

**Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund
2011-2012 Request for Proposals (RFP)**

LCCMR ID: 208-G

Project Title: Minnesota Children's Museum's Exploration of the Natural World

Category: G. Environmental Education

Total Project Budget: \$ \$20,000

Proposed Project Time Period for the Funding Requested: 1 yr, July 2011 - June 2012

Other Non-State Funds: \$ 0

Summary:

Minnesota Children's Museum's Exploration of the Natural World immerses children in direct experiences with Minnesota environments and living things, nurturing a sense of commitment and stewardship for the natural environment.

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Location

Region: Metro

Ecological Section: Minnesota and NE Iowa Morainal (222M)

County Name: Ramsey

City / Township: Saint Paul

_____ Funding Priorities	_____ Multiple Benefits	_____ Outcomes	_____ Knowledge Base
_____ Extent of Impact	_____ Innovation	_____ Scientific/Tech Basis	_____ Urgency
_____ Capacity Readiness	_____ Leverage	_____ Employment	_____ TOTAL _____%

2011-2012 MAIN PROPOSAL

PROJECT TITLE: Minnesota Children's Museum's Exploration of the Natural World

I. PROJECT STATEMENT

Current studies indicate that there has been a significant increase in indoor activities among children in recent years. Factors such as traffic, strangers, and children getting lost or hurt have greatly impacted children's outdoor activities. The result is that the radius children are allowed to roam today is one-ninth of what it was 20 years ago. (*Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv, 2005). Also, children with free time are disengaging from outdoor activities in favor of spending roughly six and a half hours daily, interacting with some form of technology. (News and Resources from the Kaiser Youth Media Study released March 9, 2005, *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-Olds*)

The negative impact of children spending less time exploring the natural world is evidenced through increases in obesity and depression. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the number of overweight children between ages two and five increased by almost 36 percent from 1989 to 1999. Further, this growing disconnection from the nature feeds the depression. A recent survey found the rate at which American children are prescribed anti-depressants almost doubled in five years with the steepest increase (66 percent) found among preschool children. (*Psychiatric Services* 2003).

Minnesota Children's Museum's Exploration of the Natural World promotes education around and exposure to nature for early learners, which is critical toward fostering a love of learning and sensitivity toward the natural world. Although it may seem paradoxical to host indoor experiences focused on outdoor play, Minnesota Children's Museum has an opportunity to use its position as a major educational institution to raise awareness about the significance of outdoor play that will encourage children to see their connection with and role in the natural world. Immersing children in direct experiences with Minnesota environments, natural objects and living things nurtures an understanding of the relationships in the natural world and appreciation of the natural environment while building science process skills and environmental stewardship.

The goal of the Museum's Exploration of the Natural World focus area is to bring nature into our playful interactions with visiting children, parents and caregivers in order to develop a greater awareness of and appreciation for how nature enhances the development of the whole child. Through the Exploration of the Natural World Focus Area, Minnesota Children's Museum seeks to provide children with a variety of activities that incorporate an exploration of nature throughout our galleries, exhibits and programs that promote the healthy development of cognitive skills—especially scientific inquiry skills. Additionally, the Museum's intentional focus on the natural world will encourage the healthy development of social-emotional skills through connections that children make in nature, promoting self-confidence and self-reliance.

II. DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Children learn and make sense of their world through play, and we seek to strengthen families through our child-centered culture, engaging children and adults through broad and diverse content areas. Play is now considered so important that it is recognized by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right for every child. By providing immersive play environments and activities dedicated to the natural world, the Museum strives to instill in all young children a desire to be good stewards of the earth. The following new activities for which we seek funds will help frame children's understanding of the natural world through interactive play.

Activity 1: Atrium Animal Program **Budget:** \$ 2,000

The Atrium Animal Program is part of the Museum's "Gathering Time" (working title), an interactive program to engage groups of children and adults in building an in-depth connection to live animals through songs, stories, puppets, and up close look-and-touch activities.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. <i>By interacting with animals, children develop empathy toward wildlife</i>	6/30/12
2. <i>Cultivate a lifelong interest in nature and natural sciences</i>	6/30/12

Activity 2: Gallery Ambassadors _____ **Budget: \$ 1,600** _____

The Gallery Ambassador program uses teens from the Museum’s Youth Squad to work with children around expanding the message of the **Earth World** gallery: *I care about nature and like to explore the natural world.* Through interactive play scenarios, volunteers will expand the learning experience around the Exploration of the Natural World focus by building meaningful connections between children and nature.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. <i>Development of children’s social-emotional skills</i>	6/30/12
2. <i>Heightened sensitivity and interest in the natural world.</i>	6/30/12

Activity 3: Spooky Woods _____ **Budget: \$ 1,600** _____

During the Halloween season, the Museum will transform the **Earth World** gallery into *Spooky Woods*. Visitors begin their *Spooky Woods* journey around a “campfire” where their guide tells a tale about the amazing sights discovered on a recent expedition through the enchanted, moonlit *Spooky Woods*. Children will have the opportunity to handle nocturnal animals, insects and arachnids.

Outcome	Completion Date
1. <i>Expanded scientific thinking and observation skills</i>	6/30/12
2. <i>Reduced anxiety around handling certain animals, insects and arachnids</i>	6/30/12

These early education experiences are designed to cultivate empathy toward the living environment, the first step in developing into responsible stewards of the planet. By providing immersive play environments (**Earth World** gallery) and activities (Gallery Ambassadors and Atrium Animal Program) dedicated to playful exploration of the natural world, children will make a connection with the natural environment, benefiting their cognitive, social-emotional and physical development, and leading to their care and protection of the earth.

