



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-369

Proposal Title: Gathering Garden

Project Manager Information

Name: Kimberly Rockman

Organization: Project Food Forest

Office Telephone: (605) 951-0227

Email: info@projectfoodforest.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The Gathering Garden will transform a former barn foundation at Prairie Ally Outdoor Center into a space featuring perennial food producing and native plants, seating areas, and a shelter building.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$57,000

Proposed Project Completion: October 31, 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): SW

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

Region(s): SW

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.

Like many rural communities, Luverne faces a paradox that is both a challenge and an opportunity. The community is rich in relationships, history, and informal care networks, yet thin in shared civic spaces that invite people to gather and connect without commerce or urgency driving the interaction. As regional pressures increase, with longer commutes, busier schedules, demographic shifts, and development, there are fewer settings where residents can slow down and spend time in truly public spaces without a specific agenda. This contributes to a quieter form of civic erosion: people still care deeply about their community but have fewer opportunities to be present with nature and one another in ways that build shared understanding, connection, and belonging.

With this project, we intend to add unique, creative infrastructure along with ecosystem-creating edible and native landscaping to a currently dilapidated area. The area is currently unusable with much of the area covered by nonpermeable, uneven cement slabs.

In order for more people to value, connect to, and care for the ecology of our region, we need to engage them with the land. Open space projects like the Gathering Garden invite curiosity, encourage learning, and inspire replication for visitors.

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.

Our project plays a role in the demonstration of what ecologically diverse and regenerative landscaping and food production can look like. For a healthier future for our soil, water, and air, we believe that more urban and rural land must become dedicated to continuous living cover and more landscapes must incorporate a broader range of plants and habitats to support biodiversity and climate resilience. The Gathering Garden is directly next to Prairie Ally's 3.5 acres of restored prairie and 100 acres of City owned grassland that contains a stream, wetlands, wellhead protection area, and a capped landfill. On the other side of the space is our 1-acre food forest. The diversity of both the native and non-native species of plants strategically planted for this project will ensure the protection of a healthy and sustainable ecosystem long term.

The Observation Station is designed to support respite from elements, informal gatherings, or quiet observation in a cozy 10'x16' shelter building. With windows on all walls, visitors will still feel connected to the outdoors. A corn crib repurposed for seating and growing fruiting vines on will be moved to the site.

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 increase visitors' knowledge of both natural and cultivated ecosystems. It includes showcasing prairie and wetland plants and regenerative agroforestry and permaculture methodologies through diverse plantings and interpretive signage.

Plants we will be strategically planting will ensure the enhancement of natural resources by:

- Placing emphasis on trees, shrubs, and perennials
- Planting thickly and using ground covers to shade soil and suppress weeds
- Utilizing nitrogen-fixing and nutrient-accumulating plants
- Planting a diverse array of plants that attract beneficial insects

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Pre-Construction Site Preparation and Construction Mobilization

Activity Budget: \$8,000

Activity Description:

Tasks include securing all construction funding, obtaining required permits, and preparing the project site for construction. Physical site preparation will involve removal of the existing cement foundation and underlying gravel, followed by grading and soil preparation. Compost and soil amendments will be brought in to rebuild the planting surface and establish conditions that support long-term plant health and stormwater infiltration. Staking and mobilization will guide contractors and volunteers in safely organizing materials and equipment.

These tasks will be accomplished through coordination between project leadership, contractors, and local permitting authorities. Versteeg Excavating, which tore the blighted barn down in the location in 2021, will use excavation and grading equipment to remove existing materials and shape the site according to construction plans.

Outputs of this activity include a cleared and graded construction site, completed permits, contractor agreements, and prepared planting soil. These outputs enable the next phase of construction and landscape installation.

Success will be evaluated by confirming that all regulatory approvals are secured and the site is safely prepared according to project plans, allowing construction to proceed without delay.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Cement removal	August 31, 2026
Dirt work and grading	August 31, 2026
Funding and permitting secured	July 31, 2027

Activity 2: Construction and Installation

Activity Budget: \$42,000

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to complete construction of the Gathering Garden while ensuring quality oversight, safety, and alignment with project plans. Construction oversight and project administration will begin at the start of the building phase and continue through substantial completion.

Tasks include repairing and stabilizing the existing quartzite barn walls, installing corn crib footings and anchoring, anchoring the observation station building (which is to be delivered prefabricated to the site), installing irrigation infrastructure, constructing an accessible ramp, and installing temporary fencing to maintain safety during construction and protect plants the first year as plants get established. Landscape work will include final grading, mulching, and planting of designated vegetation.

These tasks will be completed through coordinated work between contractors, project leadership, and volunteers where appropriate.

Outputs of this activity include completed structural elements, installed irrigation, stabilized historic stone walls, planted landscape areas, and a fully constructed observation and gathering space. Project elements will be used for education, recreation, food, and habitat.

