



## Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

### 2026 Request for Proposal

#### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2026-589

**Proposal Title:** Bringing Upstream's Environmental Education to Minnesota

#### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Mark Valdez

**Organization:** Mixed Blood Theatre

**Office Telephone:** (612) 338-6131

**Email:** mark@mixedblood.com

#### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** With funding, Mixed Blood (MB) will adapt and tour Upstream, an interactive play that educates audiences to make sustainable choices for themselves and their community as they navigate environmental challenges.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$100,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2027

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Small Projects (G)

**Secondary Category:** Resiliency (A)

#### 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

## Narrative

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

Minnesota is renowned for its natural resources. We see two major challenges to their preservation. We face threats to our pristine environment from the effects of climate change. We seek to address this first challenge by providing an opportunity to solve the second challenge which is an engaging early education program on the vigilance and conservation of these natural resources.

Young students are concerned about the future of their environment and how to make sustainable choices. We have an opportunity to teach conservation efforts through a theatrical production designed to be in residence at a school resulting in an interactive theatrical experience. These students will be engaging with environmental research and led through problem-solving processes. Often students may feel an overwhelming lack of agency. Upstream will teach them how to make sustainable choices and illuminate how those choices impact others, including those affected most egregiously and unfairly through systemic disparity.

As a way of developing the initial production with students at the Open World Learning Community (OWL), we have brought environmental experts and advocates. With this prototype, OWL has integrated courses in science, civics and language arts as a part of the students' research of Minnesota's natural 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.**

Upstream is a participatory performance that invites audiences to find sustainable solutions to environmental challenges and works to raise awareness of areas where we can improve our relationship with nature (water conservation, food waste, recycling, land use, etc.). Upstream was created by the students at the One World Learning Community (OWL) in West St. Paul, who worked with four teaching artists/playwrights and over a dozen community partners to develop an interactive play that presents the research they conducted over a year. Small groups of audience members are invited to tour an environment with an actor guide where they witness a scene and then answer questions about challenges that demand creative solutions. This interactive environment enhances the participant's understanding of the personal choices and commitments we can make to conserve and protect the natural resources of our community and create a more sustainable future.

At least 1000 children and several hundred adults will have seen the premiere of the play at the OWL School in April 2025. We are requesting funding to create a touring version of the show which we expect to share in 12 other schools and community settings in the 2026/2027 school year.

**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?**

Our goal is to use Upstream to educate people about the role(s) they can play in protecting and preserving the state's natural resources. Outcomes include:

- Present Upstream and related environmental education programming to 10,000 additional people in Minnesota;
- Offer hands-on learning experiences supplemented by action steps that attendees can implement;
- Connect participants with environmental NGOs and public agencies to gather up-to-date science-based information;
- Distribute over 10,000 toolkits that include resource links and at-home action items;
- Survey participants about changes in their thinking about environmental issues and the play production.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Preparing the Upstream set for touring

**Activity Budget:** \$40,000

**Activity Description:**

Upstream premiered in a school library and the production designs will need to be reimagined and built for portability. We will need to contract designers and re-envision how to create spectacle (e.g. a flood, a River Mother, etc.) in such a way that it is portable, adaptable to a wide range of spaces, and durable. We will need to rely less on lighting and perhaps more on sound design. Simultaneously, we will need to reduce the cast size. For the original production we had a cast of four professional actors with a support cast of 10 student actors. For the tour, we will only have four actors performing all of the parts.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Sets are designed to fit in public settings and still be interactive	September 30, 2026
Sets are built to specifications	September 30, 2026
Sets are delivered to Mixed Blood	September 30, 2026

### Activity 2: Booking the tour of Upstream to Minnesota Communities

**Activity Budget:** \$15,000

**Activity Description:**

Mixed Blood will reach out to education partners, local libraries, and other civic organizations in the greater Twin Cities metro and in towns and cities surrounding the greater Metro, including St. Cloud to the west, Buffalo to the north, and Red Wing to the south. We will establish tour dates, gather information on available venues, and facilitate bookings.

