



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-115

Proposal Title: Launching Environmental Education at Shepard Farm

Project Manager Information

Name: Pete Cleary

Organization: Dodge Nature Center

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Email: pcleary@dodgenaturecenter.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Dodge Nature Center will build environmental skills and increase knowledge for 10,000 Minnesota K-6 youth through standards-aligned, outdoor experiences and hands-on learning at our new Shepard Farm property.

Funds Requested: \$639,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2027

LCCMR Funding 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.

A growing body of research by the Children and Nature Network (based in Minnesota) and others describes the decline of time spent in nature by children, resulting in diminished use of senses, attention difficulties, obesity and higher rates of mental and physical illness. Years spent largely indoors during the pandemic have added significantly to stress and anxiety levels.

Learning in outdoor spaces and time in nature can help reverse this trend and benefit kids' physical and mental health. Research has also shown that open and nearby green spaces benefit children's learning and academic success.

With the closing of Warner Nature Center in Washington County, there is a need for affordable environmental learning opportunities for families, schools and adults. A new Education Center is under construction at Dodge's Shepard Farm in Cottage Grove! With it, we will provide access to nature-based programs in the East Metro. Once construction is complete, Shepard Farm will become a thriving hub of environmental education for the area. Using the experience gained at our 55-year-old West St. Paul location, our team will partner with area schools and community organizations to get kids and families outdoors and on trails.

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.

Dodge serves the community by providing accessible, affordable outdoor environmental education. Our programs are low-cost, and we offer scholarships to reduce barriers for schools and families with financial need. We provide high quality education programs and access to community green spaces on 460 acres of restored native prairies, hardwood forests and wetlands.

With a new Education Center (located in Cottage Grove) slated to be completed in summer of 2023, our ability to reach even more students in the Southeast Metro is increasing. South Washington County schools (District 833) have begun piloting field trips with us. Their excitement is growing as they discover what Dodge's team of naturalists and environmental education experts can add to their classroom experiences. Over the next several years, we plan to grow our capacity to meet the needs of students and teachers partners in District 833.

Through programs like Nature Detectives, Bird Basics, Forest Wildlife, Minnesota Forests, Pollination Partners, Survival Skills, Winter Adaptations and Water on the Move our team will engage students in Washington County and the surrounding area in hands-on, minds-on learning in the outdoors and on trails. These programs support Minnesota state academic standards for elementary students.

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?

By launching environmental learning in South Washington County over three years we will:

- Teach 10,000 standards-aligned environmental education in Minnesota's outdoors at Shepard Farm.
- Support school teachers in classrooms with recurring visits by Dodge Naturalist Liaison, integrating standards-based learning with outdoor activities at their site.
- Build a strong partnership with School District 833 (modeled after our established partnership with ISD 197) that will be ongoing and self-sustaining after the grant period.
- Engage diverse young people outdoors to receive benefits of being in nature and build a lasting conservation ethic that inspires action.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Launching An Environmental Learning Partnership with South Washington County Schools - Year 1

Activity Budget: \$205,300

Activity Description:

In year one Dodge will build and launch a robust partnership with District 833. With years of experience in environmental education and a decades-long partnership with ISD 197, Dodge has the background and talent to bring outdoor learning to a new community.

With Shepard Farm’s new Education Center slated to be completed summer of 2023 and the new accessible restrooms, handwashing stations and paved parking now in place, Dodge will be ready to welcome field trips as soon as our team can grow to accommodate expansion into Cottage Grove. We’ve been slowly developing this property into a community resource for years and have started relationships with ISD 833 to pilot programs – the next step is to hire new staff to deliver quality environmental education programs to impact greater numbers of students.

Our goal is to partner with three schools initially and engage all students from each school in grades Kindergarten, 1st and 3rd for this first year, providing two field trips to Shepard Farm per student throughout the year. We will also hire a Naturalist Liaison to collaborate with schools in this first year on programs in classrooms.

