



## St. Croix Valley Foundation Proposal Narrative

### I. Organization Overview

#### ***Provide your mission statement and a brief history of your organization.***

The St. Croix Bike and Pedestrian Trail Coalition's (SCBPTC) mission statement is *to support the development of a multi-use bike/pedestrian trail system and road accommodations network throughout St. Croix County and beyond that connects to the St. Croix River Crossing Loop Trail, creates safe commuting and recreational opportunities, encourages healthy life styles, and promotes tourism and commerce in the greater St. Croix County area.*

The organization began in early 2013 as a grass roots effort by St. Croix County residents interested in raising awareness about the benefits of a safe and connected bicycle and pedestrian trail network across the County. Aided by the excitement generated by the St. Croix River Crossing Bridge and its accompanying amenities, the organization quickly gathered momentum and received its nonprofit status in February 2015. Members have been appointed to county committees that helped develop an updated county wide Bike & Pedestrian Plan. They have been active in outreach in the region to inform county residents about the benefits of a coordinated trail network and about progress on the county plan by attending community festivals and organization meetings to share information. Hosting a speaker series with topics related to trails was another way of increasing awareness about trail possibilities around the region. Joining another trail organization, the SCBPTC sponsored an informational bicycle ride before construction of the St. Croix River Crossing was begun to show riders what was ahead. Ongoing outreach tools utilized by SCBPTC are an email distribution list of ~300 people, a web site that is heavily visited each month averaging ~ 900 visitors a month with a high viewer number of 2744 and a low of 616; and a *Facebook* page with ~ 230 followers as the organization continues to grow and work toward various trail initiatives.

SCBPTC became involved with the Trailhead "bench" project because staff at the Phipps Center for the Arts (Phipps) knew board members of the SCBPTC and, after discussion, both organizations considered it advantageous to join forces to create a work of art to be enjoyed by trail enthusiasts.

### II. Project Description

#### ***What is your project? Discuss the specific activities.***

The latest in a series of "benches" along the Art Bench Trail will be located in the Trailhead of the *Loop Trail* associated with the St. Croix River Crossing Bridge. Conceived as the "keystone" bench for the trail, this project will be somewhat different from the other "benches" in that it will be a larger "gathering space" suited more for group activities that the smaller "benches" might not support. As with each bench project, the design and construction will evolve through an organic process, involve multiple local partners and utilize numerous community assets. Partnering arts and non-arts organizations identifies volunteers and staff who work closely with a local artist or craftsperson throughout the process to create a piece that expresses and celebrates the social, cultural, and natural history of the place where the bench is to be located.

#### ***What is the plan and the timeline of the project***

From the fall 2017 through the of spring 2018 Houlton Elementary students will be completing various kinds of research. Activities will include creating documentation – drawings, poems, videos, etc. – of every experience to share with the lead artist and to reflect upon in the design/construction work.

Experiences planned for the students include: Visiting the site monthly with an art teacher to quietly observe and record what students see, hear, smell, touch, and feel; Becoming acquainted with the plans for the site; Meeting with County personnel to study maps of the *Loop Trail*; Exploring the cultural and natural history of Houlton and its “place” in the Valley; Having a series of speakers/guests/presenters, e.g. cultural historians and local residents relating personal narratives, National Park Service (NPS) Ranger, river scientists from the St. Croix River Watershed Research Station, environmental educator/naturalist; etc.; Creating independent research projects to share with the school community and, quite possibly, other activities that may arise during development of the project. By far, the most exciting part of the spring season will be meeting the lead artist through an interactive activity. This is the time when creation of the work of art actually begins.

To further expand the community for this project, during the summer 2018 family/community gatherings will be planned, e.g. a kayak trip on the St. Croix River, a bike ride around the *Loop Trail*, visits to the other benches, attendance at Art Bench Trail events, etc.

In the fall of 2018, the students will be taking a field trip to Franconia Sculpture Park, which includes the “Kids Make Sculpture” workshop, and to the NPS headquarters to continue talks with the NPS ranger. Any grant moneys received from this application would be applied toward the Franconia trip and a partial payment of the artist’s fee.

Lastly, during the 2018-19 school year, design for the “gathering space” will be finalized and construction work begun. Installation of the work of art and accompanying celebration is anticipated for the spring of 2019.

***What are the goals you hope to achieve?***

The goals for the project are threefold - include a multi-disciplinary approach with students through the activities creating the “gathering space”; generate an extended sense of community and responsibility for the area; and showcase the cultural and artistic qualities of the region.

