



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-258

**Proposal Title:** Diversifying Nature Education Access

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Kristopher Lencowski

**Organization:** Ramsey County Parks and Recreation

**Office Telephone:** (651) 266-0330

**Email:** kristopher.lencowski@co.ramsey.mn.us

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Diversifying nature education through outreach support, affinity group nature center events, Indigenous-led nature programming, and nature interpretive signage designed by Indigenous artists and educators.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$450,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** November 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?**

Statewide

**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.**

Research has shown racial disparity between park usership and access to nature education. Minnesota has made strides in closing this gap through programs such as No Child Left Inside and Outdoor School for All, but significant work remains. Indigenous communities in Minnesota have also undergone harm, displacement, and erasure. Dakota ancestors did not have a written language, and instead embedded their worldview in their relationship with the land, but modern-day Indigenous communities fight for access to the outdoors where that relationship with the land can be restored.

Ramsey County has two special relationships meant to help heal these inequities. The first is the 3-year partnership Tamarack Nature Center has had with Saint Paul Public Schools, which brings over 1,600 Pre-K students to the Nature Center for a nature education experience each year, but more opportunity remains to deepen and expand the partnership's impact.

Ramsey County also has a relationship with Dakota artists and educators Marlena Myles and Tanáǵidaŋ Tó Wíŋ through the Minnesota Parks Artists-in-Residence program through 2025, where they are creating events, education sessions and augmented reality art installations at Battle Creek Regional Park.

These special relationships are poised for exponentially greater impact with additional resources.

**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.**

Capitalizing on the opportunity of unique partnerships, this grant will:

Support an outreach specialist at Tamarack Nature Center to expand on the current SPPS partnership and develop new partnerships, connecting with racially diverse residents.

Develop culturally relevant and inclusive curriculum and events at Tamarack Nature Center.

Expand and extend current Legacy Amendment-funded programming of Dakota artists-in-residence Marlena Myles and Tanáǵidaŋ Tó Wíŋ at Battle Creek Regional Park to include plant walks, nature education programming, and medicinal plant workshops through an Indigenous lens.

Engage Marlena Myles and Tanáǵidaŋ Tó Wíŋ as consultants to develop open-source nature interpretive signage through an Indigenous lens that can be used by any local, regional or state park agency in Minnesota for nature trails.

Install 25-30 nature interpretive signs at Battle Creek and Tamarack Nature Center as an example site for the designs.

Overall, this project has the potential to continue to build trust between Indigenous communities and parks, reach out to racially diverse residents with nature programming, close the loop by developing programming designed to bring families out to Tamarack and Battle Creek, and create nature interpretive signage that can be of benefit to the entire state.

**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?**

Nature education creates tomorrow's conservationists and a citizenry aware of the interconnectedness between the land and the people. People don't value what they don't understand, and don't protect what they don't value. This grant will build connection between racially diverse residents and Minnesota's natural resources, create a greater sense of

trust between Indigenous communities and parks, help heal past injustices and reconnect people to the lands of their ancestors, and offer a new way of thinking about nature interpretation through an Indigenous lens that can be replicated throughout the state.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Tamarack Nature Center Inclusive Cultural-Focused Naturalist, Programming and Events

**Activity Budget:** \$235,000

**Activity Description:**

Tamarack Nature Center's mission is, "Helping people discover the value of nature through play, exploration, inquiry, and service." This activity will create access to culturally relevant, inclusive, and accessible environmental education and recreation programs/events that bridge the "nature gap" for BIPOC and underserved communities in Ramsey County. This includes enhancing the relationship with Saint Paul Public Schools (District 625) early childhood classes by providing additional classroom visits, teacher education, family days, and events. Additionally, the program will offer meaningful interpretation of Indigenous (Dakota) life and connections to the land for the community, while working closely with Ramsey County's American Indian Community Coordinator to strengthen these connections.

**Outcomes:**

**Enhanced Access to Environmental Education:** Offer inclusive programming for underserved and BIPOC communities, particularly through partnerships with Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS).

**Cultural Enrichment:** Provide culturally relevant natural resource interpretation that highlights indigenous life, history, and connection to the land, incorporating these perspectives into existing programs.

