. Teenagers that are new immigrants face additional challenges including learning a new language, navigating a new city and park system, and a whole new culture.

These many obstacles mean that teens do not receive the benefits of parks and natural spaces including increased physical activity, community connections, reduced feelings of depression and anxiety, improved concentration, personal confidence, and overall improved quality of life. Teens also miss the opportunity to develop a relationship with nature - to “fall in love with nature” – which motivates and inspires actions which protect and preserve nature.

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.

We are seeking funding to immerse youth in local outdoor experiences that enable them to explore parks and natural spaces, learn new skills, gain environmental knowledge, and develop a conservation ethic.

As part of MPOSC’s research, teens identified specific skills and activities they want to explore include birding, wildlife viewing, paddling, camping, survival skills, geocaching, fishing, and biking. All these activities take place outdoors, in nature, and offer the opportunity to integrate environmental learning that focuses on water quality, a sustainable lifestyle, and maintaining and enhancing a biodiverse natural environment.

Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board (MPRB) staff that have completed BEETLES training will lead the environmental education components of the outdoor experiences. BEETLES training ensures that staff develop activities that inspire participants’ wonder and curiosity about the natural world, and support teens’ innate affinity to explore. MPRB Staff and collaborators will guide teens as they explore and learn new skills and activities.

By engaging in these local immersive outdoor learning experiences, the many obstacles identified by teens will also be addressed. Teens will be in groups, learning about nature, gaining confidence, as well as identifying safe nature spaces to spend time in.

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. Teens expand their sense of wonder, and feel confident exploring, examining, and developing explanations for what they’re seeing and experiencing in the natural world.
2. Teens learn new outdoor skills and while doing so, develop a better understanding of how their actions and inactions impact the natural world, AND as a result, participants will make different and better decisions to protect Minnesota’s natural resources.
3. Teens develop connections to Minnesota’s natural resources, beginning with the parks and natural spaces found in their community.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Plan, coordinate, pilot, and evaluate immersive outdoor experiences for underserved teens

Activity Budget: \$60,000

Activity Description:

MPRB will host and lead Field Days and Field Camps focused on underserved teens, and with the intent that more than 70% of participants will be from communities of color, Indigenous, or recent immigrants. The proposed activities address obstacles to nature identified by teens, and embed environmental learning into the activities.

Tasks involve planning and coordinating program content with outdoor skills learning; hiring and training teen or college-age interns; promoting the program with community partners; recruiting participants; piloting the Field Days and Field Camps; leading program evaluations; and improving offerings based on feedback.

Field Days will focus on older teens, occur during throughout the year, and include half day and whole day experiences to accommodate school groups, community partners, park programs plus school out days.

Field Camps will focus on younger teens, and mostly be offered during the summer, school breaks, and school out days. This meets a need identified by parents – their children are too old for many park programs (usually for ages 6 to 11), too young to get a job, and not necessarily responsible enough to be left home alone all day. Field camps will provide the opportunity for youth to be outdoors and acquire new skills.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Pilot and evaluate field day experiences with at least 100 teens	December 31, 2024
Continually adapt and improve field day experiences and camps based on evaluations	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Engage underserved teens in immersive outdoor activities with skill building and compelling environmental learning

Activity Budget: \$140,000

Activity Description:

The objectives are to address teen-identified obstacles to connecting with nature, to provide teens with requested outdoor skill building activities, and to integrate environmental education on water quality and the importance of protecting and enhancing biodiverse natural spaces in Minnesota

Tasks include coordinating internal logistics to reserve park spaces, gather equipment, and secure transportation for youth as needed. External logistics include promoting programs with current collaborators and partners, as well as developing relationships with new entities that serve teens. MPRB staff will work with community partners to recruit teen and college-age interns.

MPRB staff will integrate environmental education with the outdoor skills that teens wish to learn. For example, teens would learn about water quality and stormwater while paddling canoes on Powderhorn Lake and getting up close with stormwater outlets, and later using dip nets to learn about macroinvertebrates. Or by following a tree-focused orienteering course in Wirth Park, teens would learn about biodiversity and woodland ecosystems. These kinds of immersive outdoor experiences will help teens develop connections with the natural world and a stewardship ethic.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Lead Field Days for 250 older teens	June 30, 2025
Lead Field Camps (summer, spring & winter breaks) for younger teens	June 30, 2026
Lead Field Days for 250 older teens	June 30, 2026
Hire and train 12 teen or college-age interns to support Field Days & Camps	June 30, 2026

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?

