



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-076

**Proposal Title:** Tree Trust Career Pathways Green Industry Workforce Development

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Jared Smith

**Organization:** Tree Trust

**Office Telephone:** (952) 767-3880

**Email:** jareds@treetrust.org

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Tree Trust will equip 45 young adults with technical and transferable skills and employer connections for green industry careers. Participants will receive paid, hands-on training while stewarding community green spaces.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$730,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2029

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Education and Outdoor Recreation (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

## Narrative

**Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.**

Tree Trust's Career Pathways Branches programming addresses two needs: urban forest stewardship and qualified workers in the green industry. The invasive pest emerald ash borer (EAB) is killing Minnesota's ash trees at an alarming rate. As new trees are planted to replace those killed by EAB, trained workers are needed to supplement the workforce and care for our forests long-term. However, in its June 2024 report, the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) noted that Minnesota faces a "very tight labor market. ...This long-term tightness is causing hiring challenges for many employers and constraining job growth in certain industries" (<https://mn.gov/deed/newscenter/publications/trends/june-2024/review.jsp>). DEED identified the retirement of Baby Boomer generation workers as a significant contributing factor to the tight labor market. Tree Trust engages individuals from populations who have historically been underrepresented in the green industry, opening up new and exciting career pathways for them. Branches graduate and now climbing arborist Melanie shared, "The program...empowered me to try new things and enter a [tree care] career that, especially as Black woman, felt daunting." Green industry jobs offer family-supporting wages, employee benefits, and opportunities for advancement, all while stewarding our environment.

**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.**

Branches is our pre-apprenticeship Career Pathways program. It has proved to be a highly successful on-ramp for young adults aged 18-28 from underserved communities to enter high-demand green industry careers. Branches runs year-round in 10-week cohorts. Participants earn wages for all cohort hours, beginning at \$16/hour. They hone technical skills through hands-on, project-based learning with tree care, landscaping, property maintenance, and/or construction projects in community green spaces. Participants also receive curriculum-based classroom and workshop instruction on tree identification, tree pests and hazards, landscape design planning, and safe industry equipment use and maintenance. They learn transferable career skills, including how to write a resume, interview techniques, job search and retention, career exploration resources, conflict resolution, communication skills, decision-making, and financial literacy. Participants earn industry-recognized credentials and network with local employers through jobsite tours, mock interviews, and guest speakers to facilitate a smooth transition into the workforce. Participants complete programming with valuable green industry experience and credentials that give provide a competitive edge to enter the workforce. They also gain a sense of ownership in stewarding the environment, and firsthand knowledge of the positive impact that green industry work has in transforming and maintaining green spaces for all to enjoy.

**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 achieve the following outcomes:

- Provide paid, hands-on green industry workforce training to 45 young adults aged 18-28, with a focus on participants from underrepresented populations. Training will expose participants to a variety of environmental and natural resources careers, and create a pipeline of qualified workers for Minnesota employers.
- 80% of participants will earn an industry-recognized credential.
- 75% of participants will enter a job, apprenticeship, or ongoing education after completing programming.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Recruit 45 participants for the Career Pathways Branches program

**Activity Budget:** \$29,940

**Activity Description:**

The objective is to recruit 45 young adults who are motivated to enter green industry careers and demonstrate enthusiasm for our program format. We diversify recruitment through relationships with schools, county libraries, social service organizations, and youth outreach centers to reach potential participants in their communities. Our full-time Community Outreach Coordinator actively collaborates with recruitment partners to engage young adults through in-person visits, presentations to classes, phone calls, emails, and career fairs. Tree Trust employs a full-time Communications Specialist to design website content, social media posts, and flyers (physical and digital) to reach potential participants. We track the number of program applications that result from social media and email communications, in-person connections, events, and email and phone call communication. We adjust our content and strategies as needed, based on these results, to optimize our marketing to prospective participants. Interested participants fill out an online application, and then have a phone call with a Tree Trust staff member to assess their interest in programming, their current work experience and education level, and physical competency and skills for an outdoor work program. Participants who pass this vetting process then have an in-person interview with Tree Trust staff to complete enrollment.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit 15 participants for Branches cohorts in SFY 2027	April 30, 2027
Recruit 15 participants for Branches cohorts in SFY 2028	April 30, 2028
Recruit 15 participants for Branches cohorts in SFY 2029	April 30, 2029