**Sustainable Partnerships:** Strengthen collaborations with local indigenous groups to co-develop programming, including interpretive experiences and environmental education that reflect indigenous values and practices.

**Curriculum Enhancement:** Integrate diverse cultural perspectives into the Naturalist-led programs, ensuring the curriculum is inclusive and reflective of the communities served.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire Outreach Naturalist	July 31, 2026
First of Nine SPPS Family Events: bring families to nature center for enhanced experience	October 31, 2026
Modify existing Tamarack curriculum to incorporate diverse cultural perspectives	August 31, 2027
Develop environmental education programs in partnership with local indigenous groups, with staff training and mentoring	September 30, 2028
Outreach Naturalist Engagement: 3 years, average 3 classes or workshops per week	August 31, 2029
Evaluation of programming and reporting of outreach impact	August 31, 2029

### Activity 2: Dakota Nature Education, Events, Workshops and Classes at Battle Creek

**Activity Budget:** \$100,000

**Activity Description:**

Marlena Myles and Tanáǵidaŋ Tó Wíŋ will, along with collaborators, develop and deliver programming about Dakota cultural heritage, traditional plant medicines, land restoration, pollinators, and the interconnection of the land and people. This will take the form of workshops, events and classes, weaving together storytelling, nature education, Dakota teachings and art. The goal is to honor Grandmother Earth, preserve Dakota cultural heritage, and foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural world with the diverse communities of Minnesota.

An average of 1-2 programs would be conducted per week, primarily in the warmer months. While some programs may be focused on specific groups, like Indigenous youth in the area, the American Indian Magnet School, or land managers like park and natural resource agencies, many programs would be available to the broader public, and serve the diverse residents of the region.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Collect feedback, survey participants in order to evaluate the events. Incorporate the feedback.	August 31, 2027
Conduct Indigenous nature education classes, events and workshops, 1-2 per week for three years	November 30, 2029

### Activity 3: Develop and Install Nature Interpretive Signage with an Indigenous Lens

**Activity Budget:** \$115,000

**Activity Description:**

While face-to-face programming is a key to nature education, interpretive signage on nature trails can be an important tool for communities to learn while out on trails experiencing nature. Interpretive signage through an indigenous lens, with content developed by local Indigenous experts, featuring the incredible art of Marlena Myles will have impact for decades to come, and lift the voices of marginalized communities. Sign designs would be open-source and available to any park agency or nonprofit.

Signage would be installed at Battle Creek and Tamarack Nature Center, which together receive millions of visits each year, creating an important location for broadening nature education due to their proximity to underserved communities and attractive amenities.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Completion of signage design	April 30, 2027
Signage design available publicly through website and promotion at conferences, etc.	May 31, 2027
Signage installed at Battle Creek Regional Park and Tamarack Nature Center	June 30, 2027

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Marlena Myles	Dakota Artist and Educator	Consultant and educator. Bio in the supplemental materials and website can be found here: <a href="https://marlenamyl.es/">https://marlenamyl.es/</a>	Yes
Tanáǵidaŋ Tó Wíŋ	Dakota Artist and Educator	Consultant and Educator. Bio in the supplemental materials, Tanáǵidaŋ is an educator and author, and owner of Blue Hummingbird Woman Indigenous Gift Shop. <a href="http://www.bluehummingbirdwoman.com">www.bluehummingbirdwoman.com</a>	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?**

Once established, portions of the nature education outreach and Indigenous-lead programming may be able to be self-sustaining after the grant period through participation fees, additional county and city support, and grants.

The interpretive signage designs would be open-source, available on the web. Presentations at the Minnesota Recreation & Parks Association, Legacy Amendment meetings, etc. can help to spread the word about the available designs.

