



Minnesota Community Schoolyards™ Program Frequently Asked Questions

How will projects be selected?

Applications will be scored according to the matrix provided in this application, with school commitment, readiness, and need being most important. As we build a statewide program, we want to ensure a mix of geography and community types. As such, we have set an intention of funding two projects in Greater Minnesota and two projects within the Twin Cities metro.

How do you determine schools of high need?

Trust for Public Land recognizes the unfortunate reality that many of our schoolyard spaces would benefit from a renovation. However, with limited resources, we must prioritize schools that most urgently need access to high-quality green space. We recognize some schools have opened since that analysis. If your school was not included in the analysis or opened after 2020, we will work with you to gather the appropriate data.

How does scoring work?

Selection for schools is scored out of 100 points, based on the following criteria:

Topic	Maximum Potential Points
Commitment: Community Schoolyard projects require an investment of the school community’s time and resources. To succeed, schools must secure internal leadership support, including the principal, facilities department, and superintendent. Additionally, the school must commit to providing public access to the schoolyard space outside of regular school hours.	30
Readiness: Projects should be able to become ‘shovel-ready’ in relatively short order. Partners must confirm that no planned construction projects—playground, school grounds, school building, parking lot and circulation, utility work, or otherwise—will conflict with potential improvements to the schoolyard.	20
Area of High Need: We give the highest priority to schools serving communities in need. This includes but is not limited to communities of color, low-income communities, areas with health disparities, neighborhoods lacking access to parks and outdoor space, and areas most impacted by climate change. The 2021 Statewide Assessment is used as a benchmark for determining needs. However, we know that other data sources and community narratives will also play a factor in identifying need.	20

Vision: Schools partners should hold an imaginative, creative vision for their space that incorporates nature and outdoor learning, pushing beyond traditional playground design. Schools should also make space for a robust engagement process that centers fun, imagination, and openness.	10
Partnerships: Successful schools will hold well-established partnerships with groups such as community groups, parents, parks departments, public health departments, civic organizations, and funders.	10
Availability of Resources: When partners are able to provide their own additional capital investment funds, it opens doors to leveraging those dollars for greater impact. It is most helpful when matching funds are allocated through an agreement or capital improvement budget allocation. Matching funds may come from school, local, grant, or donor funds.	10
Total Points	100

Can you tell me more about the Student Leader Class concept?

The Student Leader Class is a great way to engage and educate students on a number of topics through a real-world project and place they care about deeply. The program can be scaled to meet school/teacher needs, but typically runs 10-12 weeks, once a week, for an hour each week. In an elementary school setting, we recommend the Student Leader Class program for a 3rd or 4th grade class. For secondary schools, the program is more flexible. While TPL staff provide all materials and present content, the program works best when classroom teachers are actively involved, make connections to class concepts/content, and manage behavior issues.

How is this program funded?

This program is funded through the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF). In 1988, 77 percent of Minnesota voters approved a constitutional amendment establishing the ENRTF—a constitutionally dedicated fund that originates from a combination of Minnesota State Lottery proceeds and investment income. The purpose of ENRTF is to provide a long-term, consistent, and stable source of funding for activities that protect, conserve, preserve, and enhance Minnesota’s air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources for the benefit of current citizens and future generations.

TPL’s Community Schoolyards program has been recommended for funding by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources (LCCMR). That recommendation is being considered by the Minnesota Legislature but has not yet been approved. While we have strong indications this will be approved, there is a slight chance this may not occur, in which case Trust for Public Land reserves the right to delay and/or cancel this cohort round of applications.

Trust for Public Land is seeking additional public and private dollars to enhance and expand this program. If you are or know of a potential partner for this work, please contact Program Director, Eric Weiss at eric.weiss@tpl.org.

How will funds be allocated?

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) works under a reimbursement model. A regrant agreement between TPL and schools will establish the partnership and reimbursement protocols.

Who will manage construction?

Schools are expected to manage construction and related bidding, contractor agreements, and maintenance. Trust for Public Land can provide limited technical assistance and support as needed.

What is school level are you currently accepting?

TPL’s Minnesota Community Schoolyards has four levels of schoolyard improvements. We are currently accepting “Milkweeds.” From small, single site improvements to full schoolyard transformations, there’s benefit in a spectrum of improvements. Milkweeds is our second level of site improvement.

	Level 1 – Sprouts	Level 2 – Milkweeds	Level 3 – Dogwoods	Level 4 - Evergreens
Engagement	Minimal	Robust	Robust	Extended
Student Leader Class	Not Included	Included	Included	Included
Timeline	Under 1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	2-3 years
Minimum Funding Needs (soft and hard costs)	\$50,000	\$250,000	\$500,000	\$1 million

What if we have a playground renovation project planned? Can this effort be combined with other initiatives?

Coupling this opportunity with a planned playground or other site improvement project is a perfect fit. We will work with your team to align site design, timeline, and funding.

Can we apply for grants or fundraise for additional site improvements?

If selected, TPL will work with you to secure additional funding, although additional funding cannot be guaranteed.

Do you have other schoolyard opportunities available?

We anticipate releasing a second RFP in the spring of 2024 for a cohort of Sprouts, our level 1 quick-build Community Schoolyard improvement projects. The cohort will include up to six schools, evenly split between the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. Schools will receive \$25,000 for site improvements. Ideal applicants for this cohort should apply with specific project improvements in mind, such as rain gardens, outdoor classroom, micro-forest, pollinators habitats, or edible gardens.

In addition, Trust for Public Land can provide fee-for-service project management and engagement support if your playground project budget would allow. Contact Program Director, Eric Weiss at eric.weiss@tpl.org for more information.