



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-129

Proposal Title: YES! Students Step Up To Reduce Carbon Footprint

Project Manager Information

Name: Jennifer Swenson

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

Office Telephone: (320) 354-5894

Email: jennifer.s@prairiewoodselc.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: YES! (Youth Eco Solutions) will empower Minnesota youth to reduce their carbon footprints by losing 5,000 pounds of CO₂ per YES! team each school year.

Funds Requested: \$199,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2026

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (H)

Secondary 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.

In "Minnesota's Climate Action Framework," Governor Tim Walz states: "Climate change is an existential threat for all people in Minnesota." As carbon dioxide emissions increase, the state of Minnesota warms causing more frequent and intense storms, record-breaking floods, and an increase in wildfires - resulting in community and individual property damage, poor air quality, and harm to our beloved wildlife and habitat. Thankfully Minnesota is taking action concerning this climate crisis; the proposed project will enable Minnesota's youth to actively participate in achieving the climate vision for our state by reducing their carbon footprints.

Oftentimes, our youth feel disconnected not only from what is happening in their community, but also statewide. With your support, YES! can continue to offer an opportunity to change this by providing resources and guidance for students to take responsibility for their own carbon footprint, actively build relationships in their communities, help achieve Minnesota's Climate Action Framework, and create a cleaner Minnesota for the future generations.

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.

Youth Eco Solutions (YES!) is a student-driven, award-winning program that empowers students to solve ecological challenges through hands-on projects. Since 2007 YES! has supported over 4,700 students in working with over 7,250 businesses, organizations, and community members, cultivating connected and action-oriented future citizens. Our project goal is to mobilize Minnesota youth to shrink their carbon footprint through team projects that reduce CO2 emissions by at least 5,000 pounds per team. YES! will also connect these students with local experts through workshops that both teach about climate change and introduce students to related careers.

Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) is seeking \$199,000 to build on our past success by supporting youth-led ecological projects. Projects may include: conserving energy by installing LED lights or motion sensors in classrooms; promoting renewable energy by designing a solar boat or building a wind generator; growing food in a community garden or school greenhouse; composting organic waste; reducing plastic waste by improving recycling systems or upcycling used items; protecting water quality by testing stream or lake clarity; conserving water by installing low-flow showerheads in locker rooms; and planting native prairie, trees, or pollinator garden to create habitat and improve soil health.

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?

Prairie Woods ELC, working in partnership with Ney Nature Center, seeks to accomplish the following project-specific outcomes over two years:

- Students shrink their annual carbon footprint through YES! team projects that reduce CO2 emissions by at least 5,000 pounds per team.
- YES! youth actively help our state achieve targets described in "Minnesota's Climate Action Framework".
- Connect students with local experts to deliver 20 customized workshops and trainings on climate change related topics.
- Educate and encourage students to implement at least 40 climate change action projects in and with their communities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Recruit, Educate, and Connect YES! Students to Climate Change Experts and Careers

Activity Budget: \$79,600

Activity Description:

Building on our past experience, YES! students in grades 6 through 12 will learn from local and state climate change experts while completing up to 40 ecological projects over 2 years. YES! staff from various locations in Minnesota will recruit new YES! teams and retain existing teams to gain statewide participation. We will partner with local climate change experts to host a Fall Summit and up to 10 workshops per year. Education will include hands-on training for topics students are interested in pursuing for their community projects as well as strategies for creating S.M.A.R.T. goals, managing projects, and engaging community members. YES! students will receive education in conserving energy through use of LED lights or motion sensors in classrooms, promoting renewable energy by designing a solar boat or building a wind generator, growing food in a community garden or school greenhouse, composting organic waste, reducing plastic waste by improving recycling systems or upcycling used items, protecting water quality by testing stream or lake clarity, conserving water by installing low-flow showerheads in locker rooms, and planting native prairie, trees, or pollinator garden to create habitat and improve soil health.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Connect 150 students to regional and state climate change experts and careers in year 1	June 30, 2025
Provide 10 climate change workshops and teachings to educate YES! students in year 1	June 30, 2025
Recruit 300 students to join YES! teams	June 30, 2026
Connect 150 students to regional and state climate change experts and careers in year 2	June 30, 2026
Provide 10 climate change workshops and teachings to educate YES! students in year 2	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Step Up and Take Action! Students Implement 40+ Hands-on Climate Change Action Projects