***What public service activity will you provide and where will that activity be conducted?***

This project is conceived as a multi-use facility for any number of school and community organizations or simply a meeting place for friends attending a special event. In addition, the heavy use anticipated on the *Loop Trail* will disburse information about the St. Croix Valley and its trails and arts initiatives locally, regionally and across the broad spectrum of tourists visiting the facility.

***How will people find out about your project and/or what will you do to get your project to them?***

Located in the Trailhead area of *Loop Trail* which is anticipated to host a large number of visitors annually, this “gathering space” will be a showcase for this unique multi-state trail connection engaging both local & regional residents and tourists who come to enjoy and use the space. The signage and information brochures placed in the area will clearly define other “benches”, trails and places to visit in the St. Croix Valley. In addition, Art Bench Trail marketing material, routinely available through the Phipps, will continue to encourage visitors to enjoy St. Croix Valley’s attractions. Further, simply the design and construction of the “gathering space” by a large, inclusive community with shared experiences create word of mouth referrals to the site allowing personal connections to be made to the local environment through trails and art work. Lastly, the Art Bench Trail has a web site <http://www.artbenchtrail.org/> and a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/artbenchtrail/> both accessible 24 hours a day.

***Who is involved in this project (leadership/consultants/volunteers/artists)? Why are their qualifications right for this project?*** The Art Bench Project is regional community art project organized and coordinated by the Phipps in partnership with St. Croix Valley Foundation (SCVF) and the NPS. The local connections for the Trailhead Art Bench include SCBPTC, Houlton Elementary School and its PTA, St. Croix County and the Town of St. Joseph and its Park Committee. The Phipps will lead this effort and their expertise is well documented through the success of the eight existing benches. Each of the local organizations is either in close proximity to the Trailhead or has on going vested interest in the St. Croix River,

a designated scenic river, and its unique amenities,. Their contributions to this project will be the “community” piece - their roles depending upon the project needs as design is finalized.

***If artistic personnel have not yet been selected, what is the process and/or criteria you will use to select them?***

Kenji Akagawa, an American sculptor, printmaker, and arts educator best known for sculptural constructions that also serve a practical function, was preliminarily consulted by the collaborators regarding this project. Mr. Akagawa had a long teaching career at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design and is currently Professor Emeritus at the School. He has created many sculptures for clients both worldwide and locally, e.g. at the Walker Art Center Sculpture Garden. His vision of using a variety of indigenous materials to create this proposed “gathering space” helped form the foundation of the project. Whether Mr. Akagawa or another artist will be the lead artist has yet to be determined.

Criteria for the artist selection will include a demonstrated commitment to working with the community or a history of creating art in public places. However, previous experience is not required. Rather, the artist will be chosen based on the quality of prior work samples with priority given to those who use materials available in the area to create this “bench” and those who have direct ties to the communities in the *Loop Trail* vicinity.

### ***III. Need, Impact, Evaluation***

***Why is this project needed?***

The Trailhead for the *Loop Trail* is anticipated to bring a record number of regional residents as well as tourists to the area. To have this expansive, aesthetically stunning work of art on a highly visible trail site will provide not only increased public awareness of community art at its very best but also invite trail users to explore St. Croix Valley’s trail facilities thereby increasing public dialog about using and creating trail facilities which, in turn, engenders tourism dollars that accompany those visits - an economic benefit for the entire region.

***What artistic benefit will result from your activities?***

The activities with Houlton Elementary School students associated with the design and construction of this Trailhead project will engender an interest in the local area and its natural, cultural and historical elements. Because of the very nature of the Art Bench Trail and, in particular, this Trailhead “gathering space” project, audiences from a broad cultural and socio-economic background will encounter unique works of art in the community gathering places where they live or enjoy visiting – perhaps encouraging further exploration of the trails surrounding other “benches” and generating a new interest in and curiosity about art and its many forms.

***How will the participants and the larger community benefit from the project activities?***

This Trailhead “gathering space” will be located in the approximate center of the Art Bench Trail. The space will be available to trail users as a resting and recharging oasis, to organizations for meetings, to residents for a congregating locale for a group event, to scouting and 4H groups for projects, to students from area schools for learning experiences, as a quiet place to read or complete art projects, as well as a wide variety of other uses that defined open spaces provide. This attractive and inviting “gathering space” set in the midst of a highly visited, first class trail facility will draw people again and again to the trails in the St. Croix Valley naturally encouraging growth and extension over time of trail networks in the Valley– at the core of SCBPTC’s long term goals.

***What methods will you use to determine whether you have met your project goals?***

Houlton Elementary teachers involved in implementation for the project will, as a part of the curriculum development for this unit of study, evaluate whether the goals and objectives of the project were met by the planned activities. The enduring understanding for this unit of study will be how a location weaves together a tapestry of time, geography, and people to build a community.