### Activity 2: Provide paid, hands-on workforce training for 45 Branches participants.

**Activity Budget:** \$639,900

**Activity Description:**

The objective is to equip participants with the technical and transferable skills needed to enter a green industry career, while providing hands-on experience in stewarding community green spaces. Participants will complete a 10-week cohort, with 160 hours of hands-on worksite training, 40 hours of related technical instruction, and 20-30 hours of employment readiness training. Worksite training will include projects in tree care, landscaping, property maintenance, and/or construction in public green spaces. Participants will have the opportunity to earn at least one industry-recognized credential, including First Aid/ CPR, Tree Care Industry Association Introduction to Arboriculture Safety, Minnesota Tree Inspector Certification, and OSHA-10 General Industry or Construction. These credentials demonstrate mastery of foundational industry skills for future employers. Transferable life skills are critical to increase employability and prepare participants to successfully enter a career; employment readiness training includes writing resumes, interview techniques, job search and retention, career advancement, conflict resolution, communication skills, and decision-making. Participants practice these skills in real time as they learn to follow workplace expectations, come to work on time, complete tasks with high quality results, receive constructive feedback from trainers, and practice working as a team with other people.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Serve 15 participants in Branches during SFY 2027	June 30, 2027
Serve 15 participants in Branches during SFY 2028	June 30, 2028
Serve 15 participants in Branches during SFY 2029	June 30, 2029
At least 80% of participants (36 people) will earn one or more industry-recognized credentials.	June 30, 2029

### Activity 3: Provide employer connections and ongoing education opportunities to 45 Branches participants.

**Activity Budget:** \$60,160

#### Activity Description:

The objective is to equip participants with the skills and resources to find and begin jobs with local employers who provide family-supporting wages, employee benefits, and opportunities for career advancement. Employment Success Coaches, Branches Trainers, and our Outreach Coordinator help participants explore potential job opportunities and connect with local employers throughout programming by a variety of means including career fairs, mock interviews, guest speakers, jobsite tours, and online job search assistance. We assist participants with purchasing interview clothing if needed and provide coaching on interview techniques when participants have a job interview. Our Communications Specialist takes professional headshots of each participant at no charge. Participants also have the opportunity to apply for employment with Tree Trust's social enterprise, Landscape Services. In addition to employment opportunities, Tree Trust Landscape Services offers a Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry Registered Arborist Apprenticeship program.

#### Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
At least 75% of participants (30 people) will begin a job, apprenticeship, or ongoing education	June 30, 2029

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jessica Galatz	Hennepin County Regional Railroad Authority	Worksite partner	No
Maggie Volchko	Davey Tree Expert Company	Job placement, mock interviews, jobsite tours	No
Philip Binns	City of Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development	Worksite partner	No
Rollin Heassler	Rainbow Tree Care	Job placement, mock interviews, jobsite tours	No
Debra Paulsen	Royal Credit Union	Financial literacy training	No
Deb Bahr-Helgen	Minneapolis Workforce Development Board	Participant referrals and resources	No
Mark Jacobs	Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board	Participant referrals and resources	No
Erik Aamoth	Hennepin-Carver Workforce Development Board	Participant referrals and resources	No
Brad Mahr	Ramsey County Workforce Innovation Board	Participant referrals and resources	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?**

Tree Trust has an extensive network of recruitment partners throughout the seven-county Twin Cities metro. We currently have more Branches applicants than we have funding to serve. Cohorts funded by this grant will be completed during the project timeline and will not require ongoing funding. We have additional pending and secured funding through government, foundation, and corporate sources for expenses not covered by ENRTF. Project results, listed as outcomes above, are implemented throughout programming. We evaluate results through objective metrics and participant feedback through a third-party research firm. We track enrollment and graduation numbers, raises, credentials, and post-program placements.

## Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Protect Community Forests By Managing Ash For EAB	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 06b	\$3,500,000

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Jared Smith

**Job Title:** Executive Director | CEO

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

Jared Smith is Tree Trust's Executive Director | CEO. Jared has been with Tree Trust for 26 years, and was named Executive Director in 2018. Before this role, Jared worked with our Summer Youth Employment Program, served as a program coordinator, and – beginning in 2004 – led the Tree Trust Landscape Services division and managed company operations. He has over 20 years of experience in project management, employment training, working with youth, landscape contracting, and managing equipment and vehicle fleets. Jared holds a B.A. in Geology from Gustavus Adolphus College and is a licensed general contractor.

Jared will oversee planning, implementation, and reporting for this project. He is supported by a team of qualified staff, including our Director of Career Pathways, Branches Program Manager, Employment Success Coaches, Finance staff, and Field Operations staff. Our Branches Program Manager is an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist, holds her Minnesota Tree Inspector Certification and is certified in First Aid/CPR. We currently have five Branches Trainers on staff, who are all certified in Ground Operations 1-3 from the Tree Care Industry Association's Tree Care Academy and in First Aid/CPR.

**Organization:** Tree Trust

**Organization Description:**

Tree Trust is a non-profit organization, founded in 1976. Our mission is to transform lives and landscapes by engaging people to build skills for meaningful careers, inspiring people to plant trees, and making our community a greener, healthier place to live. Our vision is a thriving workforce living on a healthy planet. From our founding to the present, we have grown and adapted to meet the ongoing needs of Minnesota, while always staying true to our mission and vision.

