



Michigan *Legacy* Art Park

IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2023 ARTS & CULTURE FINALIST: MICHIGAN LEGACY ART PARK

INITIATIVE: TRAIL AND WAYFINDING IMPROVEMENTS

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE – IN THE APPLICANT’S WORDS

Michigan Legacy Art Park (the Art Park) inspires awareness, appreciation and passion for Michigan’s history, culture, and the environment through the arts. The Art Park operates a 30-acre public sculpture forest in Thompsonville, adjacent to Crystal Mountain, and provides programs and services on-site, and in classrooms across northwest Michigan. The Art Park has over 50 sculptures in its permanent collection; poetry inscribed on stones in the natural setting; an amphitheater for concerts and events; a 1/4 mile accessible trail and 2-mile natural trail; and a Discovery Grove area for student activities and exploration.

Over 20,000 people are served annually including residents of Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim, Manistee, and Kalkaska Counties in Michigan. This includes over 1000 children in our region who visit the Art Park on field trips that include a guided art hike and an environmental art project. Many of these children live in rural areas, without regular access to the arts.

A recent professional assessment indicated that several specific areas of the trail and wayfinding system should be improved for both safety and visitor experience. The Art Park has met with our facility partners who identified areas of traffic congestion and discussed potential new, alternative sections of trail that would benefit all users. With Impact 100 funding, the Art Park will hire professional trail designers to improve the trail system and increase the safety, access, and enjoyment of visitors seeking health and wellness activities.

This project will be transformational and impactful for all of our community. Time in nature is vital to our health and wellbeing, and studies continue to show the neurological and emotional benefits of viewing art. Michigan Legacy Art Park provides both art and nature to our northwest Michigan community.

The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant.

While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Financial Review Committee (FRC) and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.

ORGANIZATION’S VISION STATEMENT

Michigan Legacy Art Park will gain a national reputation as a distinguished forest sculpture park by committing to artistic excellence; providing enriching learning opportunities; engaging every person who enters the Art Park; and stewarding our natural, human, and economic resources.

ORGANIZATION’S MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Michigan Legacy Art Park (the Art Park) is to inspire awareness, appreciation and passion for Michigan’s history, culture, and the environment through the arts.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

Founded in 1995, the Art Park completes its mission through the operation of a 30-acre forested, public sculpture park in Thompsonville, on the grounds of Crystal Mountain, and through programs and services held on-site, and in classrooms across northwest Michigan. The Art Park has over 50 sculptures in its permanent collection; poetry inscribed on stones in the natural setting; an amphitheater for concerts and events; a ¼ mile accessible trail and 2-mile natural trail; and a Discovery Grove area for student activities and exploration. Over 20,000 people are served annually including national tourists, statewide visitors, and residents of Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Antrim, Manistee, Mason, Lake, Oceana, Kalkaska, and Wexford Counties in Michigan.

2023-2024 Activities include the following:

1. On-site field trips are provided to 20-30 classrooms each year at the Art Park and programming in outreach locations throughout the region. Whether through the artworks, the forest, the Discovery Grove at the park, or the classroom, Art Park programs help its audiences learn about history, social studies, science, math, and art. The Art Park provides curriculum guides for teachers with direct connections to Michigan educational standards.
2. Many family-friendly activities are available at the park, including tours, hikes, art and history programs, family-friendly summer concerts, a winter outdoor-sing-along, and activities focusing on nature and the environment, including snowshoe hikes, birdwatching, plant and tree identification and other topics.
3. A new sculpture, Gateway to Black Eden, by Detroit artist M. Saffell Gardner, will be installed in 2023 and added to the permanent collection. This work reflects on the African American lake resort experience in America during the years of segregation, and specifically recalls Idlewild, a traditionally African American resort located near Baldwin, Michigan.

The Art Park hosts installations by 31 artists, with a permanent collection of more than 50 major works of art. Each sculpture expresses the Michigan experience, giving visitors a more personal connection to the people, events and natural resources that continue to shape its story. The Art Park continuously explores ways to expand its collection and broaden the diversity of its arts and artists.

The Art Park is connected to the community with innovative and impactful program collaborations with Dennon Museum Center, Crooked Tree Arts Center, Walk of Art Elk Rapids, Oliver Art Center, and others.

Whether on snowshoe tours, cross-country skiing, or hiking, outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy the trails year-round while also observing artwork. An Art Park priority is ensuring that people of all abilities can appreciate the park's trail system. The accessible trail and available golf cart tours make it possible for almost everyone to share this experience. This proposal seeks funds to make improvements to the trail system to provide improved safety and access for both visitors who use the golf-cart tour as access, and generally able users who (like many of us) struggle with steep hills.

