

What's the story behind NMU's Green Fund?

Green Fund Fee History

In 2016, two students, Nathan Frischkorn and Julia Schroeder prepared a proposal called "Invest in Innovation" as part of the requirements for a class project in PR 432 - Environmental Campaigns. The proposal included research on green fund initiatives at other institutions and a blueprint for a campus-wide grassroots campaign. In December 2016, the two students presented their proposal which got another student, Olivia Walcott very excited. At the time Olivia was trying to launch a chapter of EcoReps at NMU. Olivia and Nathan shared resources and insights.



Green Fund Fast Facts

1. For students, by students

The funds will have a direct, beneficial impact on the student body

2. \$5 opt-out fee

A minimal fee standard across peer institutions

3. Voting opens April 2nd!

Look for an email from ASNMU



In 2017, the small group of students (soon to be known as the EcoReps) presented their proposal for a Green Fund to ASNMU. The ASNMU executive board agreed to put the initiative on the next ballot, and the ASNMU President, Tristin Ruiz became a campus champion for the fund. President Ruiz with the EcoReps (led by Olivia Walcott and Georgia Harrison) launched the grassroots campaign and rallied the student body to vote for the Green Fund referendum on the 2018 ASNMU ballot. In April 2018, 912 students voted in the ASNMU elections; 76% of students voted in favor of the proposed Green Fund.

In May 2018, a small group of students presented the Green Fund proposal to NMU's Board of Trustees. The following is an excerpt from the meeting minutes at that meeting in 2018:

The following students addressed the Board of Trustees regarding campus sustainability and green fund development: Ms. Georgia Harrison, Ms. Heidi Christiansen, Ms. Kit Collins, Ms. Olivia Walcott, and Mr. Bryce DeMers. The students outlined the following: supporting sustainability on campus and the larger community; Student Sustainability Educator Program (Eco-Reps Program) at NMU; Advocated for the creation of a Green Fund at NMU (a \$5.00 fee that students could "opt-out" of to fund socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable initiatives and activities on campus). The funds would be used for Eco-Reps Program operating costs, operating costs for a center for sustainability, and potentially a grant program that would teach students how to write grants; Creating a Center for Sustainability, which would align with NMU's strategic plan and outcomes.

Chair Mahaney thanked the students and said he was impressed with all the work they put into sustainability efforts on campus. He said their comments and efforts draws him back to the Mission Statement which includes, "Our supportive, connected community empowers students, graduates,

faculty and staff to contribute to a diverse and sustainable world.” He then opened the floor to the Trustees for comments.

Trustee Mitchell asked the students how much money the opt-in fee would generate and how much they needed for this program. The students explained that they chose a \$5 opt-out fee because it’s relatively low amongst peer institutions as it’s more common to have \$1/credit hour per semester – they felt they could grow into this. The \$5 opt-out fee would not only allow them to fund Eco-Reps starting in the fall but would also allow them to gain some rollover funds to establish a grant fund and possibly operating funds for a center for sustainability. They said they believed they could operate the program with \$20,000/semester and run it well, with paid students who would be able to coordinate it; they could then grow the fund to pay a full-time staff to run it year-round; then possibly add an additional person to be the sustainability coordinator for NMU who could go beyond student efforts for campus-wide initiatives. They also explained that President Erickson has a proposal from the Sustainability Advisory Council that has a three-tiered budget laid out with possible accomplishments and goals for each level.

The following action was taken:

It was moved by Trustee Mitchell, seconded by Trustee Popp, that Northern Michigan University establish a Student Sustainability Educator (Eco-Rep) Program on a one-year trial basis with the University funding \$20,000/semester the first year as it begins to determine whether or not this is sustainable in the future.

Discussion followed:

Trustee Mitchell said a \$5