



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2025-184

Proposal Title: Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends

Project Manager Information

Name: Alison Schaub

Organization: Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends

Office Telephone: (651) 206-2696

Email: hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Bountiful, open opportunities to nature, conservation and education at our urban refuge.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$210,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2027

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): Metro

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.

This leadership development and environmental education program creates opportunities for youth in underserved communities, particularly youth of color, to deepen their understanding of environmental issues and provide solutions to address environmental injustices. Thinking about environmental education and underserved communities is an opportunity to challenge our assumptions about nature, culture and science, and, our assumptions about the life experiences of people of different backgrounds and cultures.

To develop a consistent, comprehensive education program, we strive to:

Understand the value systems and social norms in the community that we serve.

Spend time getting to know people, beyond scheduled meetings and programs.

Talking openly about cultural differences may help develop cross-cultural understanding.

Understand that every community has a different culture or set of shared agreements from which they live, work, and understand nature.

Cooperatively teach with local education leaders, fully participate in their activities, and always demonstrate respect for work that is already going on.

Think about access issues and comfort level with outdoor activities.

Educate staff and volunteers and colleagues on race issues, white privilege, and environmental justice issues.

Make a conscious choice before the grant ends to continue the partnerships and relationships that we have worked so hard to form.

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 project aims to address the lack of environmental education to underserved communities in five tracks:

Refuge Buddies

Confluence Art Gallery

On-Site Environmental Education

STEM Youth Internships

Accès to Transportation

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?

Our entire mission is to “work with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.” Through education, awareness building, advocacy, fundraising and volunteer recruitment and development, this program strives to ensure that the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge is a thriving urban refuge where nature connects people, communities and wildlife. By involving children, teenagers, educators in underserved communities in the development of our environmental education and preservation program, we are able to be change agents for inclusion by leveraging one of this community's most natural resources

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Refuge Buddies

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

Our exciting program - the Refuge Buddy program - is an initiative to provide support to passionate individuals and their organizations who are providing mentoring opportunities for those in their own communities. Those under the Refuge Buddy program retain autonomy in the planning, promotion, and execution of their programs and events and receive stipends for their time, priority access to refuge facilities, resources, and equipment, and a dedicated liaison from the refuge staff to help lead and support programs with the Refuge Buddy. Each Refuge Buddy provides 12 programs a year under the program. The Refuge Buddy program facilitates free and accessible birding, hiking, and fishing programs as well as opportunities for conservation community service, with a target demographic of BIPOC, LGTBQIA+, and underserved communities. The program also provides multiple opportunities over the year to learn about conservation careers.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Develop LGBTQIA+ Refuge Buddies Group.	June 30, 2026
Develop Somali Refuge Buddies Group.	June 30, 2027
Develop Hmong Refuge Buddies Group	June 30, 2027

Activity 2: Confluence Art Gallery Development

Activity Budget: \$40,000

Activity Description:

The Confluence Gallery is located in the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge’s Education and Visitor Center in Bloomington’s South Loop District. The gallery features emerging and established Minnesota-based artists who reflect the community and who excel at creating artwork with a focus on nature and natural elements, ecology, conservation, and/or the beauty of the Minnesota River Valley. The Refuge sees the Confluence Gallery as a conduit between the natural world and the local community; it exists to inspire, educate, and connect refuge visitors to the natural world. The gallery exists to be a conduit between the natural world and the local community; to inspire and educate, and to connect refuge visitors to the natural world.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Host 12 exhibitions of emerging natural artists annually.	June 30, 2027
Provide 6 emerging artists with stipends for their art annually. Creating art specifically for the	June 30, 2027
Provide 12 classroom art education experiences for local schools with artists.	June 30, 2027

Activity 3: Environmental Education

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

MVRF Partner School Program, which seeks to provide positive connections with nature for students, teachers, and the community and promote stewardship in the lower Minnesota River Valley. Partner schools receive on-refuge field days

with educators, developing skills and comfortability in the outdoors across seasons and years. These long-term partnerships allow refuge staff to establish relationships with teachers and school administration.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit 10 new schools into Partner School Program	June 30, 2027
Establish 25 new School Yard Habitats with classroom curriculum and Refuge field trips.	June 30, 2027
Host 15 new experience field trips (e.g. fishing, snowshoeing, bird watching).	June 30, 2027

Activity 4: Youth Internships

Activity Budget: \$20,000

Activity Description:

Minnesota Valley "DUCKS" High School Internship. While expanding their familiarity with refuge lands, interns develop career readiness skills, learn about conservation career pathways, and network with partner organizations. Interns utilize their new skillsets by actively contributing to the refuge's conservation mission and serving as ambassadors for Minnesota Valley NWR. DUCKS interns support refuge staff with restoration projects, both on and in the community, and assist with outreach events aimed at connecting all members of the Twin Cities community with the National Wildlife Refuge in their backyard. Crew Leaders - High School Conservation Internship Team is a 16-week, 2 member team, that assists the Internship Coordinator in providing training, supervision, and mentorship to lead a youth crew both on the refuge and within the Twin Cities community. This position will engage youth in first-time outdoor recreation experiences including: fishing, paddling, hiking, nature photography, bird watching, and biking. Environmental Education Teaching Internship is a 12-month practical training program for beginning professionals focused on leading field trips for K-8th grade students, partnership coordination and program development.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Host Minnesota Valley "DUCKS" High School Internship	June 30, 2027
Host Crew Leaders - High School Conservation Internship Team	June 30, 2027
Expand Environmental Education Teaching Internship program.	June 30, 2027

Activity 5: Blue Goose Bus

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

We provide free transportation to and from the Refuge to 10,000 students from schools each year where at least 50% qualify for free and reduce lunch. This gives these students the opportunity to study nature in nature. In recent years, we have expanded our free transportation program to young adults in career exploration programs, underserved communities with disabilities, access to education and career building opportunities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Provide transportation to 25,000 students.	June 30, 2027
Provide transportation to 10 additional alternative learning programs/school.	June 30, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Eric Mruz	Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge	Interim Refuge Director	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?

These programs are ever-evolving and adapting to the needs of the communities, schools, and families we serve, being informed by their participation, their involvement in further education and volunteer opportunities, and development of new programs, events, and education curriculum. These programs are consistently supported by Refuge staff and continued funding is a high priority for Friends' staff including individual and corporate donors, as well as foundation grants.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Alison Schaub

Job Title: Executive Director

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

I am the current Executive Director of the MN Valley Refuge Friends and oversee the allocation of donated and grant funds at the Minnesota Valley Refuge.

Organization: Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends

Organization Description:

The Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends (MVRF) is the official citizen support group of the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge (MVNWR). Since the Refuge was established in 1976, citizens have been involved with the expansion and enhancement of the over 14,000 acres of protected habitat for both wildlife and lovers of the outdoors. The Purpose of MVRF is to assist the Refuge in accomplishing its mission. Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends works in partnership with the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge to support a thriving urban refuge through education, conservation and nature-based activities.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
Confluence Art Gallery Artists	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Art education sessions for field trips.				-		\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Refuge Buddies Program	Provide gear, access to educators for Refuge experiences/programs.					\$25,000
	Tools and Supplies	Confluence Art Gallery Education	Provide supplies and access to artist educators for onsite art experiences.					\$20,000
	Tools and Supplies	Partner School Program supplies.	Provide gear and supplies for partner schools.					\$20,000
	Tools and Supplies	School Yard Habitats	Provide supplies and curriculum to partner schools.					\$15,000
	Tools and Supplies	New Experience Field Trips	Provide gear and supplies for onsite field trip experiences.					\$15,000
	Tools and Supplies	Internship Program Supplies	Provide gear and supplies for intern programs.					\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$110,000
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-

Travel In Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Conference and continuing education opportunities for interns.	Conference and continuing education opportunities for interns.					\$5,000
	Other	Free field trip transportation. 25000 students.	Provide underserved communities and schools with access to nature, conservation, and environmental issues.					\$50,000
							Sub Total	\$55,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Confluence Art Gallery Exhibition Support	Print materials necessary to support gallery exhibitions.					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Other Expenses								
		Refuge Buddies Stipends	Provide funding for Refuge Buddies to provide additional programming beyond provided gear.					\$25,000
							Sub Total	\$25,000
							Grand Total	\$210,000

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	-

Total Project Cost: \$210,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [a9f922d9-986.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Field trip, intern, and education program participants....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	cf0c0a7c-8ef.pdf
2023 Financial Packet	cb67276a-2c2.pdf
2022 990	784b4f81-643.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution	8c149ac6-e1f.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Kara Zwickey, Eric Mruz (MVNWR)