Designing for the future, and responding to the community, the Art Park continues to expand and improve its programs and services. This includes actively working to broaden accessibility through improvements to its trail circulation system, updated and inclusive signage for the visually impaired, deaf community, and for visitors whose first language is not English. It also means ensuring that BIPOC, LGBTQ, ALICE, and all residents and visitors to the Art Park feel welcome. Through collaborative efforts, the Art Park will expand its existing collection and increase diversity, equity and inclusion with exhibits and programs to ensure Michigan Legacy Art Park represents and serves all who are part of Michigan's story.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

Michigan Legacy Art Park's trails were first developed as ski trails and converted for Art Park use in the mid-1990s. They have since been maintained as natural surface hiking trails. The trails extend 2 miles through the 30-acre property, and approximately ¼ mile is graded and paved with gravel to be ADA accessible. The remainder of the trails are rustic with hills (a 17% grade in some locations), rocks and roots. Michigan Legacy Art Park has full responsibility for trail conditions, per the long-term lease agreement with Crystal Mountain.

The rustic nature of the trails are difficult for many in our community to hike. The Art Park offers tours using an ATV golf cart as an accessibility option. However, some sections are too steep for the safe use of the golf cart, particularly when wet or covered with autumn leaves. In addition, due to the lease agreement with Crystal Mountain, the upper 2/3 of the entire trail system is reserved for Nordic ski and snowshoe use from December through March, limiting access for other visitors.

Michigan Legacy Art Park recently contracted assessment professionals to inspect the current conditions of the entire facility, including buildings and trail system. They identified several specific areas of the trail and wayfinding system that should be improved for both safety and visitor experience. The Art Park has met with the Crystal Mountain Nordic staff and officers of the non-profit Crystal Community Ski Club (CCSC) who identified areas of traffic congestion and discussed potential new, alternative sections of trail that would benefit all users. CCSC provides instruction and opportunities for schoolchildren to learn to ski and enjoy healthy winter sports and activities.

If funded, Michigan Legacy Art Park will hire professional trail designers to improve the trail system and increase the safety, access, and enjoyment of visitors seeking health and wellness activities:

1. The design firm will work with the Art Park and stakeholders to identify and plan trail improvements and wayfinding signage for the most critical sections of the trail system.
2. The most critical trail improvements will be constructed, to provide improved access and flow for both summer and winter visitors on foot or with the golf cart.

3. The Art Park will work with local public safety officials, Crystal Community Ski Club, Crystal Mountain, and others to develop and implement an improved signage system that is accessible and understandable for all visitors.

This project will be transformational and impactful to the health and wellbeing of our community by improving trail accessibility for all users. Time in nature is vital to our health and wellbeing, and the trails at Michigan Legacy Art Park provide such outdoor access for the community. Specifically, the proposed project will:

1. Increase health opportunities for people who have limited mobility on steep hills or long distances by making improvements that positively impact the experience for pedestrians, passengers in the ruggedized golf-cart, or winter sports enthusiasts on skis or snowshoes.
2. Increase safety and confidence by improving wayfinding so visitors know where they are while using the trails, particularly if an emergency response is needed.
3. Improve overall mental and physical wellbeing by providing a safe, accessible, and interesting combination of art and nature in a unique setting that truly embraces all that our community enjoys about northern Michigan.

Once built, the new trail sections and improvements will be maintained as are other sections of trail. During spring, summer, and autumn, trail maintenance is completed as needed, through daily observation of trail conditions by staff and trail maintenance volunteers, and minor repairs—applying new mulch, removing fallen tree limbs, leaf-blowing, and raking—will be completed as needed. Annually, the Art Park, Crystal Mountain Nordic staff, and Crystal Community Ski Club will walk the trails and discuss any additional improvements to the shared sections of trails and signage.

30 years ago, a group of individuals created an experiment to place art in the forest, along a quintessentially northern Michigan hiking trail. Since then, the impact of Mother Nature has been significant. By investing in the integrity of the trails, Impact 100 will ensure the trails are designed to last, remaining safe for all users, and decreasing the amount of annual maintenance required.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

Michigan Legacy Art Park (Art Park) has a mission to tell the story of the entire state of Michigan, however, its primary service area includes residents and visitors of 10 counties of Northwest Lower Michigan, including Benzie, Manistee, Mason, Lake, Oceana, Kalkaska, Antrim, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Wexford Counties. As such, this description of the community is based on this 10-County service area.

