



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-099

Proposal Title: Unlocking Minnesota Wilderness for Youth

Project Manager Information

Name: Beth Becker

Organization: YMCA of the North

Office Telephone: (612) 330-3070

Email: beth.becker@ymcamn.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Our goals are to engage 100,000 underserved youth statewide in environmental education, engaging them in the conservation and preservation of Minnesota wilderness through the experiences in the outdoors.

Funds Requested: \$762,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2027

LCCMR Funding Category: Environmental Education (C)

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

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

Statewide

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.

Research documents extreme disparity in the utilization of public parks and recreation spaces by communities of color and low-income population. In addition, access to outdoor opportunities and general connectedness to nature is heavily related to the positive social, physical and emotional health of children. Studies show that time spent outside is correlated to academic performance, overall physical health and reduction in stress levels. It is imperative that youth, and in turn their families, are aware of their nearby natural resources. With no connection to the natural world, underserved population also have little connection to future conservation or preservation of our wilderness areas, are unaware of career opportunities in nature, or how clean air, water, and land connect to their health and wellbeing.

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.

In public spaces across Minnesota, Unlock It! will provide hands-on environmental learning through an interactive experience. Our project will provide immersive and interactive environmental learning for youth, (and including families, school and community groups, and individuals) throughout the state in rural, suburban and urban areas, increasing the opportunities and engagement of underserved communities. The program is intentionally designed as a step-by-step learning challenge, engaging multiple ages and stages of learners through placed-based learning and team building, teaching conservation, preservation, and environmental sciences.

The learning takes place at YMCA lands, at local parks, open spaces of communities, organizations businesses (e.g. Science Museum), and University of Minnesota lands, that are accessible daily, at no cost, where youth, school groups, homeschoolers and others can access environmental learning through interactive environmental teaching stops along walkways, trails, and bike trails. The interactive educational stops, designed through our partnership with the University of Minnesota are provided by online interactive connection (maps and challenges) for participants. Anyone can access the Unlock It!

Unlock It! makes this learning experience possible for youth, and for school and community groups as access is free, and locations become more accessible in their own communities.

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?

The maps guide participants to find clues and solve puzzles about the area (parks and public lands). The program is FREE. The expected outcomes of the program are: 1) Will engage 100,000 Minnesota youth; 2) Accessibility breaks down barriers for equitable inclusion of underserved communities to better access outdoors, and outdoor education programming; 3) The addition of 36 new maps (12 per year) and communities will be added in Minnesota. (there are currently eleven Unlock It! mapped areas).

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Increase Unlock It! challenges and access across Minnesota

Activity Budget: \$762,000

Activity Description:

We will add 36 new interactive installations over 3 years statewide (12 per year). The projects provide promotion events and involve local communities in partnerships, including outreach to underserved youth throughout the state.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
36 new Unlock It! environmental learning challenges developed and in place across Minnesota	June 30, 2027
Outreach materials developed to engage new partners and youth across Minnesota	June 30, 2027
100,000 youth engaged with Unlock It! over three years	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Yohannis Shitta	YMCA of the North, Unlock-it	Unlock-It! Project Panager	Yes

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 will work to expand Unlock-it installations across the state, where they will remain in place in public spaces, accessible and free. Program outcome evaluation will provide the YMCA a solid basis for leveraging sustainable funding going forward. The YMCA will use the outcome data to engage funders through foundation and corporate grants, annual giving, events and sponsorships to help sustain the project. The Unlock It! program will engage new statewide partners.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
375 Underserved Youth Learn Minnesota Ecosystems By Canoe	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05f	\$375,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Beth Becker

Job Title: Director of Grants & Foundation Relations

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

Beth is the Director of Grants and Foundation Relations, providing support to the programs and funding for the YMCA of the North. She has worked on behalf of camps and adventure projects over her 8-year tenure with the YMCA, and previously has written and managed grants for more than 18 years, and point person for this project. Yohannis Shitta has the oversight of the Unlock-It! project. He is a champion of getting children, youth and families outdoors, and active and a champion of nature and the outdoors. Unlock-it is the visionary project he is leading in YMCA across Minnesota. Yohanis Shitta will be the project manager for Unlock-It as we expand to more sites across the state. Resumes attached.

Organization: YMCA of the North

Organization Description:

The YMCA of the North (YMCA) opened in 1856 in Minnesota and serves Minnesota residents across a 7-county area of the Twin Cities, Rochester, six camps in rural Minnesota, and in association with all other YMCAs in Minnesota. We are the third largest YMCA in the country, remaining relevant to generations adapting to meet the needs of Minnesotans. The YMCA Adventure Lab offers youth access to experiences and learning that broaden and enrich their world and to recognize the importance of preservation and conservation of outdoor spaces. YMCA Unlock-It, (and in collaboration with the University of Minnesota College of Biological Sciences), takes the environmental learning statewide into parks, community nature areas, and more with free access to interactive environmental learning. The project will directly impress the preservation of Minnesota wilderness and understanding of the connection of clean water, air, and land to healthy lives.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
YMCA Unlock-It! Project Manager		Project Manager, Yohannis Shitta			28%	3		\$150,000
Fringe Benefits		Fringe @ 28% = 42,000 over 3 years Health/Dental (9.45%); Group Life Insurance (0.07%); Long Term Disability (.13%); FICA (7.35%); Worker's Comp (1.2%); and Retirement (9.8%)			28%	3		\$42,000
							Sub Total	\$192,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								

							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	\$10,000 per year for 12 new maps x 3 years = \$30,000	Marketing and promoting of new maps and locations					\$30,000
							Sub Total	\$30,000
Other Expenses								
		Develop Unlock-it digital infrastructure of new installations	\$50,000 per year x 3 years (36 digital installations over 3 years), maps added to the Unlock It! app					\$150,000
		Un-Lock It! events	Community events introducing the open of each new installation sites, bring community to sites, guided hikes, local partnerships promoting stewardship and conservation, \$60,000 per year x 3 years					\$180,000
		Un-Lock It! School field trips	School field trips, guided hikes and outdoor learning \$40,000 per year x 3 years					\$120,000
		UN-Lock It! interactive map development	Development of 36 new interactive maps for new locations, physical mapping, over 3 years, 12 per year @ \$30,000 per year					\$90,000
							Sub Total	\$540,000
							Grand Total	\$762,000

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				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [a3b1b20b-38b.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Unlock It! mapping challenge youth participants 2 photos, boy and group...

Financial Capacity

File: [cbbb92b5-226.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
YMCA Board Resolution	e3dd2a31-c9f.docx

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Unlock It! Science Museum of Minnesota	21bcdeb2-453.pdf
Seth Thompson, U of M, College of Biological Sciences	1705bea9-472.docx
Yohannis Shitta Resume	869a3010-86a.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, or sale of products and assets?

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 design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other capital asset costing \$10,000 or more?

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?

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