



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-502

Proposal Title: Empowering Minneapolis Youth and Educators Through Nature Access

Project Manager Information

Name: Jeannette Lutter-Gardella

Organization: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Nature Inside Out expands equitable outdoor learning for underserved Minneapolis students through field trips, interdisciplinary lessons, and teacher training that provides access to nature, strengthen environmental literacy, and long-term stewardship.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$290,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 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): 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 and In the Future

Narrative

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

This proposal addresses a persistent gap faced by low-income Minneapolis schools, where limited resources prevent students from participating in field trips and accessing natural environments. At Kroening Nature Center in North Mississippi Regional Park, we ensure that students from underserved schools have consistent, year-over-year opportunities to build meaningful connections with nature. We lead immersive outdoor learning experiences that include art making, that strengthen scientific thinking and deepen environmental understanding. These experiences cultivate and inspire young people to spend more time outdoors, growing into lifelong environmental stewards.

Many families and educators are unaware of the well-documented health and academic benefits of outdoor learning. Teachers reported a lack of experience with environmental education topics, access to curriculum and supplies as barriers to providing lessons in schoolyards or outdoors. Teachers ranked model lessons to use in schoolyards, parks and classrooms with access to resources as their first and second choice for professional development.

North Mississippi Regional Park attracts more than 350,000 visitors a year, serving the north metro and Minneapolis. Kroening serves schools located in Areas of Concentrated Poverty (ACP) and six of the seven schools served are in environmental justice areas. Kroening currently serves more than 700

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 aim to increase participation in school fields trips and access to nature through Nature Inside Out (NIO), an outdoor, evidence based, hands-on environmental learning program that serves students from underserved elementary schools located in Minneapolis. NIO will expand to include students from four underserved middle and high schools and through a Teacher Field School, training for 25 teachers.

NIO currently provides transportation for three field trips per year for students in grades 2–5 to Kroening. School year/outdoor learning will be expanded to grades 6-8 and 9 -12. Funding supports staff time to design and lead standard-aligned lessons for these grades.

An artist residency is integrated into field trips and schools, creating an interdisciplinary approach to “thinking in nature” that supports cognitive growth and social-emotional development. Arts deepen cognition and shows measurable increases in conservation attitudes and community stewardship after arts-integrated programs (Song, M., et al. (2017) Environmental Education Research).

In partnership with Hamline University, we will create a Minneapolis Parks–Teacher Field School to train Minneapolis teachers to use schoolyards and parks for teaching and learning, increasing students’ seasonal access to nature during the school day. These teachers will then mentor and train additional educators.

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?

Nature Inside Out directly supports Minnesota’s constitutional and statutory intent to protect, conserve, preserve, and enhance its air, water, land, and wildlife by cultivating youth and teacher capacity to engage in ongoing stewardship, increasing high-quality standards-based environmental learning, and embedding art and nature-connected practices across schools and parks, ensuring equitable access to outdoor learning. Aligning with MN State Standards and NAAEE guidelines provides a pathway to measurable conservation actions and public benefits [MN Dept Ed; NAAEE].

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Nature Inside Out field trips to Kroening Nature Center

Activity Budget: \$105,000

Activity Description:

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) will coordinate, schedule, and deliver fall, winter, and spring field trips for all participating schools. Each trip will include standard-aligned, phenomenon-based outdoor, grade-level science benchmark lessons. Naturalists will prepare activities, and site-specific lesson plans. MPRB administrative staff will manage all logistics in partnership with school staff and transportation services. Attendance, field data, and teacher feedback will be collected after each trip to assess participation and inform annual improvements. Seasonal field plans will be updated each year based on evaluation findings.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Schedule and deliver fall, winter, and spring field trips with naturalist-led instruction for all participating schools,	June 30, 2029
Develop grade-specific field trips to Kroening Nature Center and school/park specific lesson plans and prepare teacher kits.	June 30, 2029
Collect student data, reflections, and attendance after each field trip for evaluation.	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: On-site schoolyard and park-based lessons led by teachers (post-PD) with MPRB Naturalist support

