

Call for Indigenous Artists: Public Art Installation Overlook Plaza Project

To Acknowledge and to Celebrate: Indigenous Placemaking on Hoocak (Ho Chunk) and Dakota Homelands.

The City of La Crescent was built on the homelands of Indigenous people, including the Hoocak (Ho Chunk) and Dakota. Those Indigenous people, their history and their presence today are largely invisible in the community. Public spaces throughout the city can be one tool to recognize Indigenous peoples as past, present, and future stewards of the land. Public spaces can also serve as a starting point for a deeper understanding of Indigenous history and acknowledging the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in this region.

"The indigenous peoples, not just the Dakota or the Hoocak, but the Dakota and Hoocak and Sac and Fox peoples were all in this area. While they traded with each other, intermarried with each other, fought with each other, these are very distinct groups of people. There isn't some monolithic group that this place is important to. Recognizing that is one aspect of success" (anonymous interview, 2024).

"If you look, you will see the systemic erasure of our history and of our importance in the area. In white culture, there always has to be a first—the first people that settled in La Crescent, the first house built. That is what is emphasized in white culture. Then what about us? ... Our information isn't being taught in the schools, and it's why it was okay for those mounds to be razed" (anonymous interview, 2024).

"This is where we are now, we have to acknowledge what has happened, we can't change it, but we don't have to keep dragging it with us like a giant sack of rocks on our backs... It's important to include contemporary views but to make it a place where people want to come and learn and walk away with a positive feeling about the land, about the river, about the people instead of walking away with all doom and gloom" (anonymous interview, 2024).

Issue Date: July 31, 2026 via CaFÉ

Contact: lkirch@cityoflacrescent-mn.gov for questions

1. PUBLIC ART OPPORTUNITY – 2026/2027

The city invites Indigenous artists and Indigenous artist-led teams with connections to what is now Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Kansas, Illinois and Montana to submit a proposal for an outdoor sculpture to be installed in May of 2027. The goal of this project has been to be as inclusive as possible, create goodwill and to acknowledge that La Crescent sits on lands inhabited for millennia by Indigenous people.

This first Indigenous History Public Art and Education project initiative by the city is meant to honor and reflect on the fortitude and resilience of the Indigenous people with connections to this region. The public art sculpture may incorporate the use of languages, traditional teachings, symbols, and other cultural elements. The city welcomes proposals that initiate awareness and understanding of the shared love of this unique place and the common bond it creates for Indigenous people and the current and future residents of the City of La Crescent, Southeast Minnesota, and the Mississippi River Valley.

2. LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The City of La Crescent acknowledges that the land we work, play, and make our homes on are unceded lands that were cared for by Indigenous people for millennia. The greenspace currently being described as Overlook Plaza is on land that holds the hearts, footsteps and spirits of the Ho-Chunk, Dakota, Ojibwe, Fox and Sac people and their relatives. We seek to honor the values, traditional teachings, and contributions of all Indigenous people with connections to this region. We also seek to recognize the hardship, exploitation, forcible removal and historical inequities experienced by these tribal communities. Despite these hardships, our Indigenous community members are still here. The city commits to being part of the learning and healing needed to build reciprocal and long-lasting trusted relationships. *(This Land Acknowledgement Statement is solely for the purpose of this Call to Indigenous Artists and has not been formally adopted by the City of La Crescent and is expected to undergo revisions and updates as we work together with our Indigenous partners.)*

3. LA CRESCENT, MINNESOTA

La Crescent, Minnesota is located in far southeast Minnesota along the Mississippi River and is the largest community in Houston County with a population of 5,276. La Crescent is nestled between the Mississippi River and the dramatic and picturesque bluffs in an area often referred to as the Driftless Region. La Crescent is a vibrant, dynamic community and boasts a mix of residential, open space, wetlands, blufflands, commerce, and industry that make it a great place to live, work and raise a family. La Crescent, known as the Apple Capital of Minnesota, is part of the larger La Crosse, WI/La Crescent, MN metropolitan area. La Crescent has plenty of recreation and leisure options, including a growing trail system which connects many of our neighborhoods

and parks. The city sets a high priority on preserving our greenspaces in a way that is sustainable for generations to come and welcomes residents and visitors to enjoy all that nature has to offer. We are just beginning to learn about the importance some of these spaces hold to our Indigenous partners.

4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

The City of La Crescent received a Blandin Foundation grant through their Boost Grant program. The grant request noted the city desires to educate residents and visitors and celebrate our rich Indigenous history and culture by installing public art, monuments, kiosks, seating, and native plantings at the city's proposed Overlook Plaza in downtown La Crescent. Overlook Plaza is a greenspace located in the core of the city at the terminus of the new Wagon Wheel Trail bicycle/pedestrian connector bridge over U.S. Highway 14/61.

