



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2024 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2024-273

Proposal Title: Youth Conservation Empowerment Project

Project Manager Information

Name: Nicole Pokorney

Organization: U of MN - Extension Center for Youth Development

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: UMN Extension Center for Youth Development will partner with Winona and Rochester ALCs to engage 40 youth in year-long activities that connect, engage, and empower youth as environmental change-agents.

Funds Requested: \$70,000

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?

Region(s): SE

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

Region(s): SE

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.

It is estimated that by 2042, the majority of US citizens will be nonwhite. Yet communities of color and lower-income communities in Minnesota frequent parks and trails at a significantly lower rate than white communities and those of higher income, for reasons such as a lack of awareness, time, transportation, desire, or perceived safety (Metropolitan Council 2014, 2016). This is a national trend too. The Nature of Americans study (2017) confirmed that even for those who want more time in nature, minority groups face more barriers, though they could benefit the most. Being in nature is not only beneficial to personal health, but also facilitates understanding of our planet's health, which is crucial to conservation and responsible global citizenship. The younger generations are concerned about the environment, scared of climate change, and eager to help. According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Youth Envoy (2008), 73% of youth indicated they currently feel the effects of climate change, but only 9% were confident the world would act quickly to address it. This project can meet youths' need for agency in environmental stewardship and build a long-lasting and action-based conservation ethic.

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.

Our proposal creates an opportunity for youth from underserved, culturally diverse and low-income communities to connect to the people, places, and organizations in their community. Activities proposed for this project would help youth better understand and engage with the natural world in a way that empowers them to be environmental stewards. Building from past programmatic successes, this project would use a model based on the Natural Intelligence in Youth Work framework. The purpose of this framework is to build and nurture pro-environmental behaviors in youth by using a holistic approach that makes them more connected, engaged, and empowered in their relationship with nature.

The youth audience are students from Rochester Alternative and Winona Area Learning Centers (ALCs). 74% of students in Rochester and Winona ALCs qualify for free/reduced lunch, with 65% of Rochester's and 32% of Winona's students being nonwhite. Each year, Whitewater State Park, in partnership with Minnesota 4-H, hosts the Outdoor Exploration Day and invites youth with diverse backgrounds from Rochester and Winona to participate, introducing them to outdoor spaces. This proposed project would continue the momentum created by the event, providing the scaffolding that youth need to eventually become environmental stewards, instead of having the impact of

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 purpose of the Youth Conservation Empowerment Project is to nurture pro-environmental behaviors in young people so that they feel connected to and engaged with nature, and empowered to take action to conserve and preserve its resources. Our project outcomes include the following:

Youth will strengthen their connection with nature.

Youth will learn skills to build their confidence in being in outdoor spaces.

Youth will enhance their interest and leadership in environmental stewardship.

Youth will gain awareness of career potential in various aspects of environmental sciences.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Connection to Nature

Activity Budget: \$12,120

Activity Description:

Activities are structured using the Natural Intelligence in Youth Work framework of Connection, Engagement, and Empowerment. Youth at Rochester Alternative and Winona Area Learning Centers meet monthly over the school year per year (8 times per year) to engage in activities that help them find their connection to nature. These activities include nature journaling, exploration of local natural spaces such as their school grounds, local parks and other nearby green areas, learning outdoor skills, and discovering potential careers in environmental fields. Youth engage in other lessons and activities utilizing research-based resources such as the Leopold Education Program (LEP) curriculum, which provides activities and learning opportunities to develop land ethics and stewardship. We will also engage the University of Minnesota Bell Museum for natural history activities and guest speakers to gain a deeper understanding about the natural world and youth’s role in it. Youth will also learn basic wilderness skills to build competency and comfort in spending extended time outdoors. These skills will include hiking, canoeing, wilderness first aid, and outdoor cooking.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Evaluation to benchmark youth connection to and knowledge of outdoor spaces	September 30, 2024
Monthly programming to gain outdoor competency	May 31, 2026
Establish communication and relationships with families of the youth participants	May 31, 2026
Annual end of school evaluation of youth connection to and knowledge of outdoor spaces	June 30, 2026

Activity 2: Nature Engagement Activities

Activity Budget: \$49,880

Activity Description:

4-H will partner with Camp Fire Minnesota Bluewater Lodge to take youth on a 3-night immersive canoe trip and outdoor experience in the Chain of Lakes and Chippewa National Forest in June of each year. A guided experience in nature, steeped in transformation learning theory that provides challenge and a chance to break away from normal daily routines, will encourage youth to more fully engage and develop a personal relationship with nature.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Overnight outdoor experience at Camp Fire Minnesota Bluewater Lodge and Canoeing June of each year.	June 30, 2026

Activity 3: Nature Empowerment Activities

Activity Budget: \$8,000

Activity Description:

As young people deepen and are bolstered by their connection with nature, they will build in their response to environmental stewardship through service learning so they feel empowered as change agents. They will participate in the Outdoorist Oath Workshop and develop Citizen Science/Conservation service learning projects for their local area. Youth will write proposals for their project to be able to spend up to \$200 on the supplies and other items they need to

conduct their projects. These projects will teach and equip young people to address community needs, plan and implement change-making projects, and acquire skills such as grant writing and teamwork that they can use to apply for other funding after this grant ends.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Monthly programming to learn conservation project planning, grant writing, complete projects.	May 31, 2026
Throughout the grant, equip school staff to sustain programming and outdoor learning experiences after grant.	May 31, 2026
Final evaluation (including essay type questions to unearth nuances) and reporting	June 30, 2026

