



LIGHT

IN THE

Forest

AT CINCINNATI NATURE CENTER

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Cincinnati Nature Center is seeking artists to create light installations for the 2026 *Light in the Forest* event.

CincyNature.org



Inspiring Conservation



About Cincinnati Nature Center

Cincinnati Nature Center believes nature is for everyone. Since opening our doors to the public in 1967, this belief has remained the cornerstone of everything we do. Each year, we welcome over 320,000 nature enthusiasts from around the region and beyond to explore the 1,800 acres of forests, prairies, streams, ponds, and wetlands that make up our two locations—Rowe Woods and Long Branch Farm & Trails.

Because each person's connection to nature can be deeply personal, we offer programs, volunteer opportunities, clubs, events, and more that provide opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to engage with nature at their own pace and within their own interests.

About *Light in the Forest*

Set in the winter nights of December, *Light in the Forest* is our premier event. For the past six years, we have welcomed over 100,000 people from all 50 states and several different countries to our unique display of artistic and interactive light installments. Guests enjoy the peacefulness of nature as they stroll past ponds, fields, and woodlands areas along the one-mile, illuminated walking trail.

Rated as a top "Holiday Light Display" by CityBeat's annual Best of Cincinnati, adults and children marvel at the lights, live music, festive treats, winter spirits bar, holiday shopping, and more.



Request for Proposal

Cincinnati Nature Center is seeking multiple artists to create site-specific, original light installations and experiences as part of the 2026 *Light in the Forest* event. This opportunity is open to professional light installation artists, visual artists, sculptors, and groups or businesses with experience in light installation work, animation, projection mapping, audio components, or digital art.

Project awards ranging from \$1,000–\$10,000 may be provided to each selected project per installation or a combination of installations.

Applicants must submit the following to be considered:

- A rendering(s) of your concept that shows the overall look, dimensions, colors, etc. of your piece
- Supporting images
- Budget *please note: all selected artists will be required to show proof of Liability insurance coverage. Please include this in your costs.
- Outline all electrical requirements and needs for your installation
- Artist statement and bio with complete contact information (name, address, email, phone number)
- 3–5 samples of past work

In addition to the artist installations, Cincinnati Nature Center will set up all path and auxiliary lighting, additional installations, a decorative historic home, music, and a holiday shopping experience.

The application deadline is April 24, 2026 at 5 pm.

Project Intent

The 2026 *Light in the Forest* theme is **“Nature magnified: Step into a world where nature becomes larger than life, and the many colors and patterns of Ohio’s natural world reveal themselves.”** The vision is to create unique, outdoor light experiences that fully immerse visitors in the wonder/splendor of nature. The one-mile long, all-accessible walking trail houses installations that are intended to naturally blend with the surrounding scene or habitat.

This site-specific artwork should:

- Provide enhancements to the fields, forests, ponds, and trails using lights and reflection.
- Be aligned with Cincinnati Nature Center’s values and the environment. Learn more about our mission at CincyNature.org
- Provide excitement and interest for the community as a whole while highlighting the beauty of nature.

Artists may submit more than one installation for more than one area.

Please Note

Abstract whimsical and/or color images, mapping, and projections are welcome and encouraged to take the visitor to a more magical place. Artists are encouraged to integrate the trails and boardwalks into installations, as well as the natural elements found along the trail, such as ponds, trees, and fields.

Pieces must be constructed to last throughout the entirety of the event (about 2 months from installation until removal) in an outdoor environment. Installations must be able to withstand large temperature fluctuations and unpredictable weather, including: snow, sleet, rain, sun, and high winds.

Artists will work with the Nature Center’s Facilities Team to ensure installations are safely displayed and secured. The Facilities Team will be responsible for turning on and shutting down installations each evening. If the installation needs repair, the artist is expected to arrive on site to make the necessary repairs within 24 hours.

Exact installation locations will be coordinated with the Cincinnati Nature Center team based on the site’s limitations and access to electric.

