



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

Agenda Item

Item 7. B. – Approve Educator Mini Grants

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

At the November 12, 2024, meeting of the Citizen Advisory Committee, applications for Educator Mini Grants were reviewed. This is the second round of grants for 2024. The first round of Educator Mini Grants was approved in March 2024. An email was sent to schools that students living in the LMRWD attend – both public and private.

A total of 4 applications were received in this round of funding, requesting a total of \$1,929.69. There was \$11,000 in the 2024 budget for the Educator Mini-grant program. \$2,475 was requested in the first round of funding.

The Educator Mini Grant program has two rounds of funding annually. Guidelines for the program can be found on the LMRWD website using this link:

<https://lowermnriverwd.org/makeadifference/educator-mini-grants>

The applications were shared with the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) who ranked the programs and has provided recommendations to the LMRWD Board of Managers. There was not a quorum of the CAC at the March 5, 2024, meeting, those that were in attendance voted to suspend the bylaws for the purpose of approving the recommendations.

The recommendations made by the CAC are provided in Technical Memorandum – Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations – Fall Round 2024, dated December 4, 2024.

Attachments

Technical Memorandum – Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations – Fall Round 2024, dated December 4, 2024

Recommended Action

Motion to approve Educator Mini Grants as recommended by the Citizen Advisory Committee

Technical Memorandum



To: Linda Loomis, Administrator
Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD)

From: Rachel Kapsch, Water Resources Scientist
Suzy Lindberg, Communications Manager

Date: December 4, 2024

Re: Educator Mini-Grant Recommendations–Fall Round 2024

The Educator Mini-Grant program is a key component of the Education and Outreach (E&O) Program, focusing on educating school-aged students within and surrounding the Lower Minnesota River Watershed District (LMRWD). The program provides up to 10 grants per school year—with a maximum fund distribution of \$500 per recipient—to help offset the costs associated with water and natural resource educational materials or programming.

On behalf of the LMRWD, Young Environmental Consulting Group, LLC (Young Environmental) announced a new round of educator mini-grants in October and received **four applications**, including requests for a total of **\$1,929.79** in funding. Young Environmental prescreened the applications for compliance and funding eligibility and created review packets that were distributed to the Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) for evaluation at the November 12, 2024, meeting. The Young Environmental team facilitated a discussion of the applications, working with the CAC to discuss justifications for the educational relevance and cost-effectiveness of each grant application and ultimately vote on recommendations. Based on the resulting discussion, the CAC has provided the following recommendations for Board approval.

SUMMARY

Based on the review process, Young Environmental and the CAC recommend authorizing funding for all four submitted applications, noting their alignment with the LMRWD’s mission and goals for watershed-focused education. This recommendation, if approved, would authorize \$1,929.79 in funding to four current applicants. A summary of the scoring matrix and comments from the CAC is included below. Attachment 1 provides a full summary of CAC scoring. We have also included a compilation of the mini-grant applications received in Attachment 2.

Mini-Grant	Summary	Total Average Score	Recommended Board Action
Mini-Grant 1: Shakopee High School	Funds will be used to buy waders to facilitate a water quality sampling and sorting experience.	8	Recommend approving the funding request for \$449.95.
Mini-Grant 2: Chaska High School	Funds will be used for two Vernier dissolved oxygen sensors for students to use as part of water quality testing.	7.8	Recommend approving the funding request for \$500.
Mini-Grant 3: Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends	Funds will support the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge programming.	5	Recommend approving the funding request for \$500.
Mini-Grant 4: Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School	Funds will be used for handheld microscopes to support the Wondering Walk Initiative.	7.2	Recommend approving the funding request for \$479.84.
TOTAL GRANT AMOUNT REQUESTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL			\$1,929.79

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District - Educator Mini-Grant Evaluation

Fall 2024 Round



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

Mini-Grant Summary	Amount Requested	Applicant Contact	Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and Staff Vote							TOTAL AVG SCORE	CAC Recommendation	Notes
			Judy Berglund*	Greg Genz*	Patty Thomsen*	Lee Peterson	Holley Wlodarczyk*	Linda Loomis (Administrator)	Suzy Lindberg (Young Env.)			
Mini-Grant 1: <i>Shakopee High School</i> Money will be spent on waders for water quality sampling and sorting experience.	\$449.95	Claire Bleser cbleser@shakopeeschools.org	8	-	-	8	8	8	8	8	The CAC recommends approval.	Linda advised approving this one with the context that Claire was previously the Riley-Purgatory Bluff Administrator.
Mini-Grant 2: <i>Chaska High School</i> Money will be spent on two Vernier dissolved oxygen sensors for students to use as part of water quality testing.	\$500	Kelly Dreier dreierk@district112.org	8	-	-	8	7	8	8	7.8	The CAC recommends approval.	