Activity Budget: \$65,000

Activity Description:

Following completion of teacher training through the Minneapolis Parks Teacher Field School, participating educators will implement seasonal outdoor lessons in their own schoolyards and nearby parks, with Minneapolis Park naturalist support. Training will equip teachers with foundational outdoor instructional skills, safety practices, and grades-specific methodologies aligned to Minnesota State Standards. Naturalists and teachers will co-develop fall, winter, and spring lesson plans that integrate local phenomena, outdoor data collection, and hands-on environmental investigations for their nearby park. Naturalists will provide ongoing coaching and classroom-to-outdoor modeling to ensure teachers are confident in using natural spaces as extensions of their curriculum.

Throughout the school year, teachers will deliver these lessons during all three seasons, giving students consistent access to place-based learning opportunities close to home. Lessons will emphasize ecological awareness, observation skills, and connections between schoolyard environments and broader natural resource systems. Implementation data—including teacher and naturalists notes and student participation—will be collected to assess fidelity, identify barriers, and document instructional gains. Teacher feedback gathered after each season will guide revisions to lesson designs, instructional supports, and future Teacher Field School training modules. This milestone ensures that outdoor learning is embedded into regular school practices and sustained beyond the project period.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
25 teachers complete 40 hours of Hamline University's Minneapolis Parks Teacher Field training-two teacher cohorts	June 30, 2029
Teachers and naturalists co-develop seasonal lesson plans aligned to MN State Standards.	June 30, 2029

MPRB naturalists provide coaching and modeling of outdoor instructional strategies for up to two cohorts.	June 30, 2029
Teachers implement lessons in fall, winter, and spring in schoolyards/parks.	June 30, 2029
Gather implementation data and teacher feedback to inform revisions (ongoing).	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Interdisciplinary art and nature experiences and reflection

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

The Artist in Residence will collaborate with Minneapolis Park naturalists and participating art teachers to design interdisciplinary art and nature lessons that strengthen observation, reflection, and place-based learning. Together, they will develop activities that integrate drawing, journaling, sound mapping, and other observation-based art practices into field trips and schoolyard lessons. These practices will support students' inquiry skills by enhancing attention to detail, pattern recognition, and personal connections to local ecosystems.

Throughout the year, students will create artwork and written reflections during outdoor investigations. The artist in residence will assist the naturalists and teachers to collect representative examples of student work and incorporate them into broader assessment processes, linking artistic-observations with learning outcomes, engagement indicators, and environmental literacy measures. These samples will also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the integrated art-nature approach and to inform adjustments to future lesson designs.

At the end of each school year, the Artist in Residence will curate a school-based or Kroening exhibit highlighting the connections between art, nature, and stewardship. These exhibits will provide teachers, families, and community partners with tangible evidence of student learning, while reinforcing long-term engagement with natural resources and outdoor learning across seasons.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Artist in Residence collaborates with naturalists and art teachers to design art and nature activities and lessons.	June 30, 2029
Students are engaged in observation-based art practices during field trips and schoolyard lessons	June 30, 2029
Collect student work samples and integrate them into student assessment data and program evaluation	June 30, 2029
Curate end-of-year portfolios or exhibit for participating in schools	June 30, 2029

Activity 4: Curriculum mapping to MN State Standards and NAAEE Guidelines, AND Program Evaluations

Activity Budget: \$20,000

Activity Description:

This activity will ensure that all field trip and schoolyard instruction is fully aligned with Minnesota Academic Standards and NAAEE best practices in environmental education. Naturalists will collaborate with Hamline University faculty to review existing 2nd–5th grade curricula, identify gaps in standards alignment, and plan opportunities for cross-curricular connections. An independent program evaluator will provide objective insight into how teachers and naturalists work together to expand outdoor learning, assess program implementation, measure effectiveness, and identify strengths and areas for improvement.

