



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-065

Proposal Title: Fostering Environmental Stewardship through Art

Project Manager Information

Name: Lori Forshee-Donnay

Organization: Watermark Art Center

Office Telephone: (218) 444-7570

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Project will enhance environmental education to underserved youth in Northern Minnesota through art related experiences with regional artists, culture bearers and Headwaters Science Center, delivering culturally relevant hands-on learning experiences.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$298,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (C)

Project Location

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

Region(s): NW, Central, NE,

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

Region(s): NW, Central, NE,

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.

Northern Minnesota students face significant barriers to accessing environmental education through art. The Watermark Art Center (WAC) in Bemidji offers free programming but remains geographically out of reach for many rural and tribal communities. The region's isolation from major urban centers, coupled with a lack of transportation options, prevents students from engaging with hands-on art experiences that connect them to their environment.

WAC serves a vast region, including Becker, Beltrami, Cass, Clearwater, Hubbard, Itasca, Lake of the Woods, Mahnomon, Roseau, Red Lake Nation, White Earth Nation, and Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. However, as a small organization with limited outreach capacity, WAC struggles to bring its programming to students in these communities.

This proposal leverages the Headwaters Science Center's (HSC) LCCMR-recommended initiative, set to launch in summer 2025, which will use a mobile network to deliver hands-on environmental education to Boys & Girls Club sites across Northern Minnesota. By building on this infrastructure, we will integrate environmental education through art, using local and Native artists to connect students with their landscapes and cultures in meaningful ways. Without intervention, these students remain disconnected from both art and environmental learning, missing critical opportunities to explore the relationships between nature, culture, and self-expression.

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.

Watermark will collaborate with Headwaters to develop place-based programming integrating art and science, providing environmental programming to underserved youth.

Through collaborations with Indigenous organizations and artists, WAC has been able to develop environmental art programming emphasizing cultural narratives as well as the use and preservation of these vital resources. Working with a regional network of artists and environmental educators, WAC can provide youth at area Boys & Girls Clubs, and other after-school programs, opportunities to explore their connection to the environment with cultural art activities through a scientific lens.

HSC's science expertise and transportation infrastructure maximizes impact, ensuring students gain both artistic and scientific perspectives on Minnesota's environment. With the support of HSC, Watermark staff and artists will travel to BGCA sites, while additional artists will work with students in their own communities.

Combining WAC's strength in arts-based education with Headwaters expertise in environmental science education and LCCMR-funded transport network, will ensure efficient program delivery, creating a sustainable model for reaching youth in remote areas with meaningful experiences. And by integrating "Art" into STEM based programming, students gain a greater understanding of nature, recognizing the need for conservation and the importance of environmental stewardship.

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 expand access to STEAM programming for students in Minnesota's most economically and geographically disadvantaged counties through over 360 visits to BGCA sites and other after-school programs over two years. By integrating diverse cultural perspectives, local artists, and culture bearers, Watermark Art Center, Headwaters Science Center, and Boys & Girls Clubs will collaborate to deliver inclusive, natural-resource-based curricula. Hands-on experiences will engage students in environmental stewardship, connecting them to their landscapes in meaningful ways. This scalable model ensures that rural and underserved communities gain lasting access to high-quality, culturally relevant environmental education focused on ecology, conservation, and sustainability.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Hire Project Staff at the Watermark

Activity Budget: \$3,000

Activity Description:

The project will begin with the recruitment and onboarding of additional staff for the program. Watermark's Art Education Program Director and Executive Director will engage an Artist Liaison and a Program Assistant for the project. These key personnel will play a critical role in coordinating between WAC, our project partners, artists, and educators to facilitate the effective implementation of the program. The Artist Liaison and Program Assistant will ensure efficient communication and collaboration, address logistical challenges, and develop new community resources. Having dedicated staff for after-school programs and artist support is vital to establish a sustainable and impactful educational model for rural and underserved students.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit Art Liaison and Program Assistant	July 31, 2026

Activity 2: Ongoing Project Coordination & Communication

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

This activity ensures seamless communication, collaboration, and effective management across all project partners, between the Watermark Art Center, the Headwaters Science Center, regional artists and culture bearers, and Boys & Girls Clubs of America sites. This activity spans the full two years of the project and is designed to address the challenges of coordinating a complex project with multiple partners across a wide geographic area.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Project coordination	June 30, 2028
Assembly and coordination of art kits.	June 30, 2028

Activity 3: Teaching at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Northern Minnesota

Activity Budget: \$240,000

Activity Description:

WAC staff will conduct 30 to 50 sessions per year primarily at Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) sites within the Headwaters Science Center (HSC) network (recommended for LCCMR funding beginning Summer 2025), utilizing HSC's transportation infrastructure and Bemidji-based staff.

WAC's extensive network of regional artists will make approximately 150 visits per year by directly engaging with BGCA sites located near their homes and studios when possible. This dual approach leverages local artists' connections to foster strong, culturally relevant relationships within their communities and local environments. By connecting artists with their community, we can develop relationships that support ongoing programming. Environmental art kits and natural resource supplies will be provided for students during each visit.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Watermark staff teaching at BGCA	June 30, 2028
Local artists teaching at BGCA	June 30, 2028

Activity 4: Attendance at Project Annual Meeting**Activity Budget:** \$5,000**Activity Description:**

This activity ensures that the Watermark Art Center staff and key regional artists actively participate in the annual meetings of the Headwaters Science Center project, "Science Centers Supporting Northern Boys & Girls Clubs". These meetings serve as a crucial platform for high-level coordination, communication, and collaborative planning between all project partners.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Attendance at Yealy Meeting	September 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Lee Furuseth	Headwaters Science Center	Provider of Science Education, Logistics Support and Environmental Educational Network	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?