Installations must be environmentally-friendly and not harmful to plants, animals, or the surrounding landscape.

Site Visits & Key Contact

Applicants are invited and encouraged to visit Cincinnati Nature Center in Milford, Ohio. Site tours will be available upon coordination with Cincinnati Nature Center staff.

Winter Landscapes at Cincinnati Nature Center

View some of the design space available in the photos below, or schedule a visit to walk the event trail.



Criteria for Selection

The 2026 *Light in the Forest* theme is “**Nature magnified: Step into a world where nature becomes larger than life, and the many colors and patterns of Ohio’s natural world reveal themselves.**”

- Artists should have experience with projects this large in scale, including familiarity with outdoor, weather-resistant art displays.
- Displays must last the entire *Light in the Forest* season, from installation to tear-down (about two months). Pieces that are located within reach of the trail must be built to withstand a lot of human activity.
- Artists must be accessible throughout the event for possible repairs to their installation(s).
- Artists may be asked to alter their design due to location selection or positioning. We ask that artists remain flexible due to the environment of the installation.

Priority will be given to:

- Works that align with the 2026 *Light in the Forest* theme.
- Pieces that contain interactive components that invite visitors to be a part of the installation.
- Artists who can furnish all necessary pieces of equipment for their installations (i.e., projectors). Artists will be required to provide all electrical components, such as extension cords. Note: Cincinnati Nature Center will provide access to power for all installations.
- Pieces that invite community collaboration and partnerships with other artists, schools, etc. Note: These relationships must be managed by the artist.

Application Submission Procedure

Please prepare and submit the following information via email to lightintheforest@cincynature.org.

1. Project Description

Provide a long description (one page or less) and a short description (one paragraph) of the installation, including an overview of how the installation ties to the general theme of Cincinnati Nature Center and this event. Project description must include renderings that outline the dimensions, colors, and overall look of your concept.

2. Project Details

Specify proposed location, materials, budget, and any support needed from Cincinnati Nature Center. Please note: all selected artists will be required to provide proof of insurance (a minimum of Liability coverage). Please build this cost into your budget.

3. Timeframe/Work Plan

Provide a brief outline of the steps involved in the proposed installation with time requirements. ***Installation must be completed by November 13, 2026.***

4. Bio

Provide a brief bio of artist/company and previous experience.

5. Sample Work Portfolio

Provide the link to artist’s website and/or up to five digital images.

6. References

Provide a minimum of two references.

Timeline

1. **The Week of March 16, 2026:** Cincinnati Nature Center announces RFP.
2. **April 24, 2026:** RFP Submission DEADLINE.
3. **May 4–June 5, 2026:** Interviews to expand on the scope and scale of the project and meet the Cincinnati Nature Center team. At this time, artists may be asked to provide additional examples (i.e., a prototype).
4. **Week of June 15, 2026:** Artist notification of selection.
5. **June 29, 2026:** Engagement contracts signed, with proof of artist insurance (a minimum of Liability coverage)
6. **November 2, 2026:** Installments may begin once coordinated with site manager.
7. **November 13, 2026:** Artwork installation to be completed per RFP guidelines.
8. **Payment Schedule:**
 - 1/2 payment with signed agreement
 - 1/4 payment post successful installment
 - 1/4 payment upon completion of the event (week of January 4, 2027).

Artist Benefits

- **Compensation**
Payment for work based upon acceptance of proposal
- **Exposure**
Ability to showcase your work to the nearly 20,000 guests that attend *Light in the Forest*
- **Artist/Company name will be listed/mentioned in the following:**
 - *Light in the Forest* news releases as appropriate
 - Digital and/or printed event maps
 - Cincinnati Nature Center website
 - Potential promotional collaborations across Cincinnati Nature Center social media channels
 - Trail signage near installation
- **Ticket package**
Eight general event tickets per installation to distribute to employees, clients, and/or customers
- **Additional benefit**
Opportunity to speak with guests about your work at the *Light in the Forest* preview evening

Questions?

Please contact lightintheforest@cincynature.org