



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-535

**Proposal Title:** Teach Outdoors - Southeast Minnesota

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Sara Holger

**Organization:** Project Get Outdoors Inc

**Office Telephone:** (507) 951-5885

**Email:** sara.grover@yahoo.com

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** To support schools in southeast Minnesota with creating outdoor learning areas and empowering school staff to work with nature as a partner for learning and healing.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$76,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31, 2027

**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): SE

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

Region(s): SE

**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 growing interest in outdoor learning has been underway in Minnesota since well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 1949, the MN Department of Natural Resources School Forest Program has been working on this front. Today, there are around 145 certified school forests out of 331 school districts (2,000 individual public-school sites) in the state. Other organizations and efforts, including the Trust for Public Land and, more recently, the Minnesota Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights, have been working to identify strategies to make nature-based learning more accessible, especially in lower-income neighborhoods. But the fact remains, there are not enough resources dedicated to this effort, especially in rural Minnesota, to ensure every child has access to nature and opportunities for outdoor learning.

Over the past few years, Project Get Outdoors has been receiving requests to assist with outdoor classroom design and programming from schools in southeast Minnesota. Even schools that have certified School Forests are requesting support. Our state agencies and non-profit partners do not have the staffing to be able to go into every school and provide one-to-one mentoring and coaching for teachers and community partners.

**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.**

We plan to bring on an AmeriCorps member for the 2026 – 2027 school year to assist with outreach to schools in southeast Minnesota. The corps member will assist with; increasing awareness about the importance of outdoor learning in the school setting, facilitating a regional workgroup of partners to support outdoor learning at area schools, developing region-specific resources to empower schools to embrace outdoor learning, and coordinating professional development opportunities for teachers, administrators, counselors and others who work in the school setting to work with nature as a partner for teaching and healing.

The AmeriCorps member will be housed at St. Mary's University – Rochester campus. Day to day mentoring will be provided by the site manager at SMU – Rochester campus. Project GO will provide supervision and direction via weekly check-in meetings. This partnership will allow for unique opportunities to build connections between college students on the Winona campus and Mayo Clinic School of Health Sciences Physician Assistant program that is housed on the Rochester Campus. We are excited to not only introduce teachers to resources for connecting children to nature, but also school nurses and counselors who can work with nature to provide therapeutic experiences for students.

**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?**

1. Facilitate a regional workgroup of community partners to support schools in creating and utilizing outdoor learning areas.
2. Develop a regional inventory/directory of available resources to support outdoor learning in each county of southeast Minnesota (Fillmore, Goodhue, Houston, Olmsted, Wabasha, Winona).
3. Assist a minimum of 6 schools with creating outdoor learning areas.
4. Coordinate a minimum of 6 professional development opportunities for school staff in the region to gain knowledge and skills to work with nature as a partner in learning and healing.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Assemble Southeast Minnesota Outdoor Learning Resource Directory

**Activity Budget:** \$31,000

**Activity Description:**

Develop regional inventory/directory of outdoor learning resources to share with schools.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Assemble workgroup to identify partners and help inventory resources in the 6-county region	September 30, 2026
Use inventory data to assemble directory resource	October 31, 2026
Share inventory/directory with schools and partners in the region	November 30, 2026

### Activity 2: Create Outdoor Learning Areas

**Activity Budget:** \$18,000

**Activity Description:**

Assist a minimum of 6 schools with creating outdoor learning areas. Prioritize schools geographically located near the Highway 14 corridor between Winona and Rochester. Impact a minimum of 4,000 students.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Identify 6 schools that need and want assistance.	December 31, 2026
Work with schools to connect local partners and draft site plans.	February 28, 2027
Coordinate site work days at schools and connect community volunteers and SMU students.	June 30, 2027

### Activity 3: Train School Staff

**Activity Budget:** \$27,000

**Activity Description:**

Coordinate a minimum of 6 professional development opportunities for school staff in the region. Reach a minimum of 120 school staff. Collaborate with MN DNR and other environmental education partners to introduce teachers to curriculum and resources that support teaching outdoors (Project Learning Tree, Project WET, Using Your Outdoor Classroom...). Provide Project GO training and backpacks to 6 school partner sites.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Schedule professional development trainings.	December 31, 2026
Offer professional development trainings.	June 30, 2027

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Kate Utterback	St. Mary's University - Rochester	Director of Campus Operations and Programming	No
Lisa Becker	Rochester Public Schools	Community School Facilitator, Riverside Central Elementary	No
Katie Rooks	Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa	Individual Placement Program Manager	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?**

Resources resulting from this project, such as the workgroup and regional inventory/directory, will be long-term assets schools in the region can utilize long after the project concludes.