Watermark Art Center will sustain and expand this initiative beyond the grant period through its diversified funding model, which includes government support, memberships, admissions, and contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations. By leveraging partnerships with Headwaters Science Center, local organizations, and cultural community members, we aim to create a self-sustaining network that connects artists with communities. Expanding WAC's outreach capabilities will ensure continued access to environmental and art education resources, fostering long-term regional collaboration and positioning local artists as a lasting educational and cultural resource.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Lori Forshee-Donnay

Job Title: Executive Director

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

The Project Manager has been the Executive Director for Watermark Art Center since 2006 and is responsible for over 110 exhibit installations and coordinating 18 outdoor summer art festivals. Exhibits have varied from individual artists to community and group shows, an annual National Ceramics Competition and host to ongoing traditional and contemporary Indigenous art exhibits. Partnerships with area K-12 academic institutions have created opportunities for increased interaction with school age children including High School and Middle School exhibits and field trips. Other collaborations have helped WAC develop long-astng relationships, while expanding our reach allowing us to bring additional arts programming to the region. Past partnerships include Northern Clay Center - Mpls, MN, Textile Center - Mpls. MN, Itasca Bio Lab, Lake Itasca State Park, Weismann Museum - U of M Campus, and Surface Design Association, Albuquerque, NM. WAC collaborative efforts and ability to organize art events and implement high quality programming is recognized nationally resulting in frequent requests for traveling exhibits and collaborations.

Organization: Watermark Art Center

Organization Description:

Valuing a vibrant community the mission of the Watermark Art Center is to nurture, exhibit and promote the visual arts." Watermark is a non-profit, member-supported art institution located in Northern Minnesota that serves a 9-county region and 3 Tribal Nations.

Located in the second poorest county in Minnesota, WAC is cognizant of its responsibility to serve its community and offers affordable art experiences providing greater access to those in the region. Of the 9 counties served, 2 have the highest rates of population living below the poverty line in the State. Mahnomen County is at #1 at 20.9% and Beltrami as #2 at 18.4%.

Offering a free and accessible art center with 4 galleries, including the first dedicated Native American Art Gallery in the region, WAC continues to provide an important voice for cultural empowerment and social change through its programming and partnerships.

WAC features:

- high quality contemporary art in rural Minnesota
- accessible facility with unimpeded access
- low or no cost arts programming for youth and adults
- a unique art space in small community that serves a larger rural region
- collaborations with area organizations, schools and community creating greater access to the arts

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
WAC Art Education Program Director		Project Manager and provides teaching at B&GCA sites.			7.65%	0.66		\$39,000
Artist Liaison		Provides support to WAC Art Ed Program Director, acts as liaison for artists/environmental instructors/cultural bearers, coordinating between WAC, HSC, and B&G Clubs for programming.			7.65%	1		\$38,000
Program Assistant		Purchasing and Coordination of Art Kit assembly			7.65%	0.5		\$18,000
							Sub Total	\$95,000
Contracts and Services								
Regional Artists	Service Contract	Stipends provided to regional artists for instruction to BGCA children. The total cost of each visit is \$450. There will be 150 artist visits to BGCA sites calculated at a per visit rate with each visit being 6 hours to include prep, teaching time, etc. at \$75/per hour.				0.5		\$135,000
							Sub Total	\$135,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Environmental art kits and supplies to be used by used by BGCA students. Each visit is expected to serve 30 kids in 150 visits with each \$10 kit used for 1.5 visits for a total of 3000 kits.	Materials that are needed to create the student environmental art.					\$60,000
							Sub Total	\$60,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Bring 5 Watermark staff and artists to the annual 2-day All Hands Meeting at HSC. Includes lodging @ \$110, meals \$68, averaging 100 Miles @ \$0.70.	Mileage to bring Watermark staff and artists most active in the program to the two annual All-Hands Meetings arranged by the Headwaters Science Center at BGCA sites.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing of curriculum and instructions	Instructions for teachers and students					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$298,000

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	Watermark core funding	Administrative costs.	Secured	\$20,000
In-Kind	Watermark core funding	Director's Salary	Secured	\$20,000
In-Kind	Watermark Volunteers (200 hours at 31.80)	Support of project through kit assembly, classroom support and organization.	Secured	\$6,360
			Non State Sub Total	\$46,360
			Funds Total	\$46,360

Total Project Cost: \$344,360

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [4e8c533a-7a8.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Locations of services sites and artists. Photos of kids and the art they made at the Watermark Art Center....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	2f56f750-2b8.pdf
2023 990	618fd633-ddb.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution Letter	c1192f86-0f4.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Visual Element - Regional Map with photos	80d7dce3-b45.pdf
Letter of Support - Andrea Kent, BGC of Bemidji	b467c90f-874.pdf
Letter of Support - Carol Thompson, BGC of White Earth	a2e71188-883.pdf
Letter of Support - Susanna Gaunt, Artist	33a7849b-fc7.jpe
Letter of Support - Sarah Nassif, Botanist and Artist	72225978-73d.pdf
Letter of Support - Patrick Calder-Carrier, R2 Arts Council	6032766e-86b.pdf
Letter of Support - Lee Furuseth, Headwaters Science Center	35035b06-581.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the Commissioner's Plan applies.

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

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 pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

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 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

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

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Paul Morin, Watermark Art Center Volunteer

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

Yes, I understand