An online student survey platform will be used to administer pre- and post-surveys that capture changes in students' attitudes and behaviors related to outdoor learning, connection to nature, health and well-being, and environmental stewardship. Findings will inform recommendations that build teacher confidence, strengthen instructional practice, and enhance meaningful student learning in nearby parks.

Using the feedback and evaluation, the team will produce updated curriculum guides, alignment matrices, scope-and-sequence documents, and assessment tools that support consistent, high-quality outdoor learning across grade levels. These materials will be shared with participating schools, district partners, and Minneapolis Parks Teacher Field School participants to support long-term use

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Review existing 2nd–5th grade curricula and identify alignment gaps	August 31, 2028
Map field trip and schoolyard lessons to MN curriculum benchmarks and cross-curricular connections using NAAEE Guidelines	June 30, 2029
Produce and share curriculum guides, alignment matrices, and assessment tools. To be updated annually based on	June 30, 2029

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.

Project findings, curricula, and instructional materials will be shared to ensure long-term use, find opportunities to present at statewide conferences, and promote statewide awareness of outcomes supported by the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund, to benefit efforts to protect, conserve, restore, enhance, or manage the environment and natural resources. Curriculum guides, alignment matrices, and assessment tools will be shared with participating schools, district partners, and Minnesota educators through the Minneapolis Parks-Teacher Field School, and other groups such as Children Nature Network, MN Education Equity Partnership, MN Children’s Outdoor Bill of Rights team, and Minneapolis Park Board social media. Teacher training modules and outdoor lesson materials will remain available for repeated use, supporting ongoing integration of nature-based learning into school practices after the project period. All presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products will acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications and outreach.

Student work samples, data summaries, and evaluation findings will be shared with schools and community partners. These results will help inform best practices for strengthening environmental literacy and fostering stewardship behaviors that protect, conserve, and enhance Minnesota’s natural resources. End-of-year student exhibits will showcase project impacts in accessible ways for families and community members.

Continued implementation will be supported through MPRB operations, district partnerships, and future federal, state, and local funding opportunities.

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?

Project results will be integrated into Kroening’s operations and the Minneapolis Parks Teacher Field School, ensuring continued delivery of standard-aligned outdoor learning for Minneapolis students. Curriculum materials, gear kits, and field protocols will become permanent resources maintained by Minneapolis Parks and participating schools. Ongoing implementation will be supported through Minneapolis Parks operating funds, district partnerships, and competitive federal, state, and local grant opportunities. Findings and products developed—including curricula, and teacher training modules—will be disseminated to schools, incorporated into future programming, and used to guide continuous improvement. Additional needs will be addressed through phased expansion and future funding requests.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Above The Falls Regional Park Acquisition	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 6, Sec. 2, Subd. 09q	\$950,000
Bohemian Flats Savanna Restoration	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08i	\$286,000
Bioblitz Urban Parks: Engaging Communities in Scientific Efforts	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$198,000
Enhancing Habitat Connectivity within the Urban Mississippi Flyway	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08p	\$190,000

Above the Falls Park Acquisition and Restoration Planning	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 09m	\$1,376,000
Shingle Creek Aquatic and Shoreline Habitat Enhancement	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 08l	\$1,100,000
Minnehaha Park South Plateau Oak Savanna Restoration	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08p	\$242,000
Shoreline Restoration and Enhancement at Minneapolis Lakes	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08r	\$819,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jeannette Lutter-Gardella

Job Title: Nature Center & Outdoor Educator

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

Jeannette Lutter-Gardella serves as the Kroening Nature Center Outdoor Educator, bringing more than 30 years of experience as an administrator, program manager, classroom teacher, and early-childhood instructional coordinator. Her work centers on the intersection of arts education and experiential environmental learning, with a commitment to removing barriers and expanding access to meaningful outdoor experiences. She has designed and led programs for learners from PreK through adulthood, using artmaking and hands-on activities to foster stewardship and a deep connection to the natural world. A strong collaborator, Jeannette actively builds partnerships to create project-based learning opportunities both in and beyond school settings. Her recent community collaborations include Minneapolis Public Schools, ECCE Early Childhood & Family Education, MPS Community Education, Hennepin County Green Partners, Latino Youth Development Collaborative, Wilderness Inquiry, Mississippi Park Connection, Mississippi Watershed Management Organization, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Her work includes managing staff hiring, training, scheduling, and supervision; coordinating multi-partner events; and maintaining strong community relationships, particularly with underserved and under-represented neighborhoods. She collaborates with internal departments, community groups, and external agencies for program development, secure funding, promote environmental education, and ensure successful implementation of projects and initiatives that protect and enhance Minnesota's natural resources.