The interpretive signage installed at Tamarack and Battle Creek would remain long after the grant period as an accessible way for the hundreds of thousands of residents who visit the parks to learn about nature.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Kristopher Lencowski

**Job Title:** Director of Park Operations

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

Kristopher Lencowski is Director of Park Operations at Ramsey County Parks and Recreation and oversees a park division of 6 regional parks, 6 regional trails, and 9 county parks, including Tamarack Nature Center, Battle Creek Waterpark, and the Battle Creek Winter Recreation Area. Large-scale projects that Kristopher Lencowski has lead, such as rewriting the park ordinance through a strong and equitable community engagement, developing system-wide universally designed park signage for which the department earned an "Innovation in Equity" Award from the National Recreation and Parks Association, integrating a new reservation system, managing the Tamarack Nature Center expansion design, Battle Creek Waterpark redevelopment and implementing a new \$6.6 million dollar Winter Recreation Area show expertise in developing and growing initiatives.

**Organization:** Ramsey County Parks and Recreation

**Organization Description:**

Ramsey County is the most densely urban and most diverse county in Minnesota, and the Parks & Recreation department, as part of the Metro Regional Park System, serves a local and regional audience with over 8 million annual visits to its parks. Tamarack Nature Center is a Ramsey County facility in the Parks & Recreation Department that provides facilities and programming with a mission of "Helping people discover the value of nature through play, exploration, service and inquiry." Tamarack has free access to trails and offers a variety of programs to many age groups. The animal ambassadors at Tamarack are a popular feature and play a crucial role in engaging our guests in conservational messaging, helping to show that each animal plays an important part in our environment and our lives. Tamarack is in its third year of a partnership with Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) to bring nearly every preschool

student to the nature center for Naturalist-lead programming and an outdoor experience. Marlena Myles and Tanáǵidan Tó Wín are artists and educators selected as part of the year-long Minnesota Parks Artist-in-Residence program through the Legacy Amendment to work at Battle Creek Regional Park.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Tamarack Nature Center Outreach Naturalist		Position focused on outreach to underserved communities in Ramsey County to bring programming to where people are and bring communities out to nature.			35%	3		\$200,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
Marlena Myles and Tanáŋġidaŋ Tó Wíŋ	Service Contract	Marlena Myles and Tanáŋġidaŋ Tó Wíŋ, along with other Indigenous contributors, would provide approximately 650-700 hours of work per year for three years, planning, promoting and delivering nature programming at Battle Creek Regional Park.				0.96		\$100,000
Marlena Myles and Tanáŋġidaŋ Tó Wíŋ Signage Design	Service Contract	Marlena Myles and Tanáŋġidaŋ Tó Wíŋ will develop content and design for open source interpretive signage.				0.2		\$40,000
Indigenous Naturalist	Service Contract	Indigenous Naturalists will be contracted to augment existing nature education at Tamarack Nature Center around topics such as sap-to-syrup, bird and plant life, Indigenous teachings about connection with the land.				0.12		\$10,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies for events focused on encouraging underserved communities to visit Tamarack Nature Center.	Public events require supplies, such as take home craft activities, supplies for demonstrations, etc.					\$20,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								



		Interpretive Signage	Fabricate Indigenous-designed interpretive signage to be installed at Battle Creek and Tamarack Nature Center for the public to learn about the interconnectedness of nature.	X				\$75,000
							Sub Total	\$75,000
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Promotional Materials for Public Events	Materials for promotion of public events, such as fliers, postcards, social media advertising, etc.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
							Grand Total	\$450,000

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Expenditures		Interpretive Signage	<p>Extends nature interpretation beyond face-to-face programs, allowing for passive nature education while on trails.</p> <p><b>Additional Explanation :</b> The signage will be used by the public well beyond the extent of the grant, providing passive opportunities for community to learn about nature while on the trails.</p>

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	Ramsey County Levy	In-kind administrative costs	Secured	\$67,500
			Non State Sub Total	\$67,500
			Funds Total	\$67,500

**Total Project Cost: \$517,500**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [31a6af83-f48.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Photos of Tamarack Nature Center and Dakota Artists/Educators....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Ramsey County Annual Comprehensive Financial Report	<a href="#">364fee99-d03.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Fully Executed Ramsey County Board Resolution	<a href="#">a137b5ae-78c.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Marlena Myles and Tanagidan To Win Biographies	<a href="#">c4afdb8c-ef8.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?**

N/A

**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:**

Kristopher Lencowski, Ramsey County

**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

