



# Source Water Protection Collaborative Call for creative engagement specialist/artist-in-residence

## Invitation to artists

Water connects us all. It runs beneath our feet, through our bodies, and across generations – yet most of us rarely pause to consider whose choices, histories, or hands shape the water we drink. This project invites an artist or team of creative engagement specialists to step into that current – to work alongside the people of Chatfield, Minnesota and stir a community conversation about our shared responsibility to protect one of our most essential resources: clean drinking water.

We're not looking for a campaign or a communication strategy. We're seeking creative disruptors, bridge-builders, and storytellers who understand that art has the power to shift perspectives, reimagine systems, and rebuild trust where it's been eroded. Whether your tools are performance, visual art, sound, storytelling, or social practice – this residency asks you to bring your creativity into the civic realm, co-creating with residents, land stewards, and local water professionals to reawaken connection and care for the source that sustains us all.

Supported by the **Source Water Protection Collaborative** and **Environmental Initiative**, this 10-month residency will immerse you in a real-world challenge with statewide impact: advancing collective action to safeguard Minnesota's drinking water. You'll listen deeply, collaborate boldly, and design artistic interventions that make the invisible visible – revealing how land, people, and policy intertwine through drinking water.

This is challenging, essential work – bridging differences, rebuilding relationships, and inspiring shared action. But that's exactly where artists thrive. You can translate technical issues into human stories, invite empathy into data, and open space for imagination and change.

This is an invitation to create more than art – to create belonging, awareness, and momentum that ripples far beyond Chatfield. If you're ready to use your practice to move hearts, shift systems, and protect the water that connects us all, we'd love to hear your vision.

## Request for Qualifications

**Date issued:** Dec. 12, 2025

**Application deadline:** Jan. 12, 2026

**Application review and interviews:** January-February 2026

**Project awards:** Late February 2026

**Project timeline:** March-December 2026

**Budget:** \$60,000 (\$45,000 for time and subcontracting, \$15,000 for materials)

## Project Overview

The **Source Water Protection Collaborative**, facilitated by **Environmental Initiative**, invites applications for a **10-month artist residency** focused on community engagement and drinking water protection in **Chatfield, Minnesota**. The individual or team of artists will work to foster deeper community engagement around local drinking water challenges. They will build relationships and trust among stakeholders, including those in the city's drinking water supply management area, community members consuming the city's water, and state and local government units.

Chatfield, Minnesota straddles Fillmore and Olmsted counties and is in the Root River watershed. This town of just over 3,000 people is in the Driftless region and has a vibrant local arts scene. It was chosen for the residency because its drinking water supply area is especially vulnerable to contamination and has the potential to have issues with nitrate pollution. The community is also involved in regional discussions around drinking water availability as larger metropolitan areas expand.

This project is open-ended and could be approached in a variety of ways, including community conversations on water pollution, engagement with growers who work on the land close to well water, or a collaborative mural addressing source water protection. The artist/creative engagement specialist will work with the community of Chatfield, including the Chatfield Center for the Arts, members of the city government, folks involved in the local school district, and more, to co-design a project that aligns with community interest and the artist/specialist's background and expertise. The community is interested in mural work, so artists with a practice that involves murals are strongly encouraged to apply.

This project is facilitated by the Source Water Protection Collaborative, a Minnesota-based initiative engaging individuals involved in protecting sources of drinking water from across Minnesota in state and local agencies, nonprofits, academia, agriculture, and more. The purpose of the Collaborative is to bring together diverse groups and perspectives to advance collective action for protecting drinking water.

## Project purpose

- Foster deep community engagement and relationship building around local drinking water challenges.

- There may be differing opinions, low trust, or lack of mutual understanding around some of these local water challenges.
- Build relationships and trust among stakeholders, including those impacting the drinking water supply management area, the local community, and state and local government units.
- Increase understanding of land use impact on drinking water and motivate those impacting drinking water to take protective actions.
- Leverage collaborative members and community projects to change systemic approaches to drinking water.

