



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-408

Proposal Title: Learning with Trees™ – Greening School Grounds

Project Manager Information

Name: Karen Zumach

Organization: Tree Trust

Office Telephone: (952) 767-3886

Email: karenz@treetrust.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Learning with Trees brings interactive environmental education to students and plants trees on school grounds. This project will bring Learning with Trees to eighteen schools throughout Minnesota.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$315,000

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?

Statewide

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.

A healthy tree canopy provides numerous benefits, including reduced stress, anxiety, and depression; higher property values; cleaner air; and cooler temperatures. For youth, research has established a strong connection between access to green spaces and improved academic performance and mental health. A University of Illinois study found that green views help students focus longer, recover from mental fatigue more quickly, and retain information better.

Despite these benefits, many school grounds across Minnesota lack adequate tree cover due to budget and staffing constraints. This challenge is further compounded by the invasive emerald ash borer (EAB), which is killing Minnesota's ash trees by the hundreds of thousands. With ash trees comprising up to 60% of urban forests in some Minnesota cities, EAB is severely impacting the state's tree canopy (Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 2022).

These challenges present an opportunity to strengthen our urban forests and extend the benefits of trees to more communities. By planting a diverse mix of healthy trees in areas affected by ash tree loss, we can ensure a greener, healthier future for students and generations to come.

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.

Tree Trust's Learning with Trees program provides accessible, engaging environmental education to elementary and middle school students, installs outdoor classrooms, and reforests school grounds at no cost to the schools, promoting a healthy urban tree canopy and inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards. With funding from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, we will implement Learning with Trees at 18 schools throughout Minnesota from July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2029. This project will prioritize schools that have lost trees to EAB. Tree Trust plants healthy, well-established 6-8-foot-tall trees instead of seedlings to promote long-term survival. We collaborate with schools to select trees from a diversity of species to meet the schools' needs and promote a healthy tree canopy that is resistant to attack by a single pest or disease. Students actively participate in the project, helping to create the planting plan and select tree species, engaging in hands-on environmental education activities, and planting the trees with supervision from Tree Trust staff on planting day. This interactive learning experience helps students take ownership of caring for the trees and increases their awareness of ways they can steward the environment.

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:

- Plant 20-30 trees from a diversity of species at 18 schools, for a total of 360-540 trees added to sustain and enhance Minnesota's urban forests.
- Engage approximately 7,200 elementary- through middle school-aged students at 18 different schools (assuming an average of 400 students/school) with hands-on environmental learning experiences and outdoor planting activities.
- Expand the benefits of Minnesota's natural resources by planting trees on school grounds and installing outdoor classrooms, creating new natural resources-based learning and recreation spaces for thousands of Minnesota youth.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Identify and collaborate with 18 schools to plan Learning with Trees projects

Activity Budget: \$53,328

Activity Description:

The objective is to identify schools for this project and collaborate with the schools to plan project implementation. Tree Trust staff will identify 18 Minnesota schools with low tree canopy or tree loss due to EAB, using a combination of online applications through Tree Trust's website and outreach to school districts. "Green Teams," comprised of Tree Trust staff, school staff, students, and interested community members, will be formed at each school to establish a planting plan – which may include Minnesota biome walks, edible harvest gardens, and climate-resilient tree species – and schedule the planting day. Tree Trust will provide a list of all available trees and shrubs, and teachers and students fill out a survey with feedback on their preferred trees, shrubs, and layout of an outdoor learning area. Schools have the option to install an outdoor learning area for ongoing environmental education. Based on this feedback, Tree Trust will create a landscape design that is personalized to the school. Once the planting day is scheduled, Tree Trust orders trees, mulch, gator bags, and any other needed supplies.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Confirm six schools for plantings in Fall 2026/Spring 2027; form Green Teams	December 31, 2026
Create planting plans for 2026/2027 schools, select trees, and schedule the schools' planting days	March 31, 2027
Order trees, mulch, and gator bags for 2026/2027 schools	March 31, 2027
Confirm six schools for plantings in Fall 2027/Spring 2028; form Green Teams	December 31, 2027
Create planting plans for 2027/2028 schools, select trees, and schedule the schools' planting days	March 31, 2028
Order trees, mulch, and gator bags for 2027/2028 schools	March 31, 2028
Confirm six schools for plantings in Fall 2028/Spring 2029; form Green Teams	December 31, 2028
Create planting plans for 2028/2029 schools, select trees, and schedule the schools' planting days	March 31, 2029
Order trees, mulch, and gator bags for 2028/2029 schools	March 31, 2029

