



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

## General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2027-377

**Proposal Title:** Early Childhood Learning Center Expansion

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** Shawna Weaver

**Organization:** Lake Superior Authority

**Office Telephone:** (218) 740-2013

**Email:** sweaver@glaquarium.org

## Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** We will expand our learning center by relocating our early childhood program to a space specifically designed for experiential learning and nature play with direct access to our outdoor playscape.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$220,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** July 31, 2029

**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): NE

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

Region(s): NE

**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.**

Our Discovery Center is one large classroom with temporary dividers to create three learning spaces. It serves thousands of guests every year. We host our daily early childhood learners, k-12 field trips, events, and community meetings in the Discovery Center. One of the three divided spaces serves as our early childhood learning room. We often need the whole space for larger groups so our early childhood space must regularly be broken down and transformed.

Transforming the space is a disruption for our educators and limits our ability to create a space ideal for early childhood learning. Furthermore, the Discovery Center is on our second level, requiring early childhood students to move through the building multiple times in the day. As more families struggle to find adequate childcare, our current space limits our ability to serve more families and to cultivate an innovative space designed specifically for early learners. We also need to expand other programs for k-12 learners and adults, and program expansion is impeded by the available expansion space being utilized by Early Childhood learning programs and supplies.

### **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.**

Building an Early Childhood Learning Center in its own dedicated space enables us to design that space to meet the specific needs of early learners, and reduces congestion in our upstairs Discovery Center. Our underutilized meeting room on the main level of the Aquarium can be repurposed, offering an Early Childhood Learning Center with an exterior door, education animal habitats, a private bathroom, a height-appropriate/ADA sink and counter, and more permanent classroom equipment and fixtures. The exterior door would be significantly more convenient for families and staff, and for students to easily access the outdoor classroom during programming. We could offer more early childhood learning opportunities. We could also serve more guests in the Discovery Center, as we would have all three potential spaces consistently available for k-12 and community programming. Our plan includes redesigning the downstairs meeting room and completing the remodel, shifting the early childhood programming to the new space, and recommissioning the current early childhood space in the Discovery Center for other programming.

### **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 supports our mission to engage and inspire, encouraging stewardship of wildlife and water. Our cradle-to-cradle approach to community education strengthens our citizens' understanding and motivation for conservation, protection, and preservation. By offering more early childhood learning opportunities we broaden our reach and capacity. The new space will incorporate enhanced and permanent age-appropriate science education. By expanding our available space for community events and k-12 learning, we can expand programs and increase our capacity to teach about natural resources and resource protection, conservation, and preservation to all ages.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Deconstruction of Current Space and Reconstruction of Exterior Windows and interior space

**Activity Budget:** \$220,000

**Activity Description:**

Deconstruct current interior space, and exterior wall that currently does not have lower windows. Install larger windows. Expand interior space into two adjacent spaces, add bathroom.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Demolition of interior walls to be changed	May 31, 2028
Installation of bathroom and infrastructure	July 31, 2028
Reconstruction/completion of interior walls and remodel	August 31, 2028

## 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.**

### Dissemination Efforts

Great Lakes Aquarium (GLA) will actively acknowledge the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) in all communications and outreach related to this project. This will include:

Exhibit Signage – Permanent, durable signage with the ENRTF logo and attribution language will be displayed in the new classroom.

Temporary signage with ENRTF acknowledgment will be posted during the construction phase.

Printed and Digital Materials – All brochures, handouts, interpretive panels, and educational resources related to the project will include the ENRTF logo and required attribution language.

Media and Press Releases – Press releases, interviews, and media kits will identify the ENRTF as a funding source, and GLA staff will emphasize this funding during media interactions.

Website and Social Media – The project will be highlighted on GLA’s website and through social media platforms with attribution language, ENRTF logo placement, and tagging of ENRTF accounts.

Events and Public Programs – Public presentations, tours, and educational programs related to the Early Childhood Learning Center will verbally acknowledge the ENRTF’s role in making the project possible.

These efforts will ensure that the citizens of Minnesota are informed about the ENRTF’s role in protecting and restoring the state’s natural resources, while also increasing public awareness and engagement in lake sturgeon conservation.

## 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?**

Once expanded early childhood education is implemented, it is self-sustaining through memberships and program fees. As we began and expanded our early childhood education programming over the past decade, we have seen an increase in memberships and program fees that exceed the cost of our early childhood learning program. Additional work that will happen concurrently to compliment the Early Childhood Learning Center includes updates to our outdoor playscape and outdoor classroom, for which funding is secured and pending. Beyond these major updates, maintenance will be covered by the excess in funds raised and as needed through our memberships.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Shawna Weaver

**Job Title:** Director of Learning and Engagement

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

Dr. Weaver's background includes 20+ years of educational program development and project management to build and design spaces for early childhood and environmental education. Her PhD is in Sustainability Education, giving her a unique and valuable perspective for this project. She has successfully completed remodeling and build-out projects that were transformative for organizations and their students, including outdoor classroom plans at Marshall School, an indoor/outdoor education center at Animal Allies Humane Society, and outdoor public learning features at the Walter Munk Foundation in San Diego, CA. She has served as a consultant for several organizations as they worked through similar projects. Her background in child development, curriculum development, and early childhood learning needs is imperative for creating and executing the best plan for how the new space will be designed and used.

**Organization:** Lake Superior Authority

**Organization Description:**

Lake Superior Authority dba Great Lakes Aquarium was established in 1998 as an educational showcase of the economic, recreational, biological and aesthetic importance of freshwater resources – with a particular focus on Lake Superior. The Aquarium exists to provide opportunities for community members and visitors to the region to engage with water and wildlife. The audience it serves ranges in age from young children to older adults who identify as members and non-members, staff and volunteers. Groups of people visit the Aquarium as friends, family, schools, professional organizations, clubs and for special events.

Great Lakes Aquarium is a community gathering space that supports a positive personal attachment to the Lakes Superior region, through hands-on discovery, engagement and programming with live animals, and the presentation of information and ideas related to conservation actions. In addition, the Aquarium provides a unique setting to strengthen relationships through shared memory making, enhance social and inquiry skills, and expand world views.

Our mission is to engage and inspire, encouraging stewardship of wildlife and water.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
TBD	Service Contract	Contracted construction services				1		\$220,000
							Sub Total	\$220,000
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Capital Equipment</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							Sub Total	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
							Sub Total	-

<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$220,000</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>				
Cash	Great Lakes Aquarium	Project planning (predesign, design) and management.	Secured	\$20,000
Cash	Great Lakes Aquarium	Feasibility Study	Secured	\$10,000
Cash	Great Lakes Aquarium	Construction Funding	Secured	\$15,000
Cash	Foundation	Close-out tasks, internal staff	Pending	\$10,000
Cash	Donor funds	Contingency	Pending	\$15,000
Cash	Great Lakes Aquarium	Project Management/oversight	Pending	\$10,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$80,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$80,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$300,000**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [ab587195-0bd.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

This building map indicates the location of the current meeting room that will be remodeled to serve as the early childhood learning center (circled in red)....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Lake Superior Center 990 2024	<a href="#">1f24bfe9-92d.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution GLA Early Childhood Classroom	<a href="#">34516b42-4d1.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support for Early Childhood Learning Expansion	<a href="#">c033c22e-54c.pdf</a>
Capital Construction Budget Addendum	<a href="#">13a22664-557.pdf</a>
Capital Construction Project Questionnaire	<a href="#">68bfc2a4-199.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?**

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")?**

No

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

Jay Walker, Katie Pease

**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