



## Connecting Youth, Adults, and Families to Minnesota's Cultural and Outdoor Heritage

***Wilderness Inquiry envisions a day when every Minnesotan has the opportunity to access our state's lands and waters and connect to our rich outdoor heritage.***

For 45 years, Wilderness Inquiry has connected people of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities through shared outdoor adventures so that all people can equitably experience the benefits of time spent in nature. Our programs serve more than 12,000 Minnesotans annually in communities throughout the state, highlighting our rich culture and natural resources through place-based education. We offer a progression of outdoor experiences that build confidence, connection, persistence, and stewardship ethics in young people.

### **Canoemobile**

Wilderness Inquiry's "floating classroom," Canoemobile, brings outdoor learning to life through place-based educational programs on waterways and public lands across Minnesota. In each community, we work with local partners to conduct immersive, nature-based educational activities that include canoeing, fishing, history of place, and environmental education activities, and provide an introduction to local resources for future participation in the outdoors. Canoemobile programming has helped students improve school performance, cultivate a stewardship ethic, and create pathways to pursue educational and career opportunities in the outdoors.

### **Pyramid of Engagement**

The Pyramid of Engagement provides a progression of outdoor experiences designed to engage participants in a lifelong relationship with the outdoors. We welcome participants of any age and at any level of outdoor experience, supporting individuals on their own journey into the outdoors. Adventures that follow this progression include:

- Introductory outdoor educational experiences for youth that align with state graduation standards and develop social and emotional learning capacities
- Near-nature experiences for families, community members, affinity groups, and multi-generational groups to explore the outdoors close to home
- Immersive trips to the Boundary Waters, Voyageurs National Park, and other natural areas
- Training and career pathways that provide opportunities for youth and young adults to build outdoor skills, attain credentials, and pursue professional opportunities in Minnesota's \$9.9-billion outdoor recreation sector



## Proposal

Wilderness Inquiry seeks funding in FY24-25 from the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund to:

- Expand our work in Minnesota to provide a continuum of outdoor experiences for youth, adults, and families in communities across Minnesota
- Connect 11,000 individuals of all ages, backgrounds, identities, and abilities to Minnesota's outdoor heritage through a progression of outdoor adventures
- Provide standards-based educational content through hands-on activities that engage students with Minnesota history and culture
- Provide training and career pathway opportunities that tie to outdoor careers and Minnesota's outdoor heritage
- Support the physical, mental, and social-emotional wellbeing of Minnesota youth, adults, and families through immersive outdoor experiences

Our programs are designed to break down barriers to access for individuals and communities that are historically underrepresented in outdoor spaces and activities – specifically, individuals who identify as BIPOC and/or LGBTQ+, those who experience financial inequity, and individuals with disabilities.

Since FY16, with support from the Arts & Cultural Heritage Fund, more than 26,000 individuals have participated in Wilderness Inquiry's educational and recreational programs that foster connections to Minnesota's natural resources and cultural history.

<b>Project Budget</b>	\$525,000	FY24 Legacy Request (5,000 participants)
	\$625,000	FY25 Legacy Request (6,000 participants)
	<b>\$1,150,000</b>	<b>FY24-25 Legacy Request (11,000 participants; avg. \$105/participant)</b>

## Community Need

According to a report by the Outdoor Foundation, only 18% of adults and children get outside at least once per week. Additionally, children in the U.S. spend an average of only 4-7 minutes playing outside per day. Hundreds of research studies now demonstrate that outdoor learning improves student performance, increases participation in learning activities, strengthens attention, and positively impacts career motivation. For adults, nature provides a space for social connection, physical and mental health, and links to history and culture. Quality family experiences, like spending time in nature together, directly support positive youth development such as improved academic performance and increased graduation rates. Of Wilderness Inquiry participants, 12% identify as a person with a disability, 48% identify as a person of color, and 61% experience financial inequity. For 80% of youth participants, Wilderness Inquiry provides their first organized nature-based experience in the outdoors.

## Impact

- Engage youth, families, and members of the community with Minnesota's history and cultural heritage through outdoor educational and recreational programs
- Deliver standards-based and hands-on content connected to Minnesota state standards, supporting the academic and social-emotional development of participants
- Expand access and engagement in the outdoors statewide
- Partner with state and federal agencies, Minnesota tribes, school districts, educators, community leaders, and families to promote equity and inclusion in the outdoors
- Lead activities that teach Minnesota history and culture while building skills in camping, fishing, canoeing, hiking, fire building, species identification, and orienteering
- Engage individuals across Minnesota through a progression of outdoor experiences that build confidence, connection, and interest in our state's outdoor history and culture

## Contacts

**Erika Rivers, Executive Director**  
erika@wildernessinquiry.org  
612-676-9403

**Willy Tully, Development Director**  
willy@wildernessinquiry.org  
612-676-9430