



DATE: August 13, 2026

MEMO TO: Elizabeth Hough, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Alyssa Firkus
Director of Education

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$75,000 grant from unrestricted funds to fund an education strategic plan.

FINANCIAL DATA: As of June 30, 2026, the Foundation's unrestricted funding total was \$464,450.63.

The Preservation Foundation Board of Directors has awarded \$100,450 in grants that have not yet been disbursed.

Future Disbursements	Amount
2026	\$19,450
2027	\$25,500
2028 or TBD	\$55,500
Total	\$100,450

If awarded, \$75,000 will be disbursed in the fourth quarter of 2026.

BACKGROUND: As the 501(c)3 charitable partner of the Lake County Forest Preserves, the Preservation Foundation's mission is to extend and accelerate the Lake County Forest Preserves' goals through private philanthropy to restore and preserve Lake County's natural and cultural resources in perpetuity.

In 2013, the Preservation Foundation Board of Directors adopted a policy regarding the use of unrestricted charitable gifts, which created a process for staff to submit an Annual Fund Grant request to support the priorities of the Forest Preserves, such as piloting a new initiative, extending or accelerating existing work, or securing matching funds. To date, the Preservation Foundation has awarded nearly \$1.5 million in grants from unrestricted funds.

In accordance with this policy, a request for a one-year grant in the amount of \$75,000 has been submitted for review and approval at the Preservation Foundation's August 13, 2026, Board of Directors Meeting.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Director of Community Engagement & Partnerships, Chief Operations Officer, Director of Administration, Director of Finance, and Forest Preserves Executive Director



GRANT REQUEST:

Department	Education
Project Name	Education Strategic Plan
Project Lead (if not Director)	
Total Amount Requested	\$ 75,000
Amount needed per year	
Grant Period	One Year
Grant Purpose	Pilot a new initiative
Project Description	The education department is well positioned for continued growth. This program plan will take a deep dive to assess the strategic direction of the education department and explore how it can expand its impact while continuing to serve its core audience.
Project Impact	A strategic plan will help the education department align its capacity and funding with its long-term priorities. It will provide a framework for balancing existing commitments while identifying opportunities to expand participation, engage new audiences, and increase community impact. By guiding decisions about staffing, resource allocation, and program investments, the plan will help ensure sustainable growth and maximize the effectiveness of educational offerings.
Additional Funding	None
Impact if not funded	If strategic planning isn't supported, priorities for education can become unclear, resources may be misaligned, opportunities may be missed, and long-term goals become harder to achieve. Over time, this can reduce operational efficiency, employee alignment, and overall organizational impact and negatively impact the community.

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____

☐ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: _____ Nays: _____

☐ Voice Vote; Majority Ayes: _____ Nays: _____



PARTNERS
IN CAPACITY

Prepared for



Lake County
Forest Preserves

July 27, 2026

Program Planning Project for Education at LCFP

The Education Department is Well Positioned for Continued Growth

Strengths

- Well-attended school programs aligned with IL Common Core standards, touching 75,000 LC residents annually
- Diverse program portfolio serving preschool through adults, including camps, public programs, scout programs, teacher professional development, and museum education.
- Experienced educators with expertise in both environmental and local history education.
- Established partnerships with schools throughout Lake County.
- Existing Preservation Foundation support helps make programs affordable and accessible through initiatives like Beyond the Classroom.

Opportunities

- Evaluate the program portfolio to ensure it meets evolving community needs and organizational capacity.
- Expand participation by reaching new audiences beyond current core participants.
- Expand bilingual programming to better serve Lake County's changing demographics.
- Grow environmental and history education offerings for all ages.
- Evaluate mix of at school, at Forest Preserves, at Museum, and digital delivery of programming.
- Strengthen pathways for middle school and teen engagement.
- Develop education-to-workforce pathways for young adults with the Natural Resources Department.
- Reassess Summer programming – providing directly and/or leveraging through partners
- Balance capacity and funding - Where should operational dollars be focused

Strategic Questions to Consider

Audience:

How can the Education Department focus its reach while continuing to serve its core audiences? What is balance between champions and new audiences?