Activity Budget: \$109,450

Activity Description:

The structure of how YES! operates is similar to the structure of a tree. Prairie Woods ELC and Ney Nature Center are the roots that support the program. Schools and communities are the trunk holding everything together, while students are branches reaching out to identify their community's ecological needs - working to find solutions to meet those needs.

YES! will mobilize 30 YES! teams over 2 years to help students adopt sustainable lifestyles, participate in outdoor activities that protect and improve local environments and help our state achieve targets described in "Minnesota's Climate Action Framework". YES! coordinators will continue to build relationships with local entities to support YES! teams and their projects, organize community events, and supply equipment for outdoor educational activities.

Team projects may include, but are not limited to: energy conservation, renewable energy, healthy food, composting, plastic waste reduction, wildlife habitat creation, and water conservation and protection.

We will recognize the achievements of our youth during our annual Spring Competition and Awards Ceremony. ENRTF funds provide support for YES! staff time, project seed funds, and program-related school expenses like bus transportation to workshops, making it more cost-effective for schools to participate in YES!.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engage 15 YES! teams to select and develop climate change projects in year 1	December 31, 2024
Mobilize 150 students to implement 20 new ecological projects in year 1	May 31, 2025
Recognize student achievements at our annual YES! Spring Awards Celebration	June 30, 2025
Engage 15 YES! teams to select and develop climate change projects in year 2	December 31, 2025
Mobilize 150 students to implement 20 new ecological projects in year 2	May 31, 2026

Activity 3: Annually Reduce CO2 Emissions By At Least 5,000 Pounds Per YES! Team

Activity Budget: \$9,950

Activity Description:

YES! students will shrink their carbon footprint through YES! team projects that reduce CO2 emissions by at least 5,000 pounds. Projects may include: conserving energy by installing LED lights or motion sensors in classrooms; promoting renewable energy by designing a solar boat or building a wind generator; growing food in a community garden or school greenhouse; composting organic waste; reducing plastic waste by improving recycling systems or upcycling used items; protecting water quality by testing stream or lake clarity; conserving water by installing low-flow showerheads in locker rooms; and planting native prairie, trees, or pollinator garden to create habitat and improve soil health.

Through our partnership with CERTS, YES! will assist each YES! team in calculating their individual team CO2 emissions as well as recording the overall impact across the state of Minnesota.

When YES! teams reduce their carbon footprints, Minnesota youth will be actively participating in the climate vision for our state, which includes becoming carbon-neutral by 2050, forming resilient Minnesotan communities, businesses and natural environments and creating an equitable society both for now and for future generations.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Reduce CO2 emissions by 5,000 pounds per YES! team in year 1	June 30, 2025
Reduce CO2 emissions by 5,000 pounds per YES! team in year 2	June 30, 2026
Introduce YES! students to "Minnesota's Climate Action Framework" and CO2 calculators	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Becky Pollack	Ney Nature Center, Henderson, MN	Becky Pollack serves as Executive Director of Ney Nature Center(NNC). NNC will be a program partner to facilitate YES! in the southern region by serving as a host site for YES! events, providing oversight to the southern YES! coordinator, processing billing, and ensuring project outcomes are met.	Yes
Students and Teachers	School Districts in Minnesota	School Districts will be key project partners in supporting youth in participating in natural resource projects. Funds will help support project seed funds and enable students and teachers to attend events as indicated in the budget.	Yes
Volunteers	Lake Associations, Community Groups	Lake associations and other community groups are a big part of our resource base for volunteers who support our youth-led projects.	No
Jacob Selseth	Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs)	Jacob will work with YES! students on energy efficiency projects as expert, presenter, and collaborator.	No
Beth Mercer-Taylor	Institute on the Environment - University of Minnesota	Beth and her colleagues will be a resource for both YES! staff and students concerning "How To Lose 5,000 lbs of CO2"; she will also serve as an expert, presenter and collaborator.	No
Kristen Iverson Poppleton	Climate Generation	Kristen will serve as an expert, presenter and collaborator, as well as connect YES! staff to other climate change experts.	No

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?