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District - Educator Mini-Grant Evaluation

Fall 2024 Round



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

Mini-Grant Summary	Amount Requested	Applicant Contact	Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and Staff Vote							TOTAL AVG SCORE	CAC Recommendation	Notes
			Meah Vogel*	Karl Disney*	John Williams*	Kathryn Zebrev*	Kati Johngrass					
Mini-Grant 1: <i>Shakopee High School</i> Money will be spent on waders for water quality sampling and sorting experience.	\$449.95	Claire Bleser cbleser@shakopeeschools.org	-	-	-	-	8			8	The CAC recommends approval.	Linda advised approving this one with the context that Claire was previously the Riley-Purgatory Bluff Administrator.
Mini-Grant 2: <i>Chaska High School</i> Money will be spent on two Vernier dissolved oxygen sensors for students to use as part of water quality testing.	\$500	Kelly Dreier dreierk@district112.org	-	-	-	-	8			7.8	The CAC recommends approval.	

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District - Educator Mini-Grant Evaluation Fall 2024 Round



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

Mini-Grant Summary	Amount Requested	Applicant Contact	Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) and Staff Vote							TOTAL AVG SCORE	CAC Recommendation	Notes
			Judy Berglund*	Greg Genz*	Patty Thomsen*	Lee Peterson	Holley Wlodarczyk*	Linda Loomis (Administrator)	Suzy Lindberg (Young Env.)			
Mini Grant 3: <i>Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends</i> Money will be used for supplies and materials to support hand-on learning and education opportunities.	\$500	Alison Schaub hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org	5	-	-	6	5	5	5	5	The CAC recommends approval.	Based upon partnership goals, Linda advised that we move forward with this one while asking additional questions.
Mini-Grant 4: <i>Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School</i> Money will be used for handheld microscopes to support Wondering Walk Initiative.	\$479.84	Michele Link-Valenstein michele.linkvalenstein@isd197.org	8	-	-	8	6	8	7	7.2	The CAC recommends approval.	CAC discussion involved questions on what exactly the funds be used for; however other members were excited about the experience for students within nature.

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District - Educator Mini-Grant Evaluation

Fall 2024 Round



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER
WATERSHED DISTRICT

Mini-Grant Summary	Amount Requested	Applicant Contact	Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) Members					Staff Vote		TOTAL AVG SCORE	CAC Recommendation	Notes
			Meah Vogel*	Karl Disney*	John Williams*	Kathryn Zebrev*	Kati Johngrass					
Mini Grant 3: <i>Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends</i> Money will be used for supplies and materials to support hand-on learning and education opportunities.	\$500	Alison Schaub hello@mnvalleyrefugefriends.org	-	-	-	-	4			5	The CAC recommends approval.	Based upon partnership goals, Linda advised that we move forward with this one while asking additional questions.
Mini-Grant 4: <i>Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School</i> Money will be used for handheld microscopes to support Wondering Walk Initiative.	\$479.84	Michele Link-Valenstein michele.linkvalenstein@isd197.org	-	-	-	-	6			7.2	The CAC recommends approval.	

*Note: 6 CAC members were absent from the November 12 monthly meeting and did not contribute to the scoring. They were provided with the mini-grant application package and our staff followed up with them offline to request scores. While we did not receive input from every CAC member, there was general consensus with members and staff in attendance on their review of applications.



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application Evaluation Form

Shakopee High School, Shakopee, MN

Purpose

This document provides information on the funding decision process for the educator mini-grant program application.

Screening

All applications received on or before the deadline will be prescreened. Staff and members of the Citizen Advisory Committee will then review applications based on the project quality metrics below. Each application will be given a numerical score by each reviewing member. While funds last, funding recommendations will be presented to the Board of Managers using the assigned scores.

Incomplete or late applications will not be considered for funding.

Scoring

Applicants who do not meet the required prescreening criteria will not be considered for funding (i.e., if there is a “no” response to any of the questions). Applications who meet prescreening eligibility are then scored numerically based on project quality. Project quality will be ranked as follows:

Five or more points..... Forward to managers for funding approval

Under five points..... Will not be considered for funding

Note: Instructions on this form are for grant reviewers. No action is required by grant applicants.