These improvements create a safe, functional, and educational environment. Success will be evaluated by achieving substantial construction completion according to approved plans and readiness for final project closeout.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Install Corn Crib	September 30, 2027
Repair and Tuckpoint Quartzite Walls	October 31, 2027
Anchor Observation Station	November 30, 2027
Landscaping Installation	June 30, 2028

Activity 3: Design, Fabricate, and Install Interpretive and Botanical Signage**Activity Budget:** \$3,000**Activity Description:**

The objective of this activity is to create educational signage that helps visitors understand the ecological design, plant species, and stewardship practices demonstrated in the Gathering Garden. These interpretive elements will support self-guided learning and strengthen the site's role as a regional demonstration of agroforestry, edible and native landscaping, and regenerative land stewardship.

Tasks include designing, producing, and installing a set of permanent interpretive and botanical signs. Signage will include one 2' x 5' interpretive sign for the Gathering Garden, two 24" x 36" interpretive panels explaining site features and ecological functions, and approximately 40 2"x4" botanical plant identification signs with stakes identifying common and scientific plant names. Signage will use the required language and/or logo. Signage will inform visitors about the project and the role of ENRTF funding in supporting community access to nature-based learning.

These tasks will be accomplished through coordination with a local sign manufacturer and installation by project staff. Hardware and mounting posts will be installed to ensure long-term durability and accessibility. Signs will be placed strategically to support a self-guided visitor experience.

Success will be evaluated through visitor engagement with the signage and increased educational use of the site.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design Signs	March 31, 2028
Order Signs	June 30, 2028
Install Signs	September 30, 2028

Activity 4: Construction Close-Out**Activity Budget:** \$1,000**Activity Description:**

The objective of this activity is to complete final construction stabilization, fulfill grant compliance requirements, and open the Gathering Garden for public use. This phase ensures the project meets all ENRTF requirements and that the site is safe, documented, and ready for long-term community use.

Tasks include completing stabilization work and addressing remaining punch list items identified during the final construction walkthrough. An as-built survey will be completed to document the final configuration of site features and provide accurate records for future maintenance and planning. Required regulatory steps will include recording the Notice of Funding Restriction and obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy or equivalent approval confirming the site meets applicable local requirements. Initial maintenance will be conducted by staff with grant funds through October 2028 to establish plants and hand weed, beyond which point staff and volunteers will continue maintaining the area.

Outputs include completed compliance documentation, finalized project records, and a site approved for public use.

Success will be evaluated by completion of all regulatory and grant requirements and by opening the site for its intended educational and community purposes.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Open and promote site for use	August 31, 2028
As built survey	September 30, 2028
Record funding restriction	September 30, 2028
Initial maintenance for plant establishment	October 31, 2028
Project reporting	October 31, 2028

Activity 5: Design

Activity Budget: \$3,000

Activity Description:

Shovel ready design plans have already been completed. We have attached the Site Plan Schedule only. We have not attached the full detailed construction plans as it is a multi-page document and the RFP states 'Visual component (1 page limit) or map.' As such, please request full detailed plans if desired.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Plans completed	March 31, 2026

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

Green space that improves natural resources, creates edible landscaping, and incorporates native plants can be created nearly anywhere. Prairie Ally inspires, empowers, and equips visitors to create similar spaces wherever they live, work, and play. This project builds on those efforts. Community members, municipal governments and nonprofits in the region have already shared projects that they have implemented or are planning to based on having visited Prairie Ally. We anticipate the Gathering Garden increasing learning and replication of practices that enhance natural resources in public and private outdoor spaces.

Botanical and interpretive signs created for the various plants and growing techniques in the Gathering Garden will promote behavior to better protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota's environment and natural resources.

In the Observation Station, we will keep community log books for visitors to share their experiences and findings at Prairie Ally, and we will encourage people to use platforms such as iNaturalist to log wildlife sightings.

As an organization, Project Food Forest provides resources and connections for project champions and landowners to help their projects be successful. Visitors to the Gathering Garden will be able to follow up by phone, email, or additional site visits for additional information.

The Gathering Garden will be used for decades to come. The project can expand community engagement and can be used as a case study for other communities looking to implement high-impact, ecosystem-supportive public gathering spaces.

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?

Core elements are intentionally durable, making them well-suited for long-term public use. Beyond this grant term, other grants, donations, and rental income from the duplex on the property will be used for maintenance needs and educational programming carried out by staff, partners, and volunteers.

Visitors to Prairie Ally have shared that they have expanded or created new food forest and pollinator habitat in home and community spaces; spent more time outdoors; and experienced other positive outcomes as a result of what they have experienced at our site. As a result of this project, we hope for more of these outcomes.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Kimberly Rockman

Job Title: Prairie Ally Demonstration Site Manager

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

Demonstration site manager since planning for Prairie Ally began in 2017. Kim brings land management and environmental education experience spanning across 20 years.

She has completed college coursework in natural resource management and environmental studies, with participation in programs including UMN Minnesota Master Naturalist and A Healthier Southwest's community leadership team. She has served with the Student Conservation Association, leading to employment with the National Park Service in New Jersey; interned with the Urban Homestead in California; and volunteered with St Paul Parks and Rec. She has served on the Board of Directors of the Brandenburg Prairie Foundation.

