



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-194

Proposal Title: Great Lakes Aquarium Nature Playscape Improvement

Project Manager Information

Name: Jay Walker

Organization: Lake Superior Center and Great Lakes Aquarium

Office Telephone: (218) 740-2011

Email: jwalker@glaquarium.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: We will create an urban nature playscape with protective shelter and native plants to provide opportunities for aquarium education programs, community members and tourists to be immersed in nature play.

Funds Requested: \$176,000

Proposed Project Completion: October 31, 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): NE

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

Region(s): NE

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.

Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) seeks to enhance our outdoor learning space and playscape through the addition of a pavilion, shed, fence and landscape restoration. GLA is situated in a unique urban setting which directly connects families with Lake Superior. GLA sees over 200,000 visitors to our building each year, including over 10,000 pre-k through 12th grade students. Exploration and nature appreciation extends beyond the indoor space. Camps, field trips and in particular early learning programs make use of GLA grounds for outdoor teaching space, nature exploration, and free play. Great Lakes Aquarium's preschool program participants watch for signs of the changing season, play in a mud kitchen and use natural objects to build structures. It is important to make these improvements to withstand the heavy usage the space receives.

Outdoor free play opportunities are essential to child development, especially the development of creativity, individuality, and risk assessment. The nature play movement provides a basis for creating these kinds of unstructured play opportunities in nature. Generally, nature play experiences take place in more suburban and rural areas, where natural spaces, including forests, are abundant. Therefore, nature play opportunities are not always available in urban environments, making transportation and accessibility significant

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.

Currently, part of the Aquarium grounds is utilized as a nature playscape, which is open to the public and free to use. GLA's unique location allows for the opportunity for visitors to become fully immersed in outdoor play while in an urban setting. The nature playscape has been created and maintained by staff throughout the years. This proposal will upgrade play structures, storage shed and add a pavilion that will withstand weathering and heavy visitor traffic. Great Lakes Aquarium aims to continue using this space to encourage children and families to play and explore outdoors and to connect them with the Great Lakes. New and updated features will allow for an enhanced outdoor play experiences used by visitors from across the state of Minnesota.

Part of the nature playscape improvement project is to include native plantings for pollinators. Great Lakes Aquarium has been committed to invasive species removal on our property for the past four years with staff and volunteers participating in removal efforts. Adding native plants will provide habitat for pollinators and additional educational opportunities.

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?

This project will enhance the outdoor instructional space for existing Great Lakes Aquarium programming. It will increase the types of nature play experiences available to GLA participants, community members and tourists visiting the Duluth Harbor.

Restoring and revitalizing the landscape around the nature playscape provides pollinator habitat and helps reduce pollutants and debris runoff from entering the Duluth Harbor and Lake Superior. Native plantings will provide new learning opportunities for camps and classes to observe habitat restoration projects and understand their importance for pollinators.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Playscape structures and fencing

Activity Budget: \$77,000

Activity Description:

We will build a 15'x15' pavilion and a garden shed for supply storage. In addition, we will install a 4' black chain link fence around the perimeter of the playscape, approximately 500'. The pavilion will allow our early childhood, summer camp, and field trip program participants to use the outdoor space for learning in all weather. The garden shed is necessary to store and protect our outdoor learning materials. Great Lakes Aquarium property is heavily visited during the summer months, and adequate storage is necessary for keep learning tools and loose parts protected from damage or loss. A substantial fence will protect playscape users of all ages, creating a barrier between play structures and the open water of the Duluth Harbor.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Planning, engineering and design	August 31, 2024
Construction	October 31, 2024

Activity 2: Native plantings and pollinator habitat

Activity Budget: \$89,000

Activity Description:

We will restore the landscape between Great Lakes Aquarium's building and the Duluth Harbor adding native plants and a pollinator gardens. New plantings will stabilize the disturbed ground on property, while creating rich habitat for pollinators. GLA will create an short interpretive trail connected to the Duluth Lakewalk that features interpretive signs with information about the importance of native plants and protecting pollinators.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Planning and design	March 31, 2025
Prepare landscape	June 30, 2025
Install pathways, interpretive signs and plants	July 31, 2025

