



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-145

Proposal Title: Building a Natural Connection CAIRO and Outdoor U

Project Manager Information

Name: Owen Connell

Organization: Saint Johns Arboretum and University

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Build collaboration between Saint John's Outdoor U and CAIRO to improve environmental field trips, empower new East African environmental educators, and develop culturally relevant outdoor recreation opportunities for African immigrants.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$617,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

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): Central

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

Region(s): Central

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.

The number of East African immigrants in St. Cloud and the surrounding areas Saint John's Outdoor U serves has grown exponentially in recent decades. Since its formation in 1997, Saint John's Outdoor U has built a strong partnership with St. Cloud Independent School District (ISD) 742 and the surrounding districts to deliver environmental education field trip experiences that help to meet state science standards. Of the approximately 3000 PreK-12 students we serve annually, roughly 15 percent are recent African immigrants or come from a household of recent African immigrants. Currently no Saint John's Outdoor U professional or student staff comes from an East African background, nor are they fluent in any languages commonly spoken in the region. This is problematic for the following reasons:

- Saint John's Outdoor U staff may not be appropriately adapting curriculum delivery to meet the cultural norms of others.
- Saint John's Outdoor U staff struggle with communication and connection barriers.
- Not seeing a person of East African descent on Saint John's Outdoor U staff perpetuates the belief that outdoor spaces and environmental science fields are not for underrepresented groups. The time has come to break through these barriers to empower new environmental leaders and build community.

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.

Saint John's Outdoor U will collaborate with CAIRO to:

1. Assess and improve the effectiveness of PreK-12 environmental education programming to serve a growing population of East African immigrants and refugees in the Stearns County area.
CAIRO will assist in recruiting a multi-lingual Multicultural Specialist to review, assess and assist in the delivery of Saint John's Outdoor U environmental education programs. This will ensure that programs are relevant to East African audiences and improve cultural agility of current professional staff.
2. Pilot an environmental education fellowship program to empower recent graduate(s) of CAIRO's existing CONNECT program with the skills, experience, and network to kickstart a career in environmental education.
CAIRO will assist in recruiting and supporting an annual Environmental Education Fellow. The position features advanced development of environmental interpretation skills, teaching techniques, and natural history knowledge through hands-on training and participation in seminars, workshops and continuing education. Opportunities for collaboration with College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University professors as well professionals working in multiple fields will be provided.
3. Develop and facilitate culturally relevant monthly outdoor recreation/education community programs.
CAIRO will assist in recruiting East African community members for outdoor education and recreation 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?

Multicultural specialist and external environmental education consultant will produce written assessment and recommendations to improve Saint John's Outdoor University environmental education field trip curriculum serving over 450 East African K, 2, and 3rd grade students annually (1800 total).

Four East African Environmental Education Fellows will gain the skills, knowledge, experience, and professional network to secure future work in this field and serve as trailblazer environmental educators with unbelievable potential to inspire an entire community to connect with and care for Minnesota's natural resources.

720 East African community members participate in fun and safe exploration of Minnesota outdoor education/recreation opportunities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Assess and improve the effectiveness Saint John's Outdoor U environmental education programming to improve our service of East African immigrants and

Activity Budget: \$327,200

Activity Description:

CAIRO helps Saint John's Outdoor U recruit and support a multilingual Multicultural Specialist to review, assess, and assist in the improved delivery of Saint John's Outdoor U environmental education field trips serving 450 East African students annually. This will ensure that our field trips are relevant to East African audiences and improves the cultural agility of current professional staff and student naturalists.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Collaborate with CAIRO to recruit and hire Multicultural Specialist and external environmental education consultant.	September 30, 2026
Full assessment of curriculum offerings with suggestions for improvement by Multicultural Specialist.	December 31, 2026
External Environmental Education Consultant produces initial written assesment of Saint John's Outdoor University programming.	December 31, 2026
Training created by Multicultural Specialist to improve curriculum and cultural agility of staff.	December 31, 2026
Deliver improved environmental education field trips to over 450 East African immigrants annually	May 31, 2030
Annual review to track progress and inform final report.	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Bridge CAIRO CONNECT to Environmental Education Fellowship.

Activity Budget: \$223,100

Activity Description:

Build on Saint John's Outdoor U's existing environmental education fellowship program to empower recent graduates of the CAIRO CONNECT program to with the skills, experience and network to kickstart a career in environmental education.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
CAIRO assists Saint John's Outdoor U in recruiting and supporting an annual Environmental Education Fellow	September 30, 2029
Environmental Education Fellow successfully trained in environmental interpretation skills, teaching techniques, and natural history knowledge	May 31, 2030
Environmental Education Fellow empowered to lead PreK-12 environmental education and community outdoor education program offerings	May 31, 2030

Activity 3: CAIRO Community Outdoor Recreation/Education Series

Activity Budget: \$66,700

Activity Description:

Develop and facilitate culturally relevant outdoor recreation/education community programming.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Work with CAIRO, Multicultural Specialist, and Fellow to create community programs aimed at East Africans	August 31, 2026
Create and deliver 32 community outdoor recreation/education programs over the course of four years	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
John Geissler	Saint John's Outdoor University	Support	No
Sabrin Ali	Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization	Partner	Yes
Abdi Ibrahim	Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization	Partner	Yes

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?

Multicultural Specialist will create a list of best practices and guiding standards for future programs that ensures they are relevant and intriguing to visiting East African students. Upon completion of this pilot project, Saint John's Outdoor U will seek to fund both the Multicultural Specialist and Environmental Fellow position through donations from Outdoor U members; in addition to seeking other grant-based funds.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Owen Connell

Job Title: Assistant Director of PreK-12 Environmental Education

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

Owen Connell has served as Assistant Director of PreK-12 Environmental Education at Saint John's Outdoor University since July of 2023. He has a Master of Science degree in Ecology and Environmental Science from the University of Maine and a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Clark University.