Activity 2: Provide one week of interactive, hands-on environmental education to students

Activity Budget: \$37,334

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to engage students in hands-on, interactive environmental education, broadening their understanding of the benefits of trees. Prior to the planting day, Tree Trust's interactive "Our Town Trees" exhibit is hosted by the school for a week. This hands-on exhibit introduces students to the benefits of trees, which will be reinforced on the planting day. The exhibit is highly interactive, allowing the students to engage in multisensory environmental education. Exhibit topics include the benefits of trees for energy savings, how trees produce oxygen and clean the air, trees' interaction with wildlife, and what everyday products come from trees. The exhibit comes with a handout describing how it fits into current science curriculum standards for K-5 students, as well as a handout for students to complete as they move through the exhibit.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Tree Trust delivers exhibit to 2026/2027 schools one week prior to each planting day	June 30, 2027
Tree Trust picks up exhibit following the planting days for 2026/2027 schools	June 30, 2027
Tree Trust delivers exhibit to 2027/2028 schools one week prior to each planting day	June 30, 2028

Tree Trust picks up exhibit following the planting days for 2027/2028 schools	June 30, 2028
Tree Trust delivers exhibit to 2028/2029 schools one week prior to each planting day	June 30, 2029
Tree Trust picks up exhibit following the planting days for 2028/2029 schools	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: School-wide planting day

Activity Budget: \$224,338

Activity Description:

The objectives of this activity are to install an outdoor classroom, plant 20-30 trees on school grounds, and engage students in tree planting at 18 schools. All students join together with Tree Trust staff, school staff, and parent volunteers to plant and mulch trees and to install their outdoor learning area. Planting day is a lively educational experience as students come out by class to plant trees, get their hands dirty, and have fun while they transform their school grounds. For many students, it is their first time holding a shovel, much less getting to plant a tree. Each classroom group is overseen by Tree Trust staff or a trained Tree Trust volunteer. After the planting day, students and staff fill out post-program surveys to measure students' environmental understanding and evaluate the school's experience with programming.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Plant 20-30 trees on six schools' grounds	June 30, 2027
Install outdoor classrooms at up to six schools	June 30, 2027
Engage students at six schools in tree planting activities	June 30, 2027
Administer post-program survey to students and staff	June 30, 2027
Plant 20-30 trees on six schools' grounds	June 30, 2028
Install outdoor classrooms at up to six schools	June 30, 2028
Engage students at six schools in tree planting activities	June 30, 2028
Administer post-program survey to students and staff	June 30, 2028
Plant 20-30 trees on six schools' grounds	June 30, 2029
Install outdoor classrooms at up to six schools	June 30, 2029
Engage students at six schools in tree planting activities	June 30, 2029
Administer post-program survey to students and staff	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Alex Miller	Saint Paul Public Schools	Job title: Environmental Specialist 1, Facilities. Saint Paul Public Schools will be one of our project partners for Learning with Trees planting locations.	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 will work with 6 schools/year, collaborating with each school to create a planting plan and coordinate the planting day. This grant will fund all project components. Up to thirty trees will be purchased per school, as well as mulch, gator bags, and staking materials. For schools wanting an outdoor classroom, Tree Trust will build and install benches. We will develop a maintenance plan with school staff. We record the number and types of trees planted and track their environmental impact using i-Tree Design. We use an age-appropriate post-program survey to measure students' understanding of trees' benefits.