III. PROJECT STRATEGY

A. Project Team/Partners

Minnesota Children's Museum’s leadership team and staff plan, design and implement the Museum’s high quality galleries, exhibits, programs and activities. Our experienced, in-house Exhibit and Program Development staff has extensive expertise and knowledge to develop and implement quality learning experiences for the more than 400,000 children and families who visit the Museum each year. Programs developed with our partners, like the University of Minnesota’s Raptor Center, spark children’s learning around Minnesota wildlife, habitats, adaptations and relationships in the natural world.

B. Timeline Requirements

The Museum’s Exploration of the Natural World focus is an ongoing effort that is implemented throughout the fiscal year, which runs from July 1 to June 30.

C. Long-Term Strategy and Future Funding Needs

Each year, Minnesota Children's Museum supports its Exploration of the Natural World efforts through the general operating fund, which is funded through an annual campaign that relies on the generous support of corporations, foundations, and individuals to fulfill its mission. Community investment in Minnesota Children’s Museum has built a one-of-kind institution and community resource that strengthens children, families and educators throughout Minnesota.

2011-2012 Detailed Project Budget

IV. TOTAL TRUST FUND REQUEST BUDGET 2 years

BUDGET ITEM <i>(See list of Eligible & Non-Eligible Costs, p. 13)</i>	AMOUNT
Personnel: <i>Minnesota Children's Museum's Learning Experiences staff responsible for design and implement the Museum's high quality galleries, exhibits, programs and activities.</i>	\$ 12,000
Contracts: Professional Fees and contracted services related to Natural World - New Programs	\$ 1,400
Equipment/Tools/Supplies: <i>Supplies for Animal Atrium Program, Spooky Woods and Gallery Ambassadors</i>	\$ 5,200
Travel: <i>In-State travel for professional development trainings, local travel, meetings and training</i>	\$ -
Additional Budget Items:	
<i>Printing, Photography & Graphics</i>	\$ 1,400
TOTAL ENVIRONMENT & NATURAL RESOURCES TRUST FUND \$ REQUEST	\$ 20,000

V. OTHER FUNDS

SOURCE OF FUNDS	AMOUNT	Status
Other Non-State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:	\$ -	
Other State \$ Being Applied to Project During Project Period:	\$ -	
In-kind Services During Project Period:	\$ -	
Funding History: <i>The Museum receives annual contributions toward our ongoing focus toward the Exploration of the Natural and Physical World. In addition, a portion of all earned and donated income funds exhibits and programs within the Exploration of the Natural World Focus. This secured funding reflects dollars that were secured for on-going activities and operations. The requested amount is for new activities beginning in FY11.</i>	\$ 1,470,178	Secured

2011-2012 Project Manager Qualifications and Org Info

PROJECT TITLE: Minnesota Children's Museum's Exploration of the Natural World

Project Manager Qualifications

Jill Measells, M.S., Vice President of Learning Experiences, will provide oversight of the project, including direction for partnerships, evaluation, and interpretive programming related to the exhibits. Ms. Measells is a seasoned senior-level manager with over 14 years experience within the non-profit sector, specifically in community-focused, educational organizations. Jill joined the Museum in July 2006. Previously, she served as the Director of Education, Education Manager, and Education Coordinator at the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago, the largest science and technology museum in the western hemisphere. Jill holds a BA in Political Science/International Relations from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a Master of Science degree in Public Service Management from DePaul University in Chicago.

Minnesota Children's Museum History

Founded by three educators, Minnesota Children's Museum's earliest days were defined by partnership with local organizations and an educational framework that embraces informal learning experiences whereby children actively engage, explore and discover. Minnesota Children's Museum has been creatively fulfilling its mission of *sparking children's learning through play* since it opened its doors in 1981. A nationally recognized institution, the Museum is dedicated to creating inspiring informal learning experiences for children and adults throughout Minnesota. These experiences serve to promote, support and nurture more formal learning within school and to encourage and expand adult-child learning experiences. Each year, the Museum serves approximately 400,000 visitors at its downtown Saint Paul location and 1.5 million additional visitors through statewide education programs and international traveling exhibits. Minnesota Children's Museum's vision is to be an integral community, educational and cultural asset that catalyzes children's discovery of their world through immersive play and exciting learning experiences. Our five core focus areas – literacy, healthy lives, creative expression, cultural connections and exploration of the natural and physical world – are aligned with the developmental stages of children birth through ten, are enhanced by adult interaction within the learning experience, and are part of a larger shared community experience.

Minnesota Children's Museum is the only children's museum in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. According to the Association of Children's Museums (ACM), our museum ranks second in membership and seventh in revenue and attendance out of 250 U.S. children's museums. In 2003, 2006, and 2007, the Museum received national awards from ACM for innovative educational programming and effective community partnerships. One-third of our annual visitors come through the *Access* program, which ensures that the Museum's doors are open to all children and families regardless of ability to pay.

Minnesota Children's Museum Mission and Goals

Our mission is *sparking children's learning through play*. Decades of research tells us that children learn best through play. Minnesota Children's Museum seeks to strengthen family interaction through our child-centered culture, engaging children and adults through broad and diverse content areas. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, play is essential to children's development because it contributes to their cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being. The Academy also notes that play offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children. (Ginsburg, MD, 182, 2007). The benefits of play are abundant. The Academy of American Pediatrics asserts that when play is child-driven, children practice decision-making skills, move at their own pace, discover their own areas of interest, and ultimately engage fully in the passions they wish to pursue.

