



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-302

Proposal Title: Engaging Saint Paul Youth in Meaningful Restoration Work

Project Manager Information

Name: David Woods

Organization: Urban Roots MN

Office Telephone: (651) 228-7073

Email: dwoods@urbanrootsmn.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Urban Roots will engage underserved youth, ages 14-18 in paid, job training internships centered around environmental education and natural resource conservation.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$300,000

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): 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 and In the Future

Narrative

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

Urban Roots serves Saint Paul's East Side, a USDA-designated food desert whose majority BIPOC residents experience persistent disparities. In the neighborhoods of Dayton's Bluff and Payne Phalen, 44-47% of households live within 200% of the FPL and 33-38% of youth live in poverty, compared to 37% of households and 27% of youth in Saint Paul overall.

Youth internships have a positive impact on academic, and health-related outcomes, making these experiences a powerful lever for addressing inequities. Each year, 500,000-1 million youth in the U.S. intern for free to develop work readiness skills. This norm excludes youth from low-income, disproportionately BIPOC households—who cannot afford to forgo pay—from the talent pipeline, deepening inequities and reducing the diversity of certain professions. Without equitable access to early job skills development, under-resourced youth are less likely to realize their full earning potential, achieve economic stability, and improve their quality of life.

According to the Wilderness Society and Child Mind Institute, getting youth outside enhances positive social behavior, builds confidence, alleviates stress, boosts optimal psychological functioning and improves recovery from physical trauma. However, youth face barriers like transportation, limited knowledge of outdoor spaces, and lack of gear, hindering participation in outdoor experiences.

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.

Urban Roots is requesting funds to support our youth internship program. Each year, Urban Roots offers 85+ low-income, majority BIPOC youth (ages 14-21) paid "earn and learn" internships to meet immediate needs and gain skills to pursue higher education and employment opportunities and become good stewards of the community. Through our progressive program model, youth start at age 14 and return each year until high school graduation, increasing hours, pay rate (starting at 13.50/hour), leadership roles, and responsibilities.

Youth enrolled in the internships have the opportunity to fulfill all 15 rights listed in the Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. Programming addresses barriers faced by under-resourced youth in accessing green space, education, social development, wellness, community connection, and economic opportunities. In addition to the youth interns we engage, our programming impacts more than 10,000 residents annually through: 1) farm and urban garden tours, volunteer opportunities, classes, presentations (e.g., seed cleaning workshops), and community garden plots; 2) receiving produce through hunger relief partners, our pop up farmers market events, Mill City Farmers Market; and 3) service learning, field trips, and STEM instruction, such as "Honeybees - What's the Buzz All About", for local youth.

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?

We measure the impact of programming on youth and leadership development. Annually, we anticipate that 85% of youth will achieve the following outcomes:

- demonstrate increased 21st-century job and life skills—e.g., social/emotional, development, collaboration, public speaking, planning for personal success
- score 80% or higher on program-specific knowledge tests around conservation, urban agriculture, and nutrition subjects

Additionally, we have the following goals for organizational work:

- 15,000 lbs of produce grown
- 278 acres green space maintained across 5 parks
- Over 10,000 residents engaged in Urban Roots' auxiliary programming such as food distribution, service learning, etc.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Urban Roots' Youth Internship Program

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

Urban Roots will recruit, hire, and train 85 interns to work in our Conservation and Market Garden programs, receiving training, education, and career exposure. Youth will be recruited from St. Paul. Work will occur on the East Side of St. Paul, with interns also exploring greater Minnesota to see and experience natural spaces outside of the metro area. Interns will have the opportunity to continue their internship over the school year, and are encouraged to work with us for multiple years, with each year interns diving deeper into their program and serving as leaders and mentors towards other youth.

Conservation interns learn to help with habitat restoration at local public parks, removing invasive species, planting trees, forbs, and grasses, participate in community outreach and engagement through tours and programs with other youth groups and tabling at community events, and explore careers in natural resources through visiting with partner organizations in the field.

Market Garden interns operate 5 urban farms in Saint Paul. Youth select crops, start them in a greenhouse, plant, care for the crops throughout the season, and harvest and sell at local farmer's markets. Youth connect with the community through interacting with community members at community garden sites.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
85 Interns Hired - Summer 2026	August 31, 2026
40 Interns Complete 2026/27 Academic Year Program	May 31, 2027
85 Interns Hired - Summer 2027 Program	August 31, 2027
40 Interns Complete the 2027/28 Academic Year Program	May 31, 2028

Activity 2: Advanced Interns (Crew Lead) Position Development

Activity Budget: \$145,000

Activity Description:

Through our progressive program model each year we have roughly 10 youth annually who have participated in the basic internship program for multiple years and upon graduating high school are ready to take their experience to the next level. Urban Roots will hire 12 youth/young adults (6 each year) to serve as crew leads, a position designed to give older youth the opportunity to lead projects, develop curriculum, and conduct community outreach. Crew leads engage in independent projects in their program, such as conducting surveys of planted trees in a park, designing and planting a pollinator garden outside of a rec center, or managing their own plot at one of our farm sites. Crew leads help facilitate the youth internship experience, and some develop curriculum and lessons they then lead with the interns. They are also trained to help with public outreach, especially leading programming in our children's garden, a fishing program, and pollinator activities. By having young adults from the communities they are leading outreach in, they are able to better connect with youth at outreach events, inspiring new diverse groups to engage and have fun in the natural world.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit, hire and train 6 Crew Lead positions from 2026 summer program.	December 31, 2026
Crew leads participate in individual projects and lead programs + 6 new crew leads hired	December 31, 2027
Full year of crew lead position, crew leads participate in individual projects and lead programs	June 30, 2028