Our three key departments collaborate to serve our community. Career Pathways equips 14-28 year-olds with paid workforce training and employer connections to enter sustainable careers in the green industry and skilled trades. Programs range from entry-level to advanced training with industry-recognized credentials. Community Forestry partners with municipalities, local and national organizations, schools, and community volunteers to promote a greener future by planting trees in urban areas where they are most needed. Our Landscape Services department, a social enterprise, provides professional tree care and landscape contracting to support our programming with earned income, advance the greening of our community, and create opportunities for green careers.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Branches Program Manager		Responsible for creating the curriculum and managing the participant experience throughout the program			19%	0.39		\$27,209
Branches Trainers		Direct supervision and training of participants in program for field work, technical skills, and industry-recognized credentials			19%	1.5		\$100,211
Community Outreach Coordinator		Recruiting participants for the program			19%	0.24		\$20,104
Employment Success Coaches		Direct case management, transferable skills training, and career navigation services to participants in program			19%	2.16		\$130,031
Field Operations Manager		Responsible for coordinating projects that staff and participants work on throughout program and direct supervision of Trainer position			19%	0.39		\$35,410
Placement & Partnerships Manager		Coordinates partnerships for placement opportunities for participants when they exit the program, works directly with participants to help match them with these potential employers			19%	0.27		\$17,815
Senior Manager of Program Operations		Responsible for coordinating grant reporting to ensure compliance with program outcomes			19%	0.3		\$27,472
Director of Career Pathways & Field Operations		Responsible for program design and partnerships, supervises direct program staff			19%	0.27		\$32,078
Program Assistant		Processes participant paperwork and data management			19%	0.12		\$7,814
Program Participants		Participants served by the grant (paid position)			12%	6.06		\$190,945
Finance Staff		Responsible for direct payment of payroll to participants through in-house payroll system and tracking of grant expenses; time can and will be directly attributed to this grant			19%	0.15		\$16,545

Human Resources Staff		Responsible for supporting participants through the intake process and during the program; time can and will be directly attributed to this grant			19%	0.06		\$5,130
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$610,764</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Equipment	Equipment Lease for tree care and landscaping equipment such as aerial lift, chipper, or skidsteer/loader	Equipment is used as a training tool to provide hands-on experience with industry equipment for participants on field projects during the program					\$15,000
	Tools and Supplies	Hand and power tools	Tools are used by staff and participants to complete green industry projects during the program and to provide participants with hands-on experience in the use and care of a variety of industry-related tools.					\$6,000
	Tools and Supplies	Project materials such as trees, mulch, and landscape supplies	Project materials used to train participants in green industry work, and to complete projects in creating and maintaining green spaces in the community.					\$14,325
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$35,325</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	1,400 miles x 0.70 (current IRS mileage rate)	Reimbursement to staff driving personal vehicles at the IRS mileage					\$980



			rate for program functions including but not limited to participant meetings, partnership meetings, and program activities					
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$980</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Program curriculum materials	Program curriculum for training materials for participants to use in the program					\$2,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$2,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
		Staff Training	Training expenses for staff					\$5,475
		Transportation	Transportation expense for participants to get to and from work, and between worksites during the workday					\$35,905
		Participant Training	Expenses for participant training in transferable and technical industry skills, hands-on field training, and training and testing for industry-recognized credentials					\$16,155
		Facility Expense	Expenses for lease and maintenance of facility dedicated directly to training participants for hands-on skills and classroom training	X				\$23,396
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$80,931</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$730,000</b>

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Facility Expense	This space is crucial to the program operations and provides warehouse, workshop, and classroom training space for participants while they are in the program. This training equips participants with the skills they need to ensure safety in the field, prior to completing field projects. This expense is tracked specifically based on the number of participants in the program to ensure accuracy for each grant.

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Project partners, foundation/corporate/individual donors, and other grants	These funds will come from project partners, foundation/corporate/individual donors, and other grants to help cover the costs that the ENRTF funds do not cover such as administrative, overhead, additional facility expense, insurance, and phones/computers. These expenses are essential for the program to run effectively.	Potential	\$124,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$124,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$124,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$854,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [bd38c126-f40.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Flyer lists components of Branches program, and shows photos of participants in action planting and carrying trees, using equipment, practicing climbing arborist techniques, bucking logs, and working on landscape construction projects....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Tree Trust Evidence of Good Standing with Secretary of State	<a href="#">fcd8e33d-32b.pdf</a>
Tree Trust 2023 990	<a href="#">df1a36c4-c56.pdf</a>
Tree Trust 2023 Audit	<a href="#">ee144722-495.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Tree Trust Board Authorization Letter	<a href="#">e8b9ec7c-6b3.pdf</a>

## 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")?**

No

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

Gretchen Spencer, Executive Assistant, Tree Trust; Anders Hawes, Director of Finance, Tree Trust

**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**

N/A