Subject matter experts will also be contracted to participate in discussions in the communities being served.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Advertising materials are developed & sent to potential presenting partners at schools, libraries and civic spaces	August 31, 2026
Subject matter experts from NGOs and the government are lined up with tour dates & sites	October 31, 2026
Potential preseting partners receive calls from MB staff to determine interest, schedule venue & select date	December 31, 2026
Create tool kit, study guide, and resource materials to share with schools	December 31, 2026
Mixed Blood works with community partners to advertise the upcoming event.	June 30, 2027

### Activity 3: Upstream tour to Greater Twin Cities and surrounding communities in MN

**Activity Budget:** \$45,000

**Activity Description:**

Mixed Blood will reach 12 Minnesota communities over 12 months. With this issue-oriented play, it is important to allow the audience to talk about what they have seen and to converse with Mixed Blood staff, playwrights, and subject matter experts about the changes they might make as a result of their participation.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Upstream performances reach 12 Minnesota communities	June 30, 2027
Each performance includes a Q&A with MB staff, actors and featured environmental representative	June 30, 2027

## 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?**

We are requesting funding for a set number of performance sites in Minnesota. In its initial run, there was an overwhelming desire from schools to attend the show, however the finances and logistics of busing students to a central location proved too expensive for many schools. By touring the show to the school, we expect to meet the demand. We are pursuing additional funding from corporations and organizations focused on environmental issues to support any performances beyond those covered by this grant.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Mark Valdez

**Job Title:** Artistic Director

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

Mark Valdez is the Artistic Director of Mixed Blood Theatre, and will oversee all aspects of preparing Upstream for touring and for implementing a successful tour. He is an artist and cultural organizer who partners with communities, organizations, civic institutions, and others, using theatre and creative tools to address community needs and lift-up community voices and stories. Mixed Blood has a long history of touring work across the state of Minnesota, having performed in every county. Much of his work has been created in/with/for communities, mainly in rural areas across the nation. In his own practice, Mark has produced and managed tours across the country. He has over 25 years' experience as an arts leader and administrator and is the recipient of such awards as the Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities and was awarded the inaugural Legacy Artist Fellowship from the California Arts Council.

As a director, his work has been seen at such theaters as the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta, Trinity Rep in Providence, MA, REDCAT in Los Angeles, and Syracuse Stage in Syracuse, NY, among others. Recent projects include "The Ally" by Itamar Moses at Mixed Blood and "Dr. De Soto," adapted from the book by Karl Stieg, at the Alliance Theater. He is currently working on a new comedy about affordable housing called, "The Pasture."

Mark developed a "Good Neighbor Framework" to articulate and assess work and intentions with the community. Additionally, he helped design and implement Project 154, a collaboration with local health providers to use story and personal narrative to improve health outcomes and patient advocacy in Cedar Riverside, home to many East African immigrants.

**Organization:** Mixed Blood Theatre

**Organization Description:**

MIXED BLOOD USES THEATER TO DISRUPT INJUSTICE. WE ARE A SOCIAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION CATALYZING ACTION AND CHANGE THROUGH ART. OUR WORK IS GUIDED BY DEEP COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ROOTED IN RADICAL HOSPITALITY.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Designers - 5 and Sustainability Captain		Designing and producing durable, recycled materials for theatrical use.			0%	0.3		\$13,000
Performers - 4		Performing the script			30%	1		\$40,800
Stage Management - 1		To oversee the production and performance and interaction with students and audience			30%	0.25		\$11,700
Directors - 2		To adapt and stage the production as well as guide the students/ process			0%	0.1		\$5,000
Community Outreach		Staff person responsible to secure bookings and maintain relationship with the schools and advocates.			30%	0.15		\$5,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$75,500</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Tools and Supplies	Materials not able to be repurposed or made from recycling and must be purchased	Scenic, properties, lighting, sound or costumes					\$5,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$5,000</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>-</b>

<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Other	Gas, car rental, food	Travel from Twin Cities around MN for 12 productions for 6 - 12 persons depending on distance and scope					\$16,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$16,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Development and production of tool kit, study guide, and resource materials to share with schools (Completed by December 31, 2026)	Creation of online resource guide/study guide to work with teachers and issue to students					\$3,500
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$3,500</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--



Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$100,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [200d72a7-ed0.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Excerpt from the script for Upstream...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Mixed Blood Theater 990s FY23	<a href="#">e85b1262-a6d.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Signed Board resolution letter	<a href="#">05ce3431-46e.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?**

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:**

Mark Valdez, Julie Stroud, Kate Warner: Mixed Blood Theater

**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