Activity 3: Playscape elements

Activity Budget: \$10,000

Activity Description:

We will upgrade existing and add new nature play structures that appeal to children of all ages and abilities. The current playscape structures are homemade by Great Lakes Aquarium staff. This project will provide durable play elements that can be enjoyed for years to come. We will incorporate a sand pit and digging area, in ground slide, natural material climbing structures, water play area, benches, and picnic tables. Nature play with these types of structures helps youth develop crucial social skills such as cooperation and problem solving, while fostering an appreciation of nature.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Planning and design	August 31, 2024
Installation and construction	October 31, 2024

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?

Upon project completion, Great Lakes Aquarium will continue to maintain the playscape and landscaping as part of our annual budget.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jay Walker

Job Title: Executive Director

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

Jay Walker is the Executive Director of the Great Lakes Aquarium and is responsible for leading the organization's mission to engage, inspire and encourage stewardship of water and wildlife. Mr. Walker has vast experience operating a public Aquarium. Previous to his role as Executive Director Mr. Walker was the Director of operations, where he managed the animal care and facilities departments, worked as project manager for exhibit and construction projects, and designed many of the aquarium's new exhibit galleries. Mr. Walker has 27 years of experience in the Aquarium field. He has opened two public aquariums which included the development of exhibits, animal collection, permitting, hiring staff, and developing policies and programs. Mr. Walker has successfully managed projects that received public funding from, State, City, and private sources. He is experienced with reporting for budget tracking and meeting outcomes. Mr. Walker's unique skills help to facilitate project development by collaborating with educators, researchers, engineers, designers, contractors, and state and federal agencies.

Role in the project: Mr. Walker will manage contractors, timelines, budget, and construction. Education: the University of Wisconsin Superior Fisheries B.S. 2007 Alexandria Technical College Aquaculture A.A.S 1996 Relevant positions Great Lakes Aquarium, Assistant Director (2009-2018) Director of Operations (2003-2009) Curator of Animal Care (1999-2003) Underwater World, Senior Aquarist/Lab Technician (1996- 1999).

Organization: Lake Superior Center and Great Lakes Aquarium

Organization Description:

Lake Superior Center dba Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) is a non-profit organization created to support freshwater education. The Aquarium's mission is to inspire people to explore their connection with Lake Superior and waters of the world. We believe in a world in which people feel connected to, value, and protect the world's waters. We accomplish this mission through a combination of interactive, informative exhibits and educational programming for all ages. The precursor to the Aquarium, Lake Superior Center, was an outreach and education organization focused primarily on reaching schools and teachers with Lake Superior education. Great Lakes Aquarium opened its doors in July 2000. The trend in the last 10 years has been positive in measures related to revenue, attendance and community perception. We also have witnessed a trend toward people having deeper experiences with us. Families have memberships and their children attend camps and classes. Adults attend art openings and special presentations, and many simply come to the Aquarium to relax. GLA actively partners with over 30 organizations representing K-12 and post-secondary education; business and industry; science and research; civic engagement; environmental advocacy; and city, state, and federal government.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Planning, engineering, and design of playscape, pavilion, and landscape				-		\$14,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Site preparation, landscaping, Native plantings, and pathways				-		\$78,000
TBD	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Installation of the pavilion, supply shed, and chain link fence.				0		\$74,000
							Sub Total	\$166,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Playscape elements including, sandpit, climbing structures, slides, challenge course, picnic tables, benches, and water feature.	Elements to allow children to play and explore the space around them.					\$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	\$176,000

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: [10165640-bce.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of Great Lakes Aquarium grounds with outlines of the proposed project boundaries for playscape improvement and native planting....

Financial Capacity

File: [e89356b5-59a.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Great Lakes Aquarium Board Resolution	772f6d73-5d0.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?

Yes

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?

No