Eligibility Prescreening

Is the applicant located within the LMRWD or a member city?Yes/No

Is this the first mini-grant for this recipient for the current academic year?.....Yes/No

Are all application questions complete?Yes/No

Project Quality

Instructions for reviewer: Rate all questions on a 0–2 scale and calculate the total score.

How satisfactory is the level of detail in the project application?

very unsatisfactory (0) (1) (2) very satisfactory

How well does this project address the LMRWD goals around education and awareness relating to water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat?

very unsatisfactory (0) (1) (2) very satisfactory

How well does the activity or project enhance participant learning and engagement?

not well (0) (1) (2) very well

Does the proposed activity or project seem like a sensible use of funds to further LMRWD goals?

very unreasonable (0) (1) (2) very reasonable

Total Score	_____
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Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

Describe your current role?

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

What age(s) are the participants?

K–5th grade

6–12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:

Date:



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application Evaluation Form

Chaska High School, Chaska, MN

Purpose

This document provides information on the funding decision process for the educator mini-grant program application.

Screening

All applications received on or before the deadline will be prescreened. Staff and members of the Citizen Advisory Committee will then review applications based on the project quality metrics below. Each application will be given a numerical score by each reviewing member. While funds last, funding recommendations will be presented to the Board of Managers using the assigned scores.

Incomplete or late applications will not be considered for funding.

Scoring

Applicants who do not meet the required prescreening criteria will not be considered for funding (i.e., if there is a “no” response to any of the questions). Applications who meet prescreening eligibility are then scored numerically based on project quality. Project quality will be ranked as follows:

Five or more points..... Forward to managers for funding approval

Under five points..... Will not be considered for funding

Note: Instructions on this form are for grant reviewers. No action is required by grant applicants.

Eligibility Prescreening

Is the applicant located within the LMRWD or a member city?Yes/No

Is this the first mini-grant for this recipient for the current academic year?.....Yes/No

Are all application questions complete?Yes/No

Project Quality

Instructions for reviewer: Rate all questions on a 0–2 scale and calculate the total score.

How satisfactory is the level of detail in the project application?

very unsatisfactory (0) (1) (2) very satisfactory

How well does this project address the LMRWD goals around education and awareness relating to water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat?

very unsatisfactory (0) (1) (2) very satisfactory

How well does the activity or project enhance participant learning and engagement?

not well (0) (1) (2) very well

Does the proposed activity or project seem like a sensible use of funds to further LMRWD goals?

very unreasonable (0) (1) (2) very reasonable

Total Score	_____
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Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

Describe your current role?

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

What age(s) are the participants?

K–5th grade

6–12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:

Date:



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application Evaluation Form

Minnesota Valley Refuge Friends, Bloomington, MN

Purpose

This document provides information on the funding decision process for the educator mini-grant program application.

Screening

All applications received on or before the deadline will be prescreened. Staff and members of the Citizen Advisory Committee will then review applications based on the project quality metrics below. Each application will be given a numerical score by each reviewing member. While funds last, funding recommendations will be presented to the Board of Managers using the assigned scores.

Incomplete or late applications will not be considered for funding.

Scoring

Applicants who do not meet the required prescreening criteria will not be considered for funding (i.e., if there is a “no” response to any of the questions). Applications who meet prescreening eligibility are then scored numerically based on project quality. Project quality will be ranked as follows:

Five or more points..... Forward to managers for funding approval

Under five points..... Will not be considered for funding

Note: Instructions on this form are for grant reviewers. No action is required by grant applicants.

Eligibility Prescreening

Is the applicant located within the LMRWD or a member city?Yes/No

Is this the first mini-grant for this recipient for the current academic year?.....Yes/No

Are all application questions complete?Yes/No

Project Quality

Instructions for reviewer: Rate all questions on a 0–2 scale and calculate the total score.

How satisfactory is the level of detail in the project application?

very unsatisfactory ① ② very satisfactory

How well does this project address the LMRWD goals around education and awareness relating to water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat?

very unsatisfactory ① ② very satisfactory

How well does the activity or project enhance participant learning and engagement?

not well ① ② very well

Does the proposed activity or project seem like a sensible use of funds to further LMRWD goals?

very unreasonable ① ② very reasonable

Total Score	_____
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Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization:

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

Describe your current role?

If you are a student, please provide the name and email of your supervising educator.

Address of School/Organization

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Name and Address Where Activity Will Take Place (if Different from Above)

Street Address:

Address line 2:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

What age(s) are the participants?

K–5th grade

6–12th grade

18+ years

Senior

Estimated number of participants:

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place?