YES! is completing its 16th year of working with Minnesota’s youth by leveraging over \$1.4 million in local support of projects in the form of in-kind contributions, matching funds, major grants, and volunteer hours. In addition, YES! will seek private and public partnerships, individual donors and sponsorships to continue the work. But it is the projects themselves that will have everlasting results.

One student commented, “Our YES! team is leaving a legacy.” The results from this project will leave a lifetime legacy of improved waterways, preserved and restored natural environments, and informed citizens throughout Minnesota.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Youth-Led Sustainability Projects in 50 Minnesota Communities – Phase III	M.L. 2016, Chp. 186, Sec. 2, Subd. 05c	\$400,000
YES! Students Take on Minnesota Water-Quality Challenge	M.L. 2018, Chp. 214, Art. 4, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$213,000
Yes! Students Take On Water Quality Challenge II	M.L. 2021, First Special Session, Chp. 6, Art. 5, Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000
YES! Students Take Action to Complete Eco Projects	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05g	\$199,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Jennifer Swenson

Job Title: YES! Program Manager

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

Twenty years' experience in non-profit administration and program development. Executive Director of Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center in Spicer, MN. Served as Interim Project Manager for YES! during management transition. A new Project Manager is expected to begin working May 1, 2023.

Organization: Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center

Organization Description:

Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) is a regional center for environmental education and outdoor recreation located in west central Minnesota. Founded in 1992, PWELC now serves over 30,000 people annually from over 70 school districts and dozens of youth and conservation organizations. With 540 acres of natural space, an education building with 5 classrooms, a trailhead, a pavilion, an educational shooting sports range, an observatory building, and a 40-foot indoor climbing wall, PWELC offers numerous opportunities for learning and fun. Unique from many other environmental learning centers are our outreach programs, offering educational experiences in communities. Offerings such as YES! (Youth Eco Solutions), our mobile climbing wall, kayaks, and 34-foot voyager canoe are unique opportunities for meeting the needs of busy community members and students who are unable to travel to our facilities. In addition, these programs provide extended opportunities to partner with other environmental centers across the state.

Please note, PWELC's renewable energy production is typically close to net-zero. The facility serves as a model for retrofitting buildings to renewable energy systems. PWELC also serves as a model for natural resource conservation best practices and for sharing these practices with all who live in west-central Minnesota.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		To manage project budget, reporting and staff to achieve desired project outcomes, and provide strategic and collaborative leadership in carrying out the mission of the statewide Youth Eco Solutions (YES) program.			25%	1.2		\$79,560
Regional Coordinator		To coordinate and support student-driven teams to complete natural resource and CO2 reduction initiatives..			25%	1		\$48,100
Office Manager		To provide bookkeeping, process payroll, project seed fund distributions and other office duties.			25%	0.14		\$7,800
							Sub Total	\$135,460
Contracts and Services								
Ney Nature Center	Sub award	To coordinate and support YES! Teams. Facilitate student-driven teams to complete natural resource initiatives in southern Minnesota.				0.66		\$32,000
							Sub Total	\$32,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Supplies for YES! educational events and workshops: Fall Summit, Workshops, Awards Ceremony. Environmental Education workshop supplies approximately \$10 per students X \$150 students per year X 2 years = \$3,000.	Materials and supplies will enable outdoor natural resource experiences for students across Minnesota.					\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Coordinators & Project Manager travel: approximately 200 miles/month x 24 months x .655 = \$3,040	Travel required to support and meet with Statewide teams and coordinate activities in communities.					\$3,040
							Sub Total	\$3,040
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		Project Seed Funds; Up to \$200 per team x 15 teams = \$3,000 x 2 years = \$6,000.	Allows for teams to purchase materials and services necessary to initiate projects for natural resource conservation and restoration related projects & educational events.					\$6,000
		School District (Substitute Teacher Pay)/Community Expense Allowance	To facilitate student participation, funds will be available for reimbursement to support: 1. coaches/adult advisors to attend YES! events during the school day, and 2. transportation expenses for buses. \$150 per team X 15 teams = \$2,250 X 2 years = \$4,500.					\$4,500
		Stipends for Liaisons (YES! Coaches and Advisors)	To offset costs and support student roles in YES! Up to \$500 per Liaison X 15 = \$7,500 X 2 years = \$15,000.					\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$25,500
							Grand Total	\$199,000

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				
Cash	Each participating YES! team pays a fee of \$600. 15 Teams x 2 years = 30 teams x \$600 = \$18,000.	Participation fees cover costs not eligible for reimbursement from ENRTF such as food, t-shirts, Award plaques, Twins Game tickets and other additional costs.	Pending	\$18,000
In-Kind	In-kind from Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center (PWELC) and our partner Ney Nature Center (NNC). Also includes student volunteer time, teacher/coach volunteer time, and professional/expert volunteer time.	In-Kind (phone, computer, maintenance, heating, electric, copies, professional service, etc.) PWELC \$24,000 + NNC \$ 12,000 for 2 years = 36,000 Student volunteer time average is 200 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 6,000 x \$14.56/hr = \$87,360. Teacher/Coach volunteer time average is 80 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 2,400 x \$35/hr = \$84,000. Professional/expert volunteer time average is 10 hours per team x 15 teams x 2 years = 300 x \$45/hr = \$13,500. Above in-kind is based on past history of previously quantified data.	Secured	\$184,860
Cash	Prairie Woods Environmental Center Income (Cash Reserves, Small Grants & Gifts)	Cash reserves are intended for staff, travel, office support and other items as required to maintain the program (Website Hosting, Constant Contact, Email, Technical Support, Printing, Marketing, etc.).	Secured	\$20,000
Cash	National Science Foundation (NSF) through Regents of the University of Minnesota. Empowering Youth to Become 21st Century Energy Leaders: A STEM Workforce Development Initiative	National Science Foundation (NSF) through Regents of the University of Minnesota has committed funds to YES! for Empowering Youth to Become 21st Century Energy Leaders: A STEM Workforce Development Initiative. YES! will develop and acquire program resources and content for hands-on energy projects, school-based energy and STEM training, and provide logistical support for workshops and projects.	Secured	\$9,975
			Non State Sub Total	\$232,835
			Funds Total	\$232,835

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [a4e809d6-821.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A Statewide map of YES!, testimonials from participants, photos of environmental education, proposed projects....

Financial Capacity

File: [f71369d4-e21.pdf](#)

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
PWELC Board Resolution 2023-01	cbe03599-058.pdf

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Letter of Support - Institute on the Environment	78c7bffa-589.pdf
Letter of Commitment - Ney Nature Center	6cf45eda-20b.pdf
Letter of Support - Lac Qui Parle	6d2e310f-4c1.pdf
Letter of Support - MACCRAY	52cbb9ca-cb4.pdf
Letter of Support - Sleepy Eye	26dc139a-fed.pdf
Letter of Support - Westbrook Walnut Grove	851a5703-00a.pdf
YES! Team Accomplishments 2021-2022	8c592314-5c3.pdf
Letter of Support - Royalton	e838db87-3bb.pdf
Project Concept - How to Lose 10,000 Pounds (of CO2) in Just 10 Weeks	d1279def-055.pdf
Report - Minnesota's Climate Action Framework	11bd1cb0-fc1.pdf
Letter of Support - Discovery Woods	4cf4b128-53c.pdf
Letter of Support - Harbor City	f93cc8c4-f7a.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