Organization: Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

Organization Description:

The mission of the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board (MPRB) is to permanently preserve, protect, maintain, improve, and enhance its natural resources, parkland, and recreational opportunities for current and future generations of our region including people, plants, and wildlife. The MPRB dismantles historic inequities in the provision of park and recreation opportunities for all people to gather, celebrate, contemplate, and engage in activities that promote health, wellbeing, community, and the environment. The MPRB has more than 190 park properties totaling more than 7,000 acres of land and water, and serves an estimated 32 million visitors from across the region. Its urban forests, natural areas, and waters endure and captivate. The Grand Rounds Parkway system encompassing regional parks, plus neighborhood parks, recreation centers and diversified programming has the Minneapolis park system an important component of what makes Minneapolis a great place to live, work, and play.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
MBRB Naturalist		Develop and lead field trips at Kroening. Collaborate with Hamline faculty to develop Minneapolis Parks Teacher Field School. Support, coach Minneapolis teachers for implementation of schoolyard/park lessons.			15%	1.4		\$80,000
							Sub Total	\$80,000
Contracts and Services								
Hamline University	Subaward	Providing teacher training (40 hours) specific to outdoor learning in Minneapolis Parks and schoolyards.				0.14		\$50,000
Independent Program Evaluator TBD	Service Contract	An independent program evaluator to collect and provide objective insight into how teachers and naturalists collaborate to expand outdoor learning. Assess program implementation, measure effectiveness, and identify strengths and improvement areas. Offer recommendations that build teacher confidence, strengthen instructional practice, and enhance meaningful student learning experiences in nearby parks.				0.08		\$32,000
Artist in Residence TBD	Service Contract	The artist residence- artist visits to Kroening, meet with the naturalist, meet with art teachers, shadow field trips, provide weeklong residency at schools, collaborate on student's exhibition events				0.28		\$70,000
Transportation Service TBD	Service Contract	will be providing transportation, including fuel and driver for approx. 66 field trips per school year for 2 years to Kroening Nature Center				0.06		\$50,000
Hello Insight - Online Platform for Student Evaluation	Service Contract	To provide pre and post surveys for students to capture changes in attitudes and behaviors to outdoor learning, connection to nature, health and well-being and support for the environment. Annual fee allows for student evaluation				0.04		\$8,000
							Sub Total	\$210,000

Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
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	\$290,000

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	City of Minneapolis- MPRB property tax	Jeannette is the project manager for this and will spend 12% of her time managing, coordinating and documenting.	Secured	\$15,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$15,000
			Funds Total	\$15,000

Total Project Cost: \$305,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [bbcef43e-2b2.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Photos of Nature Inside Out program at Kroening Nature Center, students participated in various activities using science tools. Student clay representations of outdoor learning experiences....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
MPRB 2024 Financial Report	00d9aa45-da9.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
MPRB Resolution	cc30384b-82c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
letter of Support -Bethune Art Teacher	1a83671c-0d6.docx
Letter of Support -Jenny Lind 5th Grade Teacher	33d6f2c7-f2f.docx
Letter of Support-Jenny Lind 4th Grade Teacher	f768420a-da2.pdf
Letter of Support Colectiva Bilingue	0b95af84-24b.pdf
Letter of Support- Principal Jenny Lind	50bb8fd4-704.pdf
Letter of Support- Bethune Arts Coordinator	421f18f3-022.pdf
Letter of Support - Hamline University	16d96d59-49d.docx

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")?

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:

MaryLynn Pulscher, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

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