Programming

How should programming evolve to meet the changing needs of Lake County children, youth and young adults? What is balance between youth and adults.?

Experiences

What educational experiences will have the greatest long-term impact? Where and how do they need to be delivered?

Workforce

How can education support conservation workforce development?

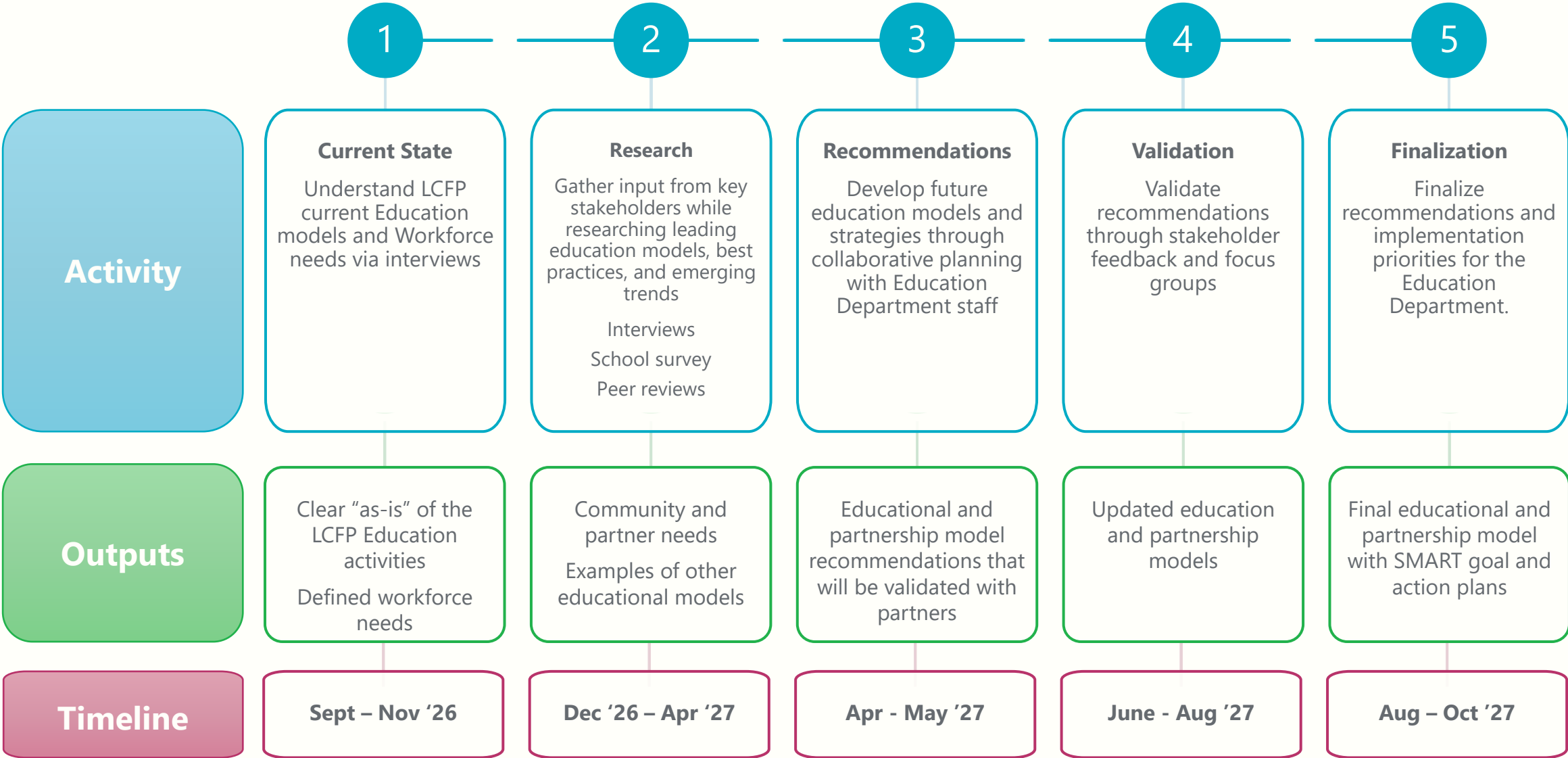
Partnerships

How can partnerships be leveraged?

