



## Youth Education & Engagement Projects - Grant Overview

### For Projects in Minnesota State Parks and Trails

#### A. Grant Program Overview

Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota is proud to offer a grant program designed to support friends groups in implementing youth education- and engagement-focused projects in state parks and trails.

Parks and trails serve an important role in engaging kids and students in nature. Studies have shown that children who don't build a connection to the natural world when they are young are far less likely to be environmental stewards when they are adults. Therefore, getting kids to visit a park or trail and participate in outdoor activities is an important way to connect youth with nature and help to build the next generation of environmental stewards.

Friends groups are uniquely positioned to assist in these efforts thanks to their commitment to stewardship of parks and trails, their working relationships with the land management agency and the community at large, and their efforts to actively connect people to their public lands. Engaging youth through learning and appreciating the outdoors is vital for Minnesota's public lands to thrive. These values align with the mission of the Parks & Trails Council.

In 2019, this grant program will award up to \$10,000 in small grants of \$500 or \$1,000 to qualifying friends groups with appropriate projects.

#### B. Applicant Eligibility

Applicants must be a friends group that directly supports a Minnesota State Park or State Trail. See the P&TC definition of friends groups on the website: <https://www.parksandtrails.org/friends-groups/>. Applicants must also be a member of Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota. Annual membership starts at \$35/year.

#### C. Timeline

- Late June 2019: Grant announcement

- August 27, 2019: Application and budget due to P&TC
- September 27, 2019: P&TC issues award decisions
- October 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020: Project implementation period
- July 15, 2020: Final Report due

## D. Grant Project Goals and Focus

Each project shall focus on engaging and educating youth at a state park or state trail. These projects are intended to complement existing interpretive activities. This grant opportunity will not fund existing projects or programs, but rather supplemental initiatives.

### Project examples:

- Securing transportation for kids/students to the park/trail for interpretive activities
- Offsetting costs of educational speaker or program fees
- Engaging students in pre- and post-field trip activities
- Creating new interpretive activities or expanding existing interpretive activities

The friends group is expected to take the lead on planning and implementation of the project. For example, depending on the project, the friends group will initiate contact with school groups, arrange transportation, secure speakers, and attend/lead the group at an event. Parks & Trails Council recognizes that friends groups have different strengths, and the project examples listed above may or may not fit into the skills and capacity of any particular friends group.

### Project criteria:

- Project must include educational activities.
  - i.e. water quality, raptors and bird watching, plants and animals, maple syruping, weather and seasons, watersheds, prairies and forests, etc.
- Recreational activities may also be included, as long as there is an educational component.
  - i.e. fishing with water quality, hiking with plant or tree identification, snowshoeing to find animal tracks, etc.
- For this grant program, youth is defined as kids in grades K-12. Project may engage school classes, after-school programs, youth groups, church groups, etc. that are made up of kids in grades K-12.
  - Project should ideally have an emphasis of engaging with youth underrepresented in park and trail visitation.
  - Project should help cultivate relationships with schools or other youth-serving organizations.
- Project must demonstrate how it complements educational initiatives that already exist at the park or trail.
- Project should align with the friends group's mission.

## E. Partners

During the application process, the friends group shall work closely with their DNR representative to identify and develop a project scope, ensuring the project complements existing initiatives and supports the overall educational mission of the park or trail. After mutually agreeing upon a desired project, the DNR representative shall provide a letter of project approval while the friends group drafts and submits the application. If the friends group secures the grant, the DNR will continue to serve as a resource as the friends group carries out the project.

Parks & Trails Council will serve as the grant issuer. P&TC will remain available and engaged as needed through the grant planning and implementation process. This project serves as an opportunity for friends groups and P&TC to strengthen their working relationship for future collaboration. The main contact is Ashley Pethan, Friends Group Coordinator ([apethan@parksandtrails.org](mailto:apethan@parksandtrails.org) or 651-726-2457).

Depending on the project, friends groups will need to cultivate relationships with schools or other youth-serving organizations in order to implement the project.

## F. Budget and Financial Accounting Procedures

Selected grant recipients will be awarded either \$500 or \$1,000 to complete their specified project. In the application, grant applicants must indicate the amount they are requesting.

The supporting budget (template provided) will include a line-item breakdown for the project. Applicants are encouraged to work with friends members and agency staff in developing the budget.

### Eligible expenses

- Transportation: bus or other transportation costs
- Contract fees: educational speaker or program fees
- Project materials: supplies or materials for activities

### Ineligible expenses

- Materials not used directly for this project
- DNR or P&TC staff time
- Infrastructure (i.e. signs)

### Distribution

The grant funds will be issued to the friends group in one of three ways. Regardless of method, the money will be issued at the beginning of the project implementation period.

1. If the friends group is not a fiscal client of P&TC and has its own checking account, P&TC will issue a check for the total grant amount made out to the friends group.

2. If the friends group is a fiscal client of P&TC, P&TC will transfer the money directly into the group's fiscal client financial account.
3. If the friends group is not a fiscal client of P&TC and does not have its own checking account, P&TC may issue a debit card pre-loaded with the total grant amount to the friends group.

Friends groups should create a monitoring practice to track their expenses to ensure the project stays within budget—this includes saving receipts and invoices to document expenditures. Information about how the funds were used will need to be reported on the final report.

More details about the financial process will be shared with the grant recipients at a later time.

### Match

While a financial match is not required, careful consideration will be given to projects that include a financial match of any amount.

## G. Reporting

Grant recipients shall submit a final report to describe the process, challenges and successes, and impact of the project. A template—in a question and answer format—for the report will be issued to the selected grant recipients at the time of award notification.

Report content will include:

- Measurable data: number of students engaged, volunteer hours contributed, number of activities developed, etc.
- Narrative: descriptions of the activities, quotes from volunteers or speakers, lessons learned, etc.
- Photo/video documentation: group shots, candid pictures or video, pictures of the activities created, etc.
- Financial information: how the grant money was actually used.

## H. Application Process

### Selection Criteria

Projects will be selected on a number of criteria, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Friends group demonstrates capacity to implement such a project.
- Project plan is compelling and thorough.
- Project complements existing agency educational/interpretive activities and does not supplant an existing initiative.
- Special consideration will be given to projects that engage with a population of youth underrepresented in park and trail visitation.
- Project highlights achievable tasks along a reasonable timeline.
- Detailed budget meets the project's criteria.

- Special consideration will be given to projects that include a financial match.
- Project establishes clear methods of collaboration among partners.
- Project demonstrates short- and long-term positive impacts on the youth, friends group, and park or trail.

### Application Documents

- Application: This Word document includes prompts for applicants to answer.
- Budget Template: This Excel document includes a line item budget.
- Letter of Project Approval Template: This letter draft Word document should be edited by the DNR representative and submitted with the application and budget.

### Submission

Before submitting, if you have any questions about your project idea, financial plan, or other items, please connect with the Friends Group Coordinator, Ashley Pethan, to discuss (651-726-2457).

Please submit the Application, Budget, and Letter of Project Approval to the Parks & Trails Council by August 27, 2019. These documents can be submitted via email to [friends@parksandtrails.org](mailto:friends@parksandtrails.org). Accommodations can be made for different methods of submission, if needed. Please reach out if your group is experiencing any difficulties with the file formats or submitting the documents.

## I. Grant Program Impact

This grant program intends to assist friends groups in their efforts to engage more people, especially youth, in learning about and enjoying Minnesota's state parks and trails. The projects have the potential to involve youth of all interests and backgrounds in outdoor activities, fostering curiosity, appreciation, and wonder for nature. Hands-on, tangible activities can help advance the message of the importance of parks and trails and how public lands play a role in each of our lives. Engagement can inspire future connection to and stewardship of parks and trails.

A goal of this program is to expand the impact of the friends group by cultivating ideas and jump-starting a unique project. With collaboration among partners—friends groups, the land management agency, P&TC, and youth-serving organizations—this opportunity intends to inspire ongoing engagement and teamwork in future projects.