Prior to his work at Saint John's Outdoor University, he has been involved in numerous projects focusing on scientific communication and outreach. One prominent example is his time working with the University of Maine Systems Approaches to Understanding and Navigating the New Arctic (SAUNNA) National Research Traineeship (NRT) program to discuss the impact of climate change on arctic systems and indigenous communities.

Owen will be supported by Outdoor University Director John Geissler who has a master's degree in environmental education from the University of Minnesota Duluth and has been a project manager on two successful ENTRF supported projects.

Organization: Saint Johns Arboretum and University

Organization Description:

Saint John's Outdoor University provides environmental and outdoor education opportunities through classes, events and initiatives with the Abbey Arboretum and the College of Saint Bennedict and Saint John's University.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Multicultural Specialist		The Multicultural Specialist will assist in the direction and coordination of the environmental education programming for PreK-12 students, College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University (CSB/SJU) students, Saint John's Preparatory students, and the general public. This position will be responsible for evaluating and suggesting changes to current Outdoor U program offerings with the intent of making them more relevant to the needs and values of visiting East African immigrant and refugee students. They shall work to create Somali and Arabic translations of current Outdoor U program offerings and establish a framework for how future programs can be created with this demographic in mind.			31.5%	4		\$262,579
Environmental Education Fellowship – CAIRO CONNECT – 12 Months		The Fellow is responsible for assisting the Outdoor U team in the facilitation and coordination of environmental education programming for PreK-12 students, College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB/SJU) students, and the general public. This position will assist in teaching environmental education curriculum and assist in the development of new programming and curriculum opportunities. Other aspects of this position include training and teaching Outdoor U staff, students and volunteers, outreach to the CSB/SJU and Center for African Immigrants and Refugees Organization (CAIRO) community, land stewardship, equipment maintenance, and professional development opportunities.			31.5%	4		\$191,464
Project Manager		The project manager shall be responsible for overseeing the professional development of both the Multicultural Specialist and CAIRO CONNECT Environmental Education Fellow, implementing organizational changes based on Multicultural Specialist and Environmental Education Evaluation			31.5%	0.36		\$31,560

		Consultant's feedback, maintain communication with CAIRO and community representatives, and assist in creating annual community outdoor recreation events.						
							Sub Total	\$485,603
Contracts and Services								
Center for African Migrants and Refugees Organization (CAIRO)	Service Contract	CAIRO shall assist in the recruitment of prospective candidates for both the Multicultural Specialist and the CAIRO CONNECT Environmental Education Fellowship positions. They shall advertise, promote, recruit, and transport community members for outdoor recreation community events. They shall provide consultation on how to build relationships with African migrant communities.				0.4		\$25,000
Outdoor Learning School	Service Contract	Outdoor Learning School shall provide an annual consultation where they shall observe Saint John's Outdoor University school programs and provide feedback on how to better engage student and community participants. Feedback and program staff performance shall be tracked over duration of the grant.				-		\$8,000
TBD	Internal services or fees (uncommon)	An East African Community Leader shall speak about the benefits of outdoor recreation to assist in recruiting members of the East African migrant community to participate in Saint John's Outdoor University community events				-		\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$35,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Program and field trip supplies	Materials needed to effectively run PreK-12 environmental education programming.					\$21,101
	Tools and Supplies	Outdoor recreation equipment make and takes (paddle making, snowshoe making) and rentals	Materials needed for Saint Johns Outdoor U community programs.					\$14,180
	Tools and Supplies	Community Program Supplies	Materials needed for community programs aimed at promoting outdoor recreation and engagement among East African migrant communities					\$4,800

							Sub Total	\$40,081
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	32 bus trips with each trip costing \$600.	Funds needed to cover transportation fees for community members wishing to attend the ourdoor recreation community programs hosted by Saint John's Outdoor University.					\$19,200
							Sub Total	\$19,200
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Publication	Community Program Promotion	Promotional materials created to create interest and awareness in Saint John's Outdoor Univeristy community programs.					\$12,000
	Publication	Somali TV Airings	TV promotions done in collaboration with CAIRO to recruit prospective applicants for the Multicultural Specialist and CAIRO CONNECT Environmental Education Fellowship. TV airings shall also promote upcoming community programs.					\$4,000
							Sub Total	\$16,000
Other Expenses								

		Multicultural Specialist and CAIRO CONNECT Environmental Education Fellow Professional Development Funds	Funds shall assist in covering fees such as certifications and trainings needed for Multicultural Specialist and Fellow's professional development.					\$21,116
							Sub Total	\$21,116
							Grand Total	\$617,000

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	-

Total Project Cost: \$617,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [03ca5b04-94b.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Visual breakdown describing the three pillars of support (PreK-12 Field Trips, Professional Development Opportunities, and Community Programs) that Saint John's Outdoor University is seeking grant funding for to better reach East African community members along with a graph showing the increase in African immigrants in Central Minnesota....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Saint John's University Evidence of Good Standing	5dac431f-c6a.pdf
Saint John's University Audited Financial Statement FY24	b738c626-cab.pdf
Saint John's University 990, 2023	93d15992-f06.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Authorization Letter	ff6a74cf-d94.pdf
Multicultural Specialist Job Description	1a24c24e-283.docx
CAIRO Letter of Support	acabb1b6-844.docx
Environmental Education Fellowship Job Description	b60906ae-52f.docx

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:

Owen Connell (Saint John's Outdoor University) John Geissler (Saint John's Outdoor University) Karlyn Forner (Saint John's University) Abdi Ibrahim (CAIRO) Sabrin Ali (CAIRO)

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