Capacity

Where should limited staff and financial resources be focused?

Education Program Design Planning and Timeline



Current Models Phase - Scope of Work

1

Current State

Understand LCFP current Education models and Workforce needs via interviews

Sept – Nov '26

Activities

- Hold in person kickoff meeting with the Steering Committee
- Establish and hold in person kickoff meeting with Education Team
- Understand stakeholders for Education work
- Review existing programs, staffing, capacity, and operational constraints by interviewing 4 staff members
- Interview Natural Resources Dept and HR to understand workforce needs and projections (2 total)
- Develop a clear "as is" report describing education and young adult workforce needs
- Share "as is" report with Steering Committee virtually
- Share "as is" report with Education Team in person

Deliverables

- Project plan/meeting schedule
- PowerPoint with analysis of current stakeholders, education models and workforce needs

Research and Gather Input Phase - Scope of Work

2

Research

Gather input from key stakeholders while researching leading education models, best practices, and emerging trends

Interviews
School survey
Peer reviews

Dec '26 – Apr '27

Activities

- Gather input from various audiences through interviews and focus groups
 - Conduct 29 interviews with teachers, school leaders, community organizations, workforce partners, higher education and Forest Preserve champions in the following areas:
 - Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle School, High School, Postsecondary, Adults
 - Facilitate 7 in person focus groups
 - Nature Everywhere
 - Elementary educators
 - Middle school educators
 - High school educators
 - Community service provider
 - Youth participants
- Design and send out a survey to educators
- Conduct 9 peer reviews
- Present findings to Education Team and Steering Committee

Deliverables

- Community and partner needs
- Examples of other educational models

Design Phase – Scope of Work

3

Design

Collaboratively design new models or approaches with Education Department Staff

Apr - May '27

Activities

- Hold two, three-hour working sessions with Education team members
- Develop recommended models and approaches
- Present findings to Education Team and Steering Committee

Deliverables

- Educational and partnership model recommendations that will be validated with partners

Feedback Phase – Scope of Work

4

Feedback

Validate recommended models or approaches by gathering feedback from clients and partners via focus groups

June - Aug '27

Activities

- Conduct 7 focus groups to gather feedback from:
 - Nature Everywhere
 - Elementary educators
 - Middle school educators
 - High school educators
 - Community service provider
 - Youth participants
- Present findings to Education Team and Steering Committee

Deliverable

- Updated education and partnership models

Finalization and Action Plans Phase – Scope of Work

5

Finalize and Create Action Plans

Finalize recommendations and implementation priorities for the Education Department.

Aug – Oct '27

Activities

- Refine recommendations based on stakeholder feedback.
- Develop SMART Goals and implementation Action Plans
- Present plan to Education Team
- Present final plan to Steering Committee for approval

Deliverable

- Final educational and partnership model with SMART goal and action plans

Proposed Costs for Education Programming Planning Project

Phase	Deliverable	Notes
1 – Current State	- Meeting schedule - PowerPoint with analysis of current stakeholders, education models and workforce needs	6 meetings with staff and SC 6 interviews with staff
2 – Research	- Community and partner needs - Examples of other educational models	29 interviews 7 focus groups 9 peer reviews 1 survey 3 staff meetings 1 SC meeting
3 – Design	Educational and partnership model recommendations that will be validated with partners	2 working 3-hour meetings with Ed Team 4 meetings with staff 1 presentation meeting with SC 1 presentation meeting with Ed Staff
4 – Feedback	Updated education and partnership models	7 focus groups 1 presentation meeting with SC 1 presentation meeting with Ed Staff
5 - Finalize	Final educational and partnership model with SMART goal and action plans	15 meeting with various groups of education staff to develop goals and action plans - Present plan to Education Team - Present final plan to Steering Committee for approval
TOTAL	\$75,000	