Year 1 = Academic School Year 2024-2025

Partner Goal = 3 Schools

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire full-time Naturalist/Curriculum Developer	July 31, 2024
Hire full-time Naturalist Liaison to Partner Schools	July 31, 2024
Hire Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2024
Hire second Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2024
Partner with 3 schools from ISD 833	August 31, 2024
Teach 1,600 students state standards-aligned environmental education programs	June 30, 2025

Activity 2: Growing Our Environmental Learning Partnership with South Washington County Schools - Year 2

Activity Budget: \$213,900

Activity Description:

In year two Dodge will expand its partnership with South Washington County Schools. Working with teachers and curriculum specialists at the schools, we will identify which programs work best for the desired grade levels as field trips to Shepard Farm. Our Liaison Naturalist will collaborate with schools to bring standards-aligned programs into their classrooms.

We will engage eight schools from ISD 833, growing the number of students reached overall and also the number of classes from partner schools. For the five new new partner schools, we will engage all students from each school in grades Kindergarten, 1st and 3rd for the first year, providing two field trips to Shepard Farm per student throughout the year. For the three partner schools from year one, we will add on more grade levels and continue to align their

curriculum with state academic standards through evaluation and collaboration with teachers.

The Curriculum Specialist and Liaison Naturalists will both be year-round Dodge staff members. The Seasonal Naturalists will be hired for each school year.

Year 2 = Academic School Year 2025-2026

Partner Goal = 8 Schools

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2025
Hire second Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2025
Partner with 8 schools from ISD 833	August 31, 2025
Teach 3,300 students state standards-aligned environmental education programs	June 30, 2026

Activity 3: Growing Our Environmental Learning Partnership with South Washington County Schools - Year 3

Activity Budget: \$219,800

Activity Description:

In year three Dodge will once again expand its partnership with South Washington County Schools. Working with teachers and curriculum specialists at the schools, we will identify which programs work best for the desired grade levels as field trips to Shepard Farm. Our Liaison Naturalist will collaborate with schools to bring standards-aligned programs into their classrooms.

We will engage thirteen schools from ISD 833, growing the number of students reached overall and also the number of classes from partner schools. For the five new new partner schools, we will engage all students from each school in grades Kindergarten, 1st and 3rd for the first year, providing two field trips to Shepard Farm per student throughout the year. For the eight partner schools from year one, we will add on more grade levels and continue to align their curriculum with state academic standards through evaluation and collaboration with teachers.

The Curriculum Specialist and Liaison Naturalists will both be year-round Dodge staff members. The Seasonal Naturalists will be hired for each school year.

Year 3 = Academic School Year 2026-2027

Partner Goal = 13 Schools

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2026
Hire second Seasonal Naturalist	August 31, 2026
Partner with 13 schools from ISD 833	August 31, 2026
Teach 5,100 students state standards-aligned environmental education programs	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jodi Husting	Crestview Elementary School	Principal of the primary partner school with whom we we will be coordinating environmental education activities,	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?

Dodge receives support for its operations from three sources: earned revenue, contributed income and endowment earnings. We are currently in a comprehensive campaign, one goal of which is to build our contributed support and our endowment. Through this objective, we will increase our ability to support additional staff that will be added to the team during this grant period.

Additionally, we will build a strong partnership in South Washington County and provide significant value to their teachers and students. Program costs after the launch period will be offset by fees paid by the school district for the ongoing partnership.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Pete Cleary

Job Title: Environmental Education Director

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

Pete joined the Dodge team in 1993 after earning an undergraduate degree in natural sciences at St. John’s University, doing graduate work in science education at The Ohio State University and teaching high school physics. From intern to seasonal naturalist, to buildings and grounds staff, to full-time naturalist, Pete’s early work at Dodge was as varied as the seasons. After a short stint at Springbrook Nature Center, Pete returned in 2000 as Naturalist/Intern Coordinator. Pete moved to Curriculum Coordinator and acted as the naturalist liaison coordinating Dodge’s involvement in the award-winning Garlough Environmental Magnet School.