In bringing together regional partners to form a workgroup and assemble the inventory/directory, we will work to identify key partners who are interested in hosting future AmeriCorps members to continue this work. We'd like to explore opportunities to collaborate with specific school districts, county public health offices, and environmental education organizations in southeast Minnesota where future corps members could be housed to provide strategic support to specific school districts.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Sara Holger

**Job Title:** Program Coordinator

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

Sara has been an environmental educator since 1994. She holds a B.S. in Natural Resources and Environmental Studies from the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. She has worked as a naturalist and environmental educator for a variety of organizations including the US Forest Service – Resort Naturalist Program, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources – Division of Fisheries, Bell Museum of Natural History, Eagle Bluff Environmental Learning Center, Olmsted County Parks, and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources - Division of Parks and Trails at Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park and Whitewater State Park. In 2005, Sara founded Project Get Outdoors and has volunteered thousands of hours with the organization over the past 20 years. In addition, she is a Minnesota Master Naturalist Instructor, a certified Early Childhood Trainer through MN DEVELOP, and a certified Nature and Forest Therapy Guide through the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides. Sara currently serves on the Southeast Minnesota Parks Rx workgroup and is facilitator for the Southeast Minnesota Environmental Education Network. She has received numerous awards for her service including the 2022 SHIFT Summit Award from ActivEnviro and the 2024 Mary Wiser Award for Leadership in the Field of Volunteer Resources from the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement. After a 25-year career with the MN DNR, Sara left the agency in 2023 and assumed the role of Program Coordinator for Project Get Outdoors. She is a mother of three and has dedicated her life to connecting children to nature.

**Organization:** Project Get Outdoors Inc

**Organization Description:**

Project Get Outdoors (PGO) is a non-profit organization located in Wabasha, Minnesota. The mission of PGO is to facilitate outdoor experiences that develop healthy kids and increase environmental stewardship behaviors. We began in 2005 as an after-school program for migrant, Latino youth at the Plainview Youth Center in Plainview, Wabasha County, Minnesota. Since then, the program has evolved into a non-profit organization focused on providing resources, training, consultation and support to help youth-serving organizations connect youth and families to nature. Our primary focus is reaching youth and families who do not have access to the outdoors or experience in nature. We have developed an array of trainings and resources to empower staff and volunteers at schools, childcare centers, libraries, rec centers, housing sites, youth centers and other community locations to be able to lead nature exploration activities for youth in their community. Since 2005, we have reached more than 50,000 children and helped champion awareness about the importance of nature connection for healthy youth development. This is critical work that helps build community, enhance social and emotional wellbeing, and foster the next generation of environmental stewards.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Program Coordinator		Supervise and guide AmeriCorps member			0%	0.2		\$13,000
AmeriCorps Member		Provide outreach to assist area schools with creating outdoor learning programs			0%	100		\$50,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$63,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	24 Project Get Outdoors backpacks	Outdoor activity backpacks with resources for exploring nature will be provided to each of the 6 partnering schools					\$7,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$7,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								

							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Project GO Outdoor Activity Calendars, Outdoor Activity Ideas Booklets, and Se Minnesota Outdoor Learning Resource Packets	Resources will be shared during professional development workshops					\$6,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$6,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$76,000</b>

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
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
In-Kind	Project Manager - Project GO Coordinator mileage to and from project meetings	Mileage to and from meetings with AmeriCorps member	Secured	\$3,000
In-Kind	St. Mary's University - Rochester workspace	workspace for AmeriCorps member and access to wi-fi	Secured	\$3,000
In-Kind	St. Mary's University staff time	day-to-day mentoring	Secured	\$14,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$20,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$96,000**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [f4c9784a-734.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Teach Outdoors Southeast Minnesota service area map...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
PGO 2024 Profit & Loss statement	<a href="#">5bc2184e-537.pdf</a>
PGO 2024 Balance Sheet	<a href="#">7396a1fa-ad2.pdf</a>
PGO 2025 MN Secretary of State Good Standing report	<a href="#">b7b63f6f-6de.pdf</a>
Project GO 2025 IRS Good Standing report	<a href="#">faec103f-bc8.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution approving LCCMR project proposal	<a href="#">f62a4f73-4c9.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support from Conservation Corps of Minnesota	<a href="#">004a20df-e84.pdf</a>
Letter of Support from Riverside Central Elementary School - Rochester	<a href="#">1617e7b0-102.pdf</a>
Letter of Support from St. Mary's University - Rochester	<a href="#">d8e4066f-8c8.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")?**

No

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

Kate Utterback, Project Get Outdoors

**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