Beyond work and educational experience, Kim brings a unique lens to caring for land and communities. Living with a

neuro-immune disease since the age of 19, Kim continues to learn and put into practice what it means to observe, respond, and adapt to inner and outer environments in holistic ways to cultivate the conditions for health.

Organization: Project Food Forest

Organization Description:

Project Food Forest's mission is to empower people to feed themselves through agroforestry, edible landscaping, and education. In addition to Project Food Forest's work providing outreach and education and partnering with other public and private projects, we operate our demonstration site in Luverne, MN.

Prairie Ally Outdoor Center provides education, recreation, food, and habitat through an alliance of restored prairie, wetlands, food forest, and gardens. The 5-acre site is open dawn to dusk daily, year-round, with no entrance fee. It was founded in 2018, with new plants and enhancements added each year since.

Interpretive signage throughout the site, self-guided tour booklets, and mowed paths allow visitors to immerse themselves as they explore. Visitors are welcome to harvest from the fruit trees, berries bushes and other food producing plants.

Prairie Ally's location has been central to its success. It is on a well trafficked road; on the paved Luverne Loop Regional Trail; a 10 minute walk from a childcare center; and just a few blocks from downtown. Because of 100 acres of adjoining undevelopable City owned grassland, it feels like being in the countryside while right in town.

Partnerships include UMN Extension, A Healthier Southwest, Southwest Initiative Foundation, and others.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
1 site staff		July 1, 2027-October 2028. Personnel time dedicated to: project management; procurement of materials; overseeing and assisting with all project elements; initial plant establishment and maintenance.			0%	0.12		\$7,000
							Sub Total	\$7,000
Contracts and Services								
Versteeg Excavating	Service Contract	Cement removal. Dirt work and grading.				0.03		\$7,000
Contractor	Service Contract	Repair of quartzite walls; mulching; planting; building of ramp; irrigation, edging, fence install; plant care				0.1		\$7,000
Contingency	Service Contract	Contingency for contracted services				0		\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$15,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Plants (17 trees, 83 shrubs, 131 perennials, bee lawn seed)	Perennial plants and seed for project					\$9,000
	Tools and Supplies	2 5' 7" teak benches, 2 4' 7" teak benches, 1 6' teak bench, 1 4' teak bench, 2 teak armchairs, 6pc Trex patio set, Trex coffee table	Seating for project					\$14,000
	Tools and Supplies	Mulch. 24 cubic yards wood mulch and delivery	Mulching around plants					\$1,000
	Tools and Supplies	2'x5' Interpretive Gathering Garden sign, Two 24"x36" interpretive signs, hardware, posts, 40 2"x4" botanical plant signs with stakes	Education and interpretation					\$2,000
	Tools and Supplies	Drip irrigation system, precision spray irrigation, irrigation controller and connection	Irrigating plants as they become established and during periods of drought in future					\$3,000
	Tools and Supplies	Footings for corn crib: Six 24"x48" concrete filled sono tubes, hardware, auger rental	Footings					\$1,000
	Tools and Supplies	Grout and related supplies	Stone wall repair and tuckpointing					\$1,000

	Tools and Supplies	Landscape edging materials	Edging around mulched areas					\$1,000
	Tools and Supplies	Topsoil and compost 8" depth and delivery	Dirt and compost as base for planting where cement foundation is removed					\$1,000
	Equipment	Partial cost of 10'x16' building (remainder will be covered by our cash match)	Shelter and observation building: 'Observation Station'					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$35,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$57,000

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				
In-Kind	DJ&A Landscape Architect Ben Smail	Landscape Architecture Design Services	Secured	\$3,000
In-Kind	George Hamilton	18 tons quartzite boulders	Secured	\$2,250
In-Kind	John Bowron, Dean Wenzel, Clint Brown	Corn crib plus labor to move, install footings, and anchor	Secured	\$2,000
In-Kind	Beverly Ann Miller Foundation	Wood and hardware for ramp	Secured	\$750
Cash	Activate Rural Learning Lab	Portion of Observation Station building cost	Pending	\$11,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$19,000
			Funds Total	\$19,000

Total Project Cost: \$76,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [4336c2eb-a1d.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Aerial map of parcel at 308 N Blue Mound Ave in Luverne, notating where the Gathering Garden will be constructed....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2025 990	a9b048b8-95a.pdf
MN Secretary of State standing	5c218c5a-595.pdf
SD Secretary of State Annual Report	80bd968e-8b2.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Authorization Letter	7c943c8e-308.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Budget Addendum	beeea8cd-d11.pdf
Support Letter	976ffc32-514.pdf
Questionnaire	e9b5578c-f04.pdf
Observation Station building design image	e88b3cbe-069.png
2025 990	546231bf-f1b.jpe
SD Secretary of State Annual Report	16142a15-668.pdf
MN Secretary of State standing	24f45476-cbe.jpe
Design	af3a9187-83c.png

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?

Yes

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:

Kimberly Rockman, Project Food Forest

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