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: Karen Zumach

Job Title: Director of Community Forestry

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

Karen Zumach is Tree Trust's Director of Community Forestry. She oversees the planning and execution of the Tree Trust Community Forestry initiatives. Karen has over 20 years of experience in project management, community organizing, landscape design, and plant maintenance. She holds B.S. degrees in Geology/Geophysics and Horticulture from the University of Connecticut. She is an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist and President of the Minnesota Shade Tree Advisory Committee.

Karen will oversee planning, implementation, and reporting for this project. She is supported by a team of qualified staff, including our Community Forestry Manager and our Community Forestry Education & Engagement Coordinator.

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.

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. Since 1992, our Learning with Trees™ program has brought environmental education to thousands of students and reforested the grounds at more than 170 Minnesota schools. 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
Personnel								
Director of Community Forestry		Responsible for oversight of the planning and execution of Learning with Trees projects. This position is a paid staff position			20%	0.15		\$18,163
Community Forestry Manager		Responsible for supervising Community Forestry staff and supporting the project execution on the day of Learning with Trees projects			20%	0.42		\$33,452
Planting Operations Manager		Responsible for providing materials, tools, and equipment necessary for preparing the project site and supporting the operational execution on the day of Learning with Trees Projects			20%	0.15		\$10,730
Community Forestry Coordinator		Responsible for supporting the project execution on the day of Learning with Trees projects			20%	0.3		\$19,700
Community Education & Engagement Coordinator		Responsible for planning and coordinating the project sites, meeting regularly with school staff liaisons to ensure project goals are being met, and leading the project execution on the day of Learning with Trees projects			20%	1.41		\$88,500
							Sub Total	\$170,545
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Equipment	Equipment Lease	Equipment Lease for mini-skidsteer to pre-dig holes for tree planting					\$4,860
	Equipment	Equipment Lease	Equipment Lease for water trailer to provide water on day of plantings					\$3,575
	Tools and Supplies	Tools and supplies	Hand tools and supplies such as gloves, safety vests, shovels, buckets, rakes and wheelbarrows for students and volunteers and staff to use during project execution					\$7,645

	Tools and Supplies	Mulch (for 540 trees)	Mulch to be used around planted trees					\$1,575
	Tools and Supplies	Trees and Delivery (540 trees)	Tree cost including delivery of the trees by third-party vendor to the project site					\$82,890
	Tools and Supplies	Water Bags (540 bags)	Water bags to secure at base of each tree to assist with ongoing watering and ensure survivability					\$11,583
	Tools and Supplies	Staking Materials	Stakes, arbor tie, and tree guards to ensure survivability					\$1,347
	Equipment	Equipment Lease	Lease of additional vehicles for planting days					\$11,050
							Sub Total	\$124,525
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	16,000 miles x current IRS mileage reimbursement rate of \$0.70	Staff travel to all project sites during the planning and project execution phases of the program. This mileage is estimated conservatively based on the potential for project sites in all parts of the State of Minnesota					\$11,200
							Sub Total	\$11,200
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printed Materials for planting day and hands on education component (7200)	Printed materials for planting day and curriculum that students receive					\$8,730

							Sub Total	\$8,730
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$315,000

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: \$315,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [69964e9c-ab7.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The file provides an overview of the Learning with Trees program, and shows photos of students planting and watering trees during program, as well as a before and after photo of a schoolyard where an outdoor classroom was installed...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2023 Tree Trust 990	a9197902-17f.pdf
Evidence of Good Standing with Secretary of State	6aeecb17-285.pdf
2023 Tree Trust Audit	476d6a4e-766.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Tree Trust Board Approval Letter	cafc2d28-f2e.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:

Jared Smith, Executive Director | CEO, Tree Trust; 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