MPRB staff plan to continue this work after the grant period ends. It will be an interdepartmental collaborative effort to continue the programs and include Environmental Educators, Youth Program Specialists, Youth Employment staff, and others. Findings and results of this work will be shared with project collaborators, MPRB programming staff, MPRB management, and Park Commissioners.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Expanding Nature Knowledge and Experience with New Interactive Exhibits at North Mississippi Regional Park	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$500,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: MaryLynn Pulscher

Job Title: Manager for Environmental Education & Youth Employment

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

MaryLynn has more than 28 years of experience with the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board, and for the last 24 years has managed the Environmental Education work group. She is responsible for the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of environmental education programs, projects, events, and sites. Education sites include the Eloise Butler Wildflower Garden & Bird Sanctuary, JD Rivers' Children's Garden, and the Kroening Nature Center at North Mississippi Regional Park. Major programs include the Neighborhood Naturalist Program serving 23,000 youth participants at recreation centers across the city each year; aquatic invasive species inspections and education at three lakes; the Mississippi River Green Team; plus community events such as the Pollinator Party: A Celebration of Bees, and the bilingual, bicultural Minneapolis Monarch Festival ~ Festival de la Monarca which attracts 10,000 participants annually. She regularly develops partnerships, coordinates collaborative projects, and implements new programs and projects with neighborhood groups, non-profits, and other government entities. For the last three years MaryLynn has also managed the MPRB's youth employment and training program which serves more than 250+ teenage employees throughout the park system. The program is being reimaged to immerse youth in nature and inspire them to pursue outdoor and green career paths.

Organization: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Organization Description:

The mission of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is to permanently preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, parkland, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations of our region including people, plants, and wildlife. The Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board dismantles historic inequities in the provision of park and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities that promote health, wellbeing, community, and the environment.

With 197 park properties totaling nearly 6,744 acres of land and water, the Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board provides places and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities

that promote health, well-being, community, and the environment. Each year, approximately 18 million visits are made to the nationally acclaimed Minneapolis park system. Its urban forests, natural areas and waters endure and captivate. Its Grand Rounds Parkway system, neighborhood parks, recreation centers and diversified programming have made the Minneapolis park system an important component of what makes Minneapolis a great place to live, play and work.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Lead Naturalist		Coordinate and lead immersive outdoor programs, lead environmental education			15%	1		\$81,000
Outdoor skills instructor		Train-the-trainers, lead outdoor skill building activities for teens			15%	1		\$60,000
Teen or college age intern(s)		Provide peer mentoring, support outdoor experiences, receive training on outdoor skills			15%	0.68		\$29,000
							Sub Total	\$170,000
Contracts and Services								
Interpretation and translation services - entity to be determined via RFP or City of Mpls TargetMarket Program	Professional or Technical Service Contract	This person or persons will provide translation or interpretation services so that we can effectively serve recent immigrants, English language learners, etc.				-		\$10,000
Transportation services - entity to be determined via RFP or City of Mpls TargetMarket Program	Professional or Technical Service Contract	This entity would provide drivers/transportation for teens or groups participating in Field Days or Camps. Transportation is a teen-identified obstacle to connecting with Nature.				-		\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$20,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								

	Equipment	Wildlife & plant ID books, binoculars, spotting scopes, life jackets, other items that can be used over & over again by teens as part of programs	Equipment and materials to provide safe, immersive outdoor activities					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
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	\$200,000

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	MPRB Environmental Education budget	Naturalist Program Coordinator - to oversee program implementation, staff coordination	Secured	\$25,000
In-Kind	MPRB Environmental Education budget	Overall project management	Secured	\$10,000
In-Kind	MPRB Youth Employment and Training budget	Funds will be used to hire teen or college age interns to support the Field Days & Field Camps. Interns will benefit from a mentored job experience.	Secured	\$35,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$70,000
			Funds Total	\$70,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [8c7c60cf-dbc.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

This graphic shows teens from varying cultural backgrounds engaged in canoeing, orienteering, fishing and biking in the summer, animal tracking in winter, hanging out and talking, and birding in the winter,...

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
MPRB Board Resolution	4547082e-907.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

Does your project include the design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

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?

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