## Project partners

- Lead: [Source Water Protection Collaborative](#)
  - This collaborative is facilitated by Environmental Initiative and funded by a Minnesota Department of Health grant through the Clean Water, Land, and Legacy Amendment.
- Support: [Environmental Initiative](#)
  - A nonprofit organization based in Minneapolis but working regionally to collaborate across perspectives, power, and systems and implement on-the-ground projects to improve our air, land, and water for all beings.

## Assets for creative engagement specialist/artist(s)-in-residence

- Funding- see budget section for more.
- Access to state and local agency staff for water-focused technical and outreach support.
- Opportunities to attend water-related conferences and events.
- Opportunities to present work at water-related conferences and events.
- Access to a videographer and photographer through Collaborative member organizations.
- Training and capacity building opportunities through Collaborative member organizations.
- Support finding housing within the host community, if needed.

## Project Structure

The work period will be approximately 10 months. We anticipate this would be a part-time project, with the specialist averaging approximately 15-20 hours of work per week. Work will occur in three main phases, outlined below, with Phase Two likely being the most time intensive phase of work:

**Phase One:** The artist/creative engagement specialist(s) will work with the Source Water Protection Collaborative and an on-the-ground engagement team in Chatfield to start building relationships and learning about local issues. They will use this time to begin planning their engagement project, co-designing with community members from Chatfield. As this planning ramps up, we expect the artist or artist team to be

embedded within Chatfield. The artist/creative engagement specialist can define what being embedded means but is expected to spend at least half their cumulative work time in the community.

By the time this phase is complete, the artist/creative engagement specialist(s) will have finalized their project plan and gained approval from the Source Water Protection Collaborative and the local engagement team.

**Phase Two:** From spring-fall, the artist/creative engagement specialist(s) will be implementing their engagement project within Chatfield and the surrounding area.

- The artist/specialist will spend most of their time in the community during Phase Two. We will help to provide housing for that time if needed.

**Phase Three:** In the last phase of work, the creative engagement specialist/artist(s) will have time to provide feedback on what they saw in community, lessons learned, and changes needed. We plan to implement this project again in 2027 in southeast Minnesota with a focus on private well engagement so this feedback will be crucial to future years of the program.

**Additional Information**

- Artist/creative engagement specialist(s) will be a part-time contractor for Environmental Initiative.
- Artist/creative engagement specialist(s) will retain copyright(s) to produced work.

<p><b>Phase 1: ~2 months</b> Relationship building with Collaborative, agencies, and Chatfield. Creating and finalizing project plan(s).</p>	<p><b>Phase 2: ~6 months</b> Implementing engagement project(s) within the region.</p>	<p><b>Phase 3: ~2 months</b> Lesson sharing with Chatfield, the Collaborative, and participating organizations.</p>
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**Residency tasks**

**Phase 1**

- Build relationships with members of the Chatfield community, the Source Water Protection Collaborative, and other relevant stakeholders.
- Learn more about local goals to incorporate into engagement plan.
- Draft, refine, and finalize engagement plan, getting approval from local team and the Source Water Protection Collaborative.

**Phase 2**

- This phase will be when most of the in-community time occurs; creative engagement specialist/artist(s) are expected to spend at least half of their cumulative time of the full project in the host community, primarily in this phase.
- Implement one or more projects in Chatfield and the surrounding region.

- Document the project process through visual, written, video, or other forms of documentation to provide context for future artists-in-residence.

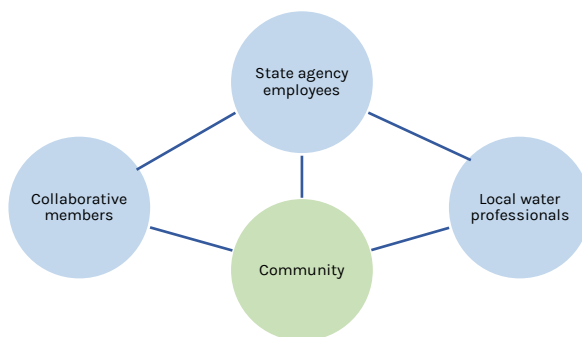
### Phase 3

- Present on the experience and lessons learned to the Chatfield engagement team and the full Source Water Protection Collaborative.
- Develop final project documentation (i.e. case study, summary video, webpage).