Race and Ethnicity: In 2020 the US Census included a Diversity Index, which is the percentage chance that two people chosen at random will be from different racial and ethnic groups. The Diversity Index for all of Michigan is 45.2%. The Art Park's 10-County service area average Diversity Index is less, 21.5%. In general, the 10 counties of the service area have a greater percentage than the state average of people who identified as White-alone. There are fewer people who identified as African American or Asian than the state average. There are many more people who identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native than the state average.

Age: The 2020 US Census found that Michigan overall had a population that was divided between 78.5% 18 years old and older, and 21.5% under the age of 18. The Art Park's 10-county service area has a population that is older than the state average. 81.01% of residents are 18 years or older, and 18.9% of residents are under the age of 18.

Disability: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that 12% of all adults in Michigan over 18 years have a mobility disability; 13% have a cognitive impairment; 8% are unable to live independently; 5% have a hearing disability; 3% have a vision disability; and 3% have a self-care disability (difficulty dressing or bathing). Information was unavailable for the 10-county service area.

Socio-Economics Diversity: The University of Michigan Poverty and Wellbeing Map (<https://poverty.umich.edu/research-funding-opportunities/data-tools/michigan-poverty-well-being-map/>) shows that over 29% of households in the 10-County service area meet the ALICE definition: (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed). These households earn just above the Federal Poverty Level but less than what it costs to make ends meet. These struggling households are forced to make impossible choices each day. The Art Park works with local community organizations to provide free admission days and family passes to ensure that everyone has access to the Art Park.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

Several of the county's in northwest lower Michigan have identified health challenges for residents that are related to such conditions as a population that is older than the state's average, and the percentage of residents, both children and adults, who are overweight or obese. Healthy activities as a means to improve physical and mental health are essential for our community.

The Art Park provides a unique opportunity for visitors to interact with both nature and art, serving an essential role for residents. This is particularly important for its rural neighbors who historically are often underserved both in terms of safe, accessible places for walking and to encounter the arts.

The 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment study by Munson Healthcare noted that both adult overweight and youth depression were among these findings in the Grand Traverse Region service area that includes Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau Counties:

"Of about 100 secondary indicators, there were 22 statistics in the five-county region that scored above 1.5, indicating they were worse than their MiThrive region or State rates:

- Students not proficient in Grade 4 English o Average HPSA Score—Dental Health
- Renters (% of all occupied homes) o Gross mortgage is >= 35% of household income
- Vacant housing units o Teens: 2+ ACEs
- Teens: 5 fruits/vegetables per day
- SNAP authorized stores o All cancer incidence
- Teens: asthma o Teens: major depressive episode o Adults: overweight
- Teens: smoked cigarettes in past 30 days
- Motor vehicle crash mortality
- Liver disease mortality

- Alcohol induced mortality (Munson HealthCare, 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment, page 107)

While outside of the service area identified by Impact 100, the 2022 Manistee County Recreation Plan describes the need to increase programming to suit an aging population and a need for increased programs and services for all areas of their county.

Although arts and culture were identified as our secondary grant application category preference, it should be noted that In 2019 the Northwest Michigan Community Development Corporation collaborated with the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation and others to create a Scorecard for improving our regional community. One of the primary goals is to Improve arts and culture resources and experiences, with a 2030 target of being the #1 arts-vibrant medium sized community in the U.S. A vibrant arts culture is a desirable and necessary part of a strong community. Partners in this effort include the Art Park as a member of the Northwest Michigan Arts and Culture Network.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

In 2014-2015 the Art Park successfully held the Arts for All capital campaign and generated \$500,000 to complete multiple activities to create accessibility improvements. These included installing an ADA approved gravel trail to the Amphitheater area; purchase of an ATV golf cart so that visitors with mobility issues may view 100% of the collection as a passenger, with a trained guide as driver, and a garage building to preserve the life and long-term viability of the vehicle.

Since the completion of this project in 2015, the accessible section of trail receives regular maintenance, including raking, application of new gravel, and regular removal of leaves and twigs so that all visitors (including those with mobility aids) can continue to use this trail. The Art Park has also successfully maintained the garage structure in excellent condition, and the ATV golf-cart receives regular maintenance, and its original battery has just been replaced. With regular maintenance the vehicle should not need replacement for an additional 5-7 years.

With a knowledgeable trails maintenance staff and volunteers, the proposed Trail Improvements will receive the same level of care, to ensure sustainability.