Downtown La Crescent was the site of an Indigenous community, located on a terrace of the Mississippi River, yet very little written knowledge of this village exists other than one archaeological report. It has become evident that the city is missing an important part of our history prior to European settlement. The Overlook Plaza area provides a prime location to feature the history, stories, and culture of the Indigenous people who called this part of the Driftless Region home and who continue to have a strong connection to this place.

This project will build on the Neutral Ground history project by the La Crescent Historical Society and the Minnesota Historical Society that highlighted the 1832 Land Survey delineating a boundary the United States Government created between tribes. These seemingly arbitrary boundaries held no meaning to the tribal nations that lived in this region. The Neutral Ground essentially became the first "reservation" that the Ho-Chunk people were forcibly removed to when they were forced from their lands east of the Mississippi River. Ho-Chunk were then forced from the Neutral Ground to multiple other locations in Minnesota and Nebraska, but they kept coming back to this area of the Mississippi River Valley. Likewise, the Dakota and other tribal nations have their own rich history and connection to this area.

Overlook Plaza is envisioned to become the "first in a series" of focal points that celebrate the Indigenous peoples who called and still call this region home. We need to look beyond traditional written history to tell the stories of the challenges these people faced and the resilience it took to still have a presence here today. The purpose of this project is to honor, celebrate, and communicate the accurate story to a wide audience of students, residents and visitors.

5. BLANDIN FOUNDATION GRANT - ACTIVITIES

With the receipt of the Blandin Foundation grant, the city matched the grant with city dollars. The

city entered into an agreement with the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, regional experts in the archaeology of western Wisconsin and southeast Minnesota. The city then sought collaboration with the University of Minnesota as part of a Resilient Communities Project (RCP) partnership. RCP is a program at the University of Minnesota's Center for Urban and Regional Affairs (CURA) that connects University faculty and students with local government agencies in Minnesota to address strategic projects that advance local resilience, equity, and sustainability.

The city has had two successful engagements with the RCP that included a Capstone Class of three Masters of Urban Planning students in the spring of 2024. This was followed in the summer of 2024 with two graduate students continuing research in three areas: 1) conducting additional interviews of indigenous residents, 2) case study interviews with staff in a city and a county that have installed public art projects, and 3) local community engagement to continue to gather design considerations using the Placelt! tool.

For a more complete understanding of this endeavor, we strongly recommend reading the following reports to learn more about the efforts undertaken to date to learn and establish relationships before moving forward with designing the space: [Indigenous History Project](#)

To Acknowledge and to Celebrate: Indigenous Placemaking on Hoocak and Dakota Homelands
Indigenous History for Overlook Plaza: Engagement Best Practices and Design Ideas

"When you think about it, there is quite a bit of difference between partners and advisors, even when they are working together for the same goal. When you have a collaboration of partners, there is better buy-in for all groups. Where opinion is asked for, that opinion is kept in a higher regard between partners versus an advisor coming in and saying something" (anonymous interview, 2024).

This project would not be possible if not for the relationships that Mayor Mikel Poellinger and Council Member Teresa O'Donnell-Ebner have with Ho-Chunk Nation members who live in the La Crescent area. These relationships have been expanded and strengthened by the creation of the Indigenous History Project Resource Committee and by the city's continued outreach and interaction with the region's tribal communities and nations.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

One of the key accomplishments of the RCP projects was the development of Guiding Principles to be applied to our ongoing work with Indigenous residents and tribal nations in integrating indigenous history and culture into community spaces. These principles were developed over the course of months through a series of meetings and interviews, primarily with native residents

living in the La Crescent area. These principles are informed by research of similar partnerships with native organizations. Additionally, research into land acknowledgements and native history projects in the region helped highlight important guidance and frameworks. While these Guiding Principles are intended to be constantly evolving, the principles set forth in APPENDIX I are the current version created by the student team and presented to the La Crescent Indigenous History Project Resource Committee at their May 2, 2024 meeting.