### Throughout all three phases

- Participate in check-in calls with Environmental Initiative staff every two weeks.
- Engage with and facilitate conversations around project updates and lessons learned at the strategic advisors Source Water Protection Collaborative group, presenting to this group at least twice.
- Track work hours and project expenses and invoice Environmental Initiative on a quarterly basis.

## Diagram of relationship building



Throughout the work period, the creative engagement specialist/artist(s) will be working on topics where there may be differing opinions, low trust, or lack of mutual understanding. The creative engagement specialist/artist(s) should be comfortable working in situations like these and keep respect for different worldviews and lived experiences while working with the community. Their work should help to bridge these gaps and facilitate relationship building between the community and local water professionals, Collaborative members, and state agency employees.

## Selection criteria

- Artistic merit and professional qualifications demonstrated in a portfolio of past work.
- Ability to communicate effectively and synthesize complex concepts.
- Demonstrated ability to constructively work with rural and historically underserved communities.
- Knowledge and experience in community engagement and place-based work.

- Prior experience working with state or local governments is not required but preferred.
- The reviewing team will rate applicants on how well their work meets the guiding principles of the Source Water Protection Collaborative, in that their work is collaborative, place-based, trust-building, and creates space for mutual exchange, non-dominant perspectives, and behavior change.

## Eligibility

- Over 18, able to work in U.S.
- Any level of career.
- Connections to southeast Minnesota.
- Has access to reliable transportation to Chatfield if not already living there.
- Specialist/artist(s) must be able to be deeply embedded and spend half of their cumulative work time in Chatfield and the surrounding region.
  - Living expenses are eligible project expenses.
- **We encourage and support artist collaboration.** We seek a lead specialist/artist to serve as the primary contact and liaison with the Collaborative but encourage teamwork and are open to working with an individual or a team of specialists/artists for this project.

## Online application process

1. Identify the name, mailing address, email address, and phone number of the primary contact person for your submission. (Environmental Initiative will use this information to provide an update to you on the status of your proposal.)
2. In 600 words or 2 minutes of audio/video responses, please provide a general overview of your community building approach, your connection to southeast Minnesota, and an overview of how you engage underserved communities.
3. In 300 words or 1 minute of audio/video responses, please provide information on your approach to project management/direction/exhibit curation.
4. In 600 words or 2 minutes of audio/video responses, please provide information on two or three relevant past projects, including why the prior projects are relevant.
  - You can provide supplemental project information for this question; please keep submissions to 10 photos, 5 minutes of audio materials/videos, write ups below 500 words, or another media that takes fewer than 10 minutes to review.
5. Please provide the name and contact information for three references.

## Budget

- \$45,000 stipend.
  - Covers time for the artist(s) and their subcontractors.
- \$15,000 project implementation funding
  - Covers materials, accommodations, rental space, and other non-stipend items.

## Timeline

- Applications open through Jan. 12, 2026.
  - There will be a recorded virtual information session about this on Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026 at 1 p.m.
- The selection committee will review applications and interview applicants in late January and early February 2026.
- The goal is to have the creative engagement specialist(s)/artist(s)-in-residence start work by late-February or early March of 2026
- This position is part-time, at an average of 15-20 hours per week, through December 2026.

## Project background

This project builds off a pilot creative engagement project the Source Water Protection Collaborative implemented in Little Falls, Minnesota in 2023. This pilot developed because Source Water Protection Collaborative members were looking to create community connections to drinking water, taking a place-based approach. Collaborative members knew that greater Minnesota communities often do not have the same engagement resources when it comes to drinking water, yet many have unique circumstances around drinking water sources and delivery mechanisms that can make conversations about drinking water difficult.

Through our 2023 pilot in Little Falls, [Creating With and For Water](#), led by community engagement artist Su Legatt, and through other examples of creative engagement work, Collaborative members witnessed the success in using engagement specialists to address the nuance and humanity in communities that can make transformational change possible. Creating With and For Water was only able to cover a period of six months, and so the Collaborative and the community of Chatfield are eager to implement this longer project.