Activity 3: Community Outreach and Engagement Activities

Activity Budget: \$55,000

Activity Description:

Urban Roots will engage at least 1,000 youth in environmental stewardship and work. This will include tours and service learning experiences at our farm and public park work sites, in classroom experiences, leading activities at community events, and facilitating outdoor recreation experiences such as fishing, archery, and biking. Education material will be developed using a STEM Justice approach, with outreach programs often being led by young adult Crew Leads, who are from the same communities as the youth they will teach.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Continue building and expanding partnerships with youth organizations and schools in the metro area	December 31, 2026
Engage 500 youth across 10 engagements, with 50% of programming being facilitated by crew leads	December 31, 2027
Engage 100 youth across 20 engagements, with 50% of programming being facilitated by crew leads	June 30, 2028

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?

Staff assess youth progress at mid- and end-term during the summer session. We also measure success through participant feedback (gathered through reflection journals, surveys, and 1:1 supervisor meetings) and engage in an annual continuous improvement process based on all data collected.

Urban Roots is a longstanding nonprofit organization. We have engaged thousands of youth in programming since 1996 on the East Side of Saint Paul. We have a solid, financial foundation and diverse income sources to support our ongoing programming including grants, a dedicated donor base, earned income and contracts.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: David Woods

Job Title: Conservation Program Director

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

David Woods, Conservation Program Director, leads youth interns in conservation projects ranging from habitat restoration, rain gardens, and pollinator work to engage the community in our local parks. David also serves as liaison between program partners, facilitator of program and curriculum development, and assists the admin team with grant writing and reporting. David joined Urban Roots as the Conservation Manager in 2014 following his service in the field as an Americorps member for the New Hampshire and Minnesota Conservation Corps. David earned his BA in Biology, Society, and the Environment from the University of Minnesota, where he also worked as an environmental educator with the Bell Museum of Natural History.

Organization: Urban Roots MN

Organization Description:

Urban Roots was founded in 1969 to empower community residents to realize their goals for better health, wellbeing, and economic opportunity. We recognize the importance of engaging youth in sustainability efforts, as a future of climate justice is impossible without the dedication and education of young people. Since 1996, our programming on the East Side of St. Paul has engaged thousands of low-income youth in education, training, and work projects providing service to the community, developing young leaders, and improving health and the environment. Urban Roots serves under-resourced, primary BIPOC youth, a demographic that is historically excluded from conservation and environmental justice fields. Youth projects address immediate community needs around food access, health, and environment—all while preparing them to become the next generation of leaders and advocates in regenerative agriculture, food equity, and food entrepreneurship.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
2 Conservation Program Coordinators		Supports the Conservation Program Director and Manager in carrying out Conservation Program curriculum and youth shifts			25%	1.5		\$85,800
Crew Leads - 6 Positions		Advanced youth internship position - serve as youth peer mentors and develop extra skills to increase employability			25%	1		\$132,600
Conservation Program Manager		Develops environmental education curriculum, oversees programming and provides supervision to staff			25%	0.5		\$39,000
Market Garden Youth Program Manager		Oversees Market Garden Program curriculum and youth development - supervises youth interns and crew leads			25%	0.5		\$35,100
							Sub Total	\$292,500
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Educational supplies	General supply fund for materials to be used in programming: markers, pens, notebooks, posters					\$1,000
	Equipment	Computers	Laptop computers for staff and crew leads to complete work on for curriculum development and tracking program deliverables	X				\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$4,000
Capital Expenditures								

							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 Conference Registrations Per Year (4 Total) for Conservation Staff to attend Conferences of Choice	Conferences will be based in expanding knowledge in environmental education for curriculum development and best practice for youth development					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Youth Intern Journals - 85 journals printed per year	Staff create a journal for youth interns to follow along program curriculum in the summer program - it includes all lessons and additional activities to facilitate learning for youth in environmental and place based education					\$1,500
							Sub Total	\$1,500
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$300,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		Computers	We will be adding additional crew lead positions and our goal is for them to expand their skills in environmental education, which include the creation of curriculum, which will include online research. As a small nonprofit organization, we currently have limited office space and computers for staff use.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	City of Saint Paul - Right Track Program	Employment Partner that provides a majority of youth wages for internship program.	Secured	\$150,000
Cash	Mortenson Family Foundation	Grant Funds to support youth internship programs	Secured	\$45,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$195,000
			Funds Total	\$195,000

Total Project Cost: \$495,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [e80eb427-e81.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

This document provides an overview of the Urban Roots' youth internship program, it includes our program demographics, photos and general goals of programming....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Urban Roots 2023 Audit	552cae5a-212.pdf
Good Standing w/ Secretary of State	59ceafa2-703.pdf
Urban Roots 2023 990	676fb7ce-d64.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Urban Roots Board of Directors Letter	f5c83b9b-2ac.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:

Hayley Ball, Urban Roots MN

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