7. LOCATION

The project site is located in downtown La Crescent at the east end of South 1st Street. The site is currently a mix of asphalt, concrete and grass and will be transformed by this project to include the artists' and community's vision and goals for this site. The plan calls for asphalt removal on the north side of the sidewalk in order for the site to have some symmetry with the grass area on the south of the sidewalk. The grass area could be used for native plantings and pollinator-friendly plants. The site is immediately west of the Wagon Wheel Trail Bicycle-Pedestrian Bridge at the intersection of two endpoints—the end of South 1st Street and the terminus of the bicycle/pedestrian bridge over U.S. Highway 14/61. Overlook Plaza is positioned as a gateway and gathering point. It serves as the start of the Wagon Wheel trail, a paved bicycle-pedestrian trail connecting La Crescent to La Crosse, Wisconsin, and connecting the city's downtown to the surrounding natural landscape.



1. "Overlook Plaza" La Crescent, MN





4. Youth Group Site Visit

8. PROJECT SCOPE, THEMES, VALUES and GOALS

Key Design Elements from Placelt! Workshops: Please refer to APPENDIX II for design elements and themes that were developed from a Placelt! workshop in the summer of 2024 with 24 community members participating. Additionally, the *Indigenous History for Overlook Plaza: Engagement Best Practices and Design Ideas* report provides further background on the foundations of this project.

Visual Art: The selected artist or artist team will create one or more visual art pieces that will invite residents and visitors to be drawn in and to linger and learn through the supplemental use of information kiosks, seating areas, landscaping, and natural or art-based screening of the highway.

Materials and Media: The selection committee is open to a range of media and materials so long as the installation is durable and suitable for long-term exterior display.

Technology: The selected artist or artist team will consider that this project is not static in time and can be enhanced, expanded and improved over time. The project will consider the use of QR codes where stories can be created using written and audio files which can be updated over time. The project may also consider the possible use of augmented reality to further enhance the viewers' experience.

Appropriate Naming of the Site: The city has a non-descript and temporary name for the site known as “Overlook Plaza.” However, the city recognizes that a more meaningful and appropriate name should be given to the site that signifies the importance of this place for the Indigenous community. The artist or artist team may offer and present a name for the site that reflects the Indigenous perspective of the site, the setting, and the art installation. The city may use community collaboration to further develop an appropriate site name.

Collaboration: The artist or artist team will be working with the city, Project Resource Committee and the Minnesota Design Center ([Minnesota Design Center \(MDC\) | College of Design](#)) on the final design for the Overlook Plaza site that may include a native healing garden, plantings for pollinators, seating and contemplation area, visual public art, natural or art-based screening of the highway, and amenities (such as shade, drinking water fountain and considerations for bicyclists and walkers).

Artist Engagement during the project: The artist(s) will be actively engaged during the entire process from concept design to final design of the site and will be present during the installation and opening ceremony. The city and its engineer will oversee the construction process and installation of the art, garden, and site work.

The Award: A commission for the artist(s) selected will be negotiated to support their work.

Project Intent: The location for the public art is at the Overlook Plaza site. The vision for this project is for a signature sculpture and/or other artistic medium of exceptional quality and enduring value located in this prominent public space. This site specific art work should:

- Enhance the bike/pedestrian bridge landing area with a distinctive, aesthetic experience both highly visible and welcoming to all who visit.
- Highlight the importance of the site and area and provide a recognizable identity for the culture, history and resilience of the region’s Indigenous people.
- Be an original art piece appropriate for the installation to stand up to vandalism, graffiti, weather, etc. and be adequately and safely displayed and secured.
- Consider site limitations. Ground space on the site is limited and will require the selected artist(s) to consider the site’s limitations and the art element placement as determined by the artist(s) and the Minnesota Design Center. The design of the artwork may be free-standing.
- Create a signature presence that provides excitement and interest for the community as a whole.
- Create curiosity, in young and old alike, to learn more about the history, culture, and ongoing presence of the Indigenous people of the region.

9. ELIGIBILITY

This Call to Artists is open to any Indigenous artist 18 years of age or older and/or Indigenous artist-led team who primarily live or work in the Midwest or that has an affiliation and connection to the area. Please describe this connection in the letter of interest. Because of the ties and presence of multiple Indigenous communities with the La Crescent area, the city encourages collaboration amongst Indigenous artists.

An artist is defined as someone who:

- ✓ has specialized artistic training, not necessarily in academic institutions.
- ✓ is recognized as a professional by their peers (artists working in the same artistic tradition).
- ✓ is active in and committed to their art practice.
- ✓ has a history of public exhibitions.
- ✓ has produced an independent body of work.

10. COMMISSION and BUDGET

The city has \$60,000 available, inclusive of any applicable tax, and includes, but is not limited to, artist fees, materials, supplies, fabrication, insurance, overhead, shipping and delivery, and travel expenses. The city will fund the installation, necessary site work, base and work with the artist(s) on the installation.

11. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS & DEADLINES

One full application (that can be duplicated for committee review) sent via the Call for Entry platform (CaFÉ). Applications must include the following:

Artist Statement – 2 page max.	- Legal name - Preferred name (if different from legal name) - Pronouns (optional) - Address (Street, City/Town, Province, Postal Code) - Phone number - Email address - Website (if applicable) - Tribal affiliation - statement of status as an American Indian identity, or enrollment status and/or ancestry in a project connected North American Indian tribe. <u>Artist teams</u> will submit a single application, with information for each member, indicating the Lead Artist. Prioritize supporting material showing artwork created by the team. If artwork is from an individual member, identify the artist in the list or caption.
Resume/References 2-page max.	- Artist Bio (one for each member, if applicable). - A list of at least three references familiar with your work and working methods. The list must include name, role, organization, complete addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses (preferably from recent projects).

Letter of Interest (1 page max) No more than 200 words in length, describing how your work addresses perspectives of Indigenous people and your approach to understanding Minnesota Indigenous culture and history.	- Outline of artistic experience, ability, and how this project relates to the Artist's practice. - Connection with Southeast Minnesota (specific or general). - <u>Confirm availability to produce and complete the public art piece (ready for installation) by May1, 2027.</u> - While artwork proposals are not needed at this stage, we encourage artists to describe their artistic approach and preliminary concepts for this project.
Proposal 1 page max	- Proposal must be clear and specific and present a plan and description of the public art sculpture. Consideration should be given to the site, materials, connection to the natural world with an explanation of how viewers will engage with the work. A rendering of your proposal is encouraged.
Budget 1 page max.	The artist is responsible for all associated expenses related to design, fabrication, transportation to the site and will coordinate installation with the city. Artists should factor these costs into their \$60,000 budget. Please include a specific budget with line-item expenses in your proposal.
Portfolio (supporting material)	- Up to 10 images of past work and links to audio or digital video. - List of artworks or caption including: - Title - Year - Medium - Dimensions - Location - Description (if applicable) - Commissioning body (if applicable) - Budget (if applicable) Optional: may include up to three selections of support materials such as reviews, news articles, web links and other related information. <i>Video or audio files should total no more than 10 minutes in length. Links must provide direct access to the audio or video and be public (no account required).</i>
All Submissions must be through the CaFÉ portal	Applications materials must be <u>received</u> no later than September 25, 2026, 4:00 p.m. Central Daylight Time. Submissions will not be returned.

12. QUESTIONS

Please contact Larry Kirch by email at lkirch@cityoflacscent-mn.gov or by phone at 507-895-4096. Questions must be received by **August 31, 2026.**

13. SELECTION CRITERIA PROCESS

A selection committee will include representation from artists/art professionals, Indigenous organizations, Indigenous community members and the City of La Crescent. The final commission of artwork for the site will be awarded by the city council through a contract. The decisions by the committee and the city will be final. The committee will select an artist(s) to create an original site-specific artwork, and will review all eligible applications based on the following criteria:

- Artistic merit, technical quality, capability, budget and impact as evidenced by past work and supporting materials.
- Proposed approach to the project as outlined in the Letter of Interest that reflects Project Intent and Guiding Principles as described in this document.
- A body of work reflecting artistic excellence in Indigenous art.
- Experience working in a public process.
- Experience fabricating and installing permanent artwork suitable for the outdoor environment.
- References provided as part of this application which will be contacted prior to final selection.
- Qualifications and experience.
- Proven record and ability to complete similar scale projects on time and within budget.

The commissioned artist(s) will work with the city, the selection committee and the Minnesota Design Center to create a site-specific, durable piece for this installation. Applicants who wish to be considered for this project should have experience working with Indigenous communities, in public settings, as well as proven ability to fabricate their own work or to work with fabricators and installers. The artwork for this site must reflect the Project Intent and Guiding Principles as described above. The Commissioned Artist(s) will be required to provide evidence of appropriate liability, property damage, and workers compensation insurance while working on the site.

The city will provide the selected artist a \$1,000 fee to produce a final proposal including art concept, artwork design and final budget. The selected artist will receive a contract for the commission in an amount sufficient for all remaining elements of the project including fabrication, shipping, and installation up to \$60,000 and based on the submitted proposed budget at the time of application. The selected artist will be required to execute a contract form with the City of La Crescent, Minnesota to create and deliver the visual art piece.