In Pete's current role, he heads a department of seven naturalists, four naturalist fellows and a team of dedicated volunteer teacher naturalists. They teach year-round in classrooms and on trails on more than 30 curriculum topics such as Bee Ecology, Maple Syruping, MN Wildlife, Orienteering, Physics on the Farm, Plant Cycles, Renewable Energy, Soil Science, Wilderness Skills and Winter Technologies. He ensures that Dodge classes align with statewide academic standards and directly support teachers and school learning objectives. Pete and his team are responsible for on-site school and community programs, after-hours and weekend programs, and outreach programs to area libraries, community centers, senior living facilities and more. He teaches Master Naturalist classes, works with area high school seniors on their community volunteer projects, and presents at learning conferences for environmental educators.

Pete is a former President of the Minnesota Naturalists’ Association and member of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency’s Environmental Advisory Board. He has nearly 30 years in the field of environmental education and currently leads a team of naturalists with a combined 100-plus years of experience in providing quality nature-based education.

Organization: Dodge Nature Center

Organization Description:

Founded in 1967, Dodge is the longest-running nature center in Minnesota and a pioneer in environmental education. It is the closest nature center to the core of St. Paul and is accessible by car, bus lines and bicycle. Dodge opened one of the first nature-based preschools in the U.S. in 2000. Our mission is to provide exceptional experiences in nature through environmental education.

Since its modest beginnings in West St. Paul, Dodge expanded from 37 acres to 460 acres across 3 cities (West St. Paul, Mendota Heights and Cottage Grove). Dodge is open to the public to enjoy year-round. Our eight miles of walking trails through restored hardwood forests, native grass prairies and wetlands are free to use, sunrise to sunset, 365 days a year. Dodge provides accessible, affordable outdoor activities for families and adults. Year round we provide high quality education programs both in and out of school, a Dodge Nature Preschool, adult learning and volunteer opportunities, community gardens and more.

With our team of highly experienced educators, a variety of ambassador animals, a working farm and acres of rolling green spaces, Dodge provides fun and accessible opportunities for environmental learning.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Environmental Education Director		Project Manager			25%	0.99		\$119,500
Naturalist, Curriculum Specialist		Educator will deliver programming at Shepard Farm and align field trip content with school needs			25%	3		\$163,500
Naturalist Liaison to Schools		Educator will work in schools to deliver content in classrooms and at Shepard			25%	3		\$163,500
Seasonal Naturalist #1		Teach environmental education programs at Shepard Farm through academic school year			7%	3		\$84,000
Seasonal Naturalist #2		Teach environmental education programs at Shepard Farm through the academic school year			7%	3		\$84,000
							Sub Total	\$614,500
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Snow shoes, drills, sleds, and other outdoor equipment	One-time costs of acquiring equipment needed to teach outdoor skills					\$4,500
	Tools and Supplies	Teaching supplies	Annual materials needed to teach outdoor skills, conduct experiments and investigations, etc.					\$9,000
							Sub Total	\$13,500
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Miles traveled to schools and to staff trainings at \$.55/mi	In-classroom teaching for partner schools and professional development for staff					\$2,500
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Travel and Conference Registration, meals and lodging	Professional Development with MN Naturalist Conference, MN Assoc of Env. Ed, and Master Naturalist Conf.	X				\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$10,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Background Check fees	Background checks for teachers who interact with school-aged students					\$500
							Sub Total	\$500
							Grand Total	\$639,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Travel In Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	Travel and Conference Registration, meals and lodging	Dodge will cover these costs for staff professional development and conference participation

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Contributed income from Individuals and foundation grants	Operating support from contributed income will be used to support staff development not covered by LCCMR funding	Secured	\$8,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$8,000
			Funds Total	\$8,000

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [6ce64e5c-8f5.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Photo array of students learning outdoors with Dodge naturalists and our mission: providing exceptional experiences in nature through environmental education....

Financial Capacity

File: [a7974cb4-944.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Dodge Board LCCMR Resolution 2023	ac33c420-ec0.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