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Holly Menniger	University of Minnesota Bell Museum	Provide educational resources, field specimens, and guest speakers for the program during monthly Connection Activities (activity 1).	No
Sara Holger	Department of Natural Resources, Rx in the Parks	Provide nature- based research and resources for developing connection to nature during monthly Connection Activities (activity 1) and in support of Youth Conservation Projects (activity 3).	No
Katie Sloan	Rochester Public Schools - Alternative Learning Center	Provide learning spaces, access to young people, sustain the program, and provide liability.	No
To be named	Winona Public Schools - Area Learning Center	Provide learning spaces, access to young people, sustain the program, and provide liability.	No
Becca Fink	Camp Fire Minnesota	Provide outdoor experience through canoeing and outdoor immersion trips (activity 2).	Yes
Ami Choi	U of M Tourism Center	Benchmark youth knowledge of nature at the very beginning and access their knowledge again at the end of activity so there can be before and after comparison.	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?

4-H clubs will be established at Rochester and Winona ALCs through program agreements to continue the partnership. In this way, the local 4-H programs can allot a portion of funds, along with the schools, after the grant period. 4-H staff will allocate time to assist with program delivery and equip school staff to continue programming. Youth participants will become MN 4-H members and will receive all the benefits afforded through membership. Our partners are deeply invested in the project and poised to help. Evaluation results will inform design of future programming and continued youth involvement in conservation.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Nicole Pokorney

Job Title: Regional Extension Educator

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

Nicole Pokorney is an Extension Educator with the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development and the Program Director for the Minnesota 4-H Outdoor Education Program. She has a Master of Education in School Counseling and has been developing, managing, and leading youth programs for over 27 years. She has conducted research in connecting youth and children to nature and how to develop outdoor programs that are inclusive and engaging. She has 10 years of experience managing grants and has a track record of managing them with fidelity.

Organization: U of MN - Extension Center for Youth Development

Organization Description:

As an original public land-grant institution, the University of Minnesota remains dedicated to access and collaboration.

UMN Extension is the college within the university tasked with executing this land-grant mission. Extension engages individuals and organizations to ask challenging questions and implement science-based solutions that drive impact. Extension's Center for Youth Development provides training, education, and tools for youth workers and leaders. UMN Extension Center for Youth Development has been creating non-formal learning opportunities for youth through its Minnesota 4-H program since 1903. Extension youth development staff serve as community connectors and youth development specialists, partnering with communities and organizations to build the collective capacity to sustain quality youth programs, with particular focus on doing so from an assets-based approach. Our overarching goals are to guide youth in learning and developing a passion in their own areas of interest and leading by being innovators and social change agents.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Nicole Pokorney (UMN Extension Center for Youth Development)		Project Director to manage the project, communicate with partners and funders, train volunteers, and assist evaluator.			36.8%	0.1		\$9,892
Ami Choi (UMN Tourism Center)		Evaluator to design and conduct evaluation and reporting. Salary and fringe for 2 years at .0375 FTE. Salary takes into account 1.025% pay raise at the start of each new fiscal year July 1.			38.8%	0.08		\$8,367
							Sub Total	\$18,259
Contracts and Services								
Camp Fire Minnesota	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Proved lodging, food, canoes, and canoe guides. \$450 x 40 youth x 2 years. Part of Activity 2, Engagement activities. 40 youth to attend an immersive 3-night outdoor and canoe trip on Chain of Lakes and Chippewa National Forest.				0		\$36,000
							Sub Total	\$36,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	General program supplies, such as nature journals, art supplies, buckets, nets, ID guides, etc. for 40 youth. \$1500 year 1, \$750 year 2.	Part of Activity 1 Connection to Nature activities to enable youth to learn about the natural spaces around them and build a connection.					\$2,250
	Tools and Supplies	Camping gear such as sleeping bags, dry sacks, mosquito nets, extra clothing (e.g., socks, shoes). \$1750 for year 1; \$0 for year 2.	For Activity 2 Engagement activities. Low-income youth often do not have access to their own gear. Funds will help supplement existing supplies to provide for those youth who need it.					\$1,750
							Sub Total	\$4,000

Capital Expenditures									
								Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship									
								Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota									
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Bus transportation for 40 youth plus adult chaperones to and from Rochester and Winona to Bluewater Lodge. \$1500 each year.	Part of Activity 2, Engagement activities. 40 youth to attend an immersive 3-night outdoor and canoe trip on Chain of Lakes and Chippewa National Forest.						\$3,000
								Sub Total	\$3,000
Travel Outside Minnesota									
								Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication									
	Printing	Printing of curricular materials such as handouts, as well as communication with families such as letters, flyers, and permission forms. \$500 year 1; \$241 year 2.	To conduct Activity 1 and communicate with families.						\$741
								Sub Total	\$741
Other Expenses									
		Youth Conservation Projects. Youth pair up to write proposals and be able to spend up to \$200 on supplies and other items they need to conduct their conservation/citizen science action projects. \$200 x 20 projects x 2 years.	Part of Activity 2 Empowerment activities. Youth learn about grant-writing so that after the conclusion of this grant, they will have the skills to be able to receive money for similar conservation projects.						\$8,000
								Sub Total	\$8,000

							Grand Total	\$70,000
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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: [82113100-0d5.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Youth strengthen CONNECTION with nature and build career awareness through monthly club meetings by exploring local outdoors, learning natural history and conservation, and deepening understanding. ENGAGE with nature to learn skills and build confidence through immersive outdoor trips. EMPOWER youth to build leadership in environmental stewardship through conservation projects....

Optional Attachments

Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
SPA Authorization letter	9de5a09d-1b0.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