14. SCHEDULE (the city reserves the right to modify this schedule, if necessary)

Timeline	Activity
July 31, 2026	Issue Call
August 31, 2026	Deadline for questions
September 25, 2026	<u>DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTALS</u>
October 16, 2026	Resource Committee Selects Finalist

October 19,2026	Selected Artist contract approved and signed
October 20– Feb 26, 2027	Work with Minnesota Design Center on plaza design and art installation parameters
May 1, 2027	Artwork completed and delivered to the city
May 14, 2027	Art installation

15. CONDITIONS

The City of La Crescent, at its sole discretion, may request clarification or request additional information, as deemed necessary to evaluate the submissions. The City of La Crescent reserves the right to reject any or all submissions, or any part thereof, or to terminate or re-advertise this Call to Artists. The City of La Crescent shall have the exclusive rights to issue all public announcements regarding the competition. Applicants shall not issue a news release or other public announcement pertaining to details of this Call to Artists, their submission, or the selection process, without the prior written approval of City of La Crescent. City employees and Selection Committee members are required to treat both the content of submissions and the deliberations of the committee as confidential, to the extent permitted by Minnesota State Statutes.

Funding for this public art opportunity is generously provided by the Blandin Foundation and the City of La Crescent.

APPENDIX I



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. Ensure the participation of indigenous peoples throughout the entire process in ways that align with their interests and goals.
 - Transparency is key in building trust with the indigenous communities
 - Respect and support the creation and evolution of positive, collaborative relationships throughout projects.
 - Prioritize hiring indigenous artists and experts for any parts of projects that are contracted outside of city staff.
2. Increase awareness of the honest history and significance of La Crescent for the Ho-Chunk Nation members, Prairie Island Indian Community members, and other indigenous peoples with relationships to this place.
 - Present information in a way that promotes curiosity, learning, and shared respect and understanding.
 - Emphasize current and future Indigenous relationships with the land and people in and around La Crescent rather than focusing solely on history.
 - Take an inclusive approach, acknowledging the Ho-Chunk Nation, Prairie Island Indian Community, and other indigenous peoples with relationships to the area.
 - Commit to sharing both good and bad aspects of the history between white settlers and Native nations in the La Crescent area.
3. No single perspective or type of knowledge can fully capture the value of a place. Processes and projects associated with this work will support the inclusion of many ways of knowing with an emphasis on moving beyond archeology and colonial histories.
4. The work of integrating Indigenous history and culture will take time and continued dedication, beyond the timeline of any individual project.
 - Individual projects have value in demonstrating tangible progress but should not be seen as the end of this work. This ought to be more than a “box to check.”
 - Understand and support connections between individual projects and larger goals of tribal nations.
5. All project participants should commit to learning about the land and people (i.e. see resource library coming out of this project) before starting and throughout projects.

APPENDIX II

Placelt! Workshop

On August 13, 2024, the City of La Crescent hosted a Placelt! Workshop at the La Crescent-Hokah Elementary School, facilitated by the University of Minnesota research team of Mike Greco and Jules Marzec. A total of 24 participants, divided roughly into four tables of six, participated in the activity.



Participants were asked to work as a group using “found” objects provided by the facilitators to create a model for a small parcel located at the east end of S. 1st Street in downtown La Crescent, in response to the following prompt: “What would your ideal design be for a plaza or public space for the Overlook Plaza area along Highway 14, at the terminus of the Wagon Wheel Trail?” A summary of the key themes discussed at each table is provided below.

Table 1: *Designing a park with a garden and play area*

Key Themes:

- Four plaques with a story of what happened in each direction (N/S/E/W)
- Garden in the middle
- Water feature (some maintenance concerns were raised)
- Benches
- Drinking fountain
- Play area/feature for kids (an animal to climb on)



- QR codes that link to a website with Native voices telling the history of the area from a Native perspective
- Indigenous plants
- Voices of current Native residents (“we’re still here”)



- Signage, QR codes, and augmented reality features
- Circular space in center with a medicine wheel (colors dyed into concrete), oriented N/S/E/W
- Water features

- Benches along outer edge
- Local traditional flora and fauna
- Incorporating native languages (spoken word) and cultural content
- Using native plants as a visual barrier to create a sense of entering a sacred space
- Translating this design to other locations, such as Vetch Park, to create a sanctuary that speaks to the sacredness of these places for Indigenous cultures



Table 4: Incorporating Indigenous art, plants, water, and interactive elements

Key Themes:

- Interactive and informative exhibit with plaques showing where each tribe originated from, where they went for trade, etc.
- Indigenous artwork
- Medicine wheel
- “Circles and cycles”
- Fountain/water feature or artwork on the ground to symbolize river and bluffs
- Native plants (trees; three sisters garden; sage, tobacco, cedar, sweetgrass)