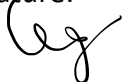
Total requested amount (maximum \$500):

\$

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:



Date:



Educator Mini-Grant Program Application Evaluation Form

Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School, Eagan, MN

Purpose

This document provides information on the funding decision process for the educator mini-grant program application.

Screening

All applications received on or before the deadline will be prescreened. Staff and members of the Citizen Advisory Committee will then review applications based on the project quality metrics below. Each application will be given a numerical score by each reviewing member. While funds last, funding recommendations will be presented to the Board of Managers using the assigned scores.

Incomplete or late applications will not be considered for funding.

Scoring

Applicants who do not meet the required prescreening criteria will not be considered for funding (i.e., if there is a “no” response to any of the questions). Applications who meet prescreening eligibility are then scored numerically based on project quality. Project quality will be ranked as follows:

Five or more points..... Forward to managers for funding approval

Under five points..... Will not be considered for funding

Note: Instructions on this form are for grant reviewers. No action is required by grant applicants.

Eligibility Prescreening

Is the applicant located within the LMRWD or a member city?Yes/No

Is this the first mini-grant for this recipient for the current academic year?.....Yes/No

Are all application questions complete?Yes/No

Project Quality

Instructions for reviewer: Rate all questions on a 0–2 scale and calculate the total score.

How satisfactory is the level of detail in the project application?

very unsatisfactory ① ② very satisfactory

How well does this project address the LMRWD goals around education and awareness relating to water quality, water conservation, and wildlife habitat?

very unsatisfactory ① ② very satisfactory

How well does the activity or project enhance participant learning and engagement?

not well ① ② very well

Does the proposed activity or project seem like a sensible use of funds to further LMRWD goals?

very unreasonable ① ② very reasonable

Total Score	_____
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Educator Mini-Grant Program Application

Name of School/Organization: **Pilot Knob STEM Magnet School**

First Name: **Michele**

Last Name: **Link-Valenstein**

Email: michele.linkvalenstein@isd197.org

Phone: **651-428-1634**

Describe your current role? **K-4 STEM Teacher and Magnet Facilitator**

Address of School/Organization

Street Address: **1436 Lone Oak Rd**

Address line 2:

City: **Eagan**

State: **MN**

Zip Code: **55121**

What age(s) are the participants?

K–5th grade 6–12th grade 18+ years Senior Estimated number of participants: 384

Describe your proposed activity or project and how it relates to water resources and wildlife habitat education. Include project goals and learning objectives for participants.

I would like to order 16 handheld microscopes to support the Wondering Walk initiative at Pilot Knob this year. The goal behind Wondering Walks is to encourage curiosity, observation, and a sense of wonder about the natural world. As a building, we are working hard to help our students notice and take in the details of the natural world. We want to help them learn how to ask questions and notice the things around them that they might sometimes overlook or ignore. Our hope is that taking students on Wondering Walks will help them develop a deeper connection to the natural world.

Handheld microscopes are an ideal match for Wondering Walks, because they allow students to observe tiny details that are often overlooked. Our students can use them to study the pond water in the woods behind our school and examine the soil more closely.

They can look at plant anatomy more closely and observe bark, sand, and rocks in a deeper way. They can find evidence of animals living in the woods and look at things like footprints more carefully. The use of these microscopes on some of our Wondering Walks will likely lead to deeper questions, stronger observations, and discovery about the natural world.

Ultimately our goal this year is to help students rediscover a sense of wonder about the natural world. Sometimes in the world of STEM, the study of the natural world is lost and we don't want that to be the case for our students. One of our goals this year is to teach our students about the history of the land Pilot Knob sits on (Dakota Land) and to help them envision how to be good stewards of the land for future generations. The first step is to give them an appreciation for what is right in front of their eyes.

When is this activity/project scheduled to take place? **The use of the handheld microscopes will be ongoing.**

Total requested amount (maximum \$500): **\$479.84**

Specify how funds will be allocated (e.g. supplies, materials, and transportation):

This will purchase 16 handheld microscopes for kids.

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0D56Q3BFN?ref=cm_sw_r_cso_em_apin_dp_JZPB1T1YNB208KAHSQYF_1&ref=cm_sw_r_cso_em_apin_dp_JZPB1T1YNB208KAHSQYF_1&social_share=cm_sw_r_cso_em_apin_dp_JZPB1T1YNB208KAHSQYF_1&starsLeft=1&skipTwisterOG=1&th=1

I understand that if my funding request is approved, I must complete and submit the Program Project Reporting and Reimbursement form to receive payment. Any photos submitted may be used by the LMRWD in future communications.

Signature:



Date: **10/14/2024**

Please submit your application to
info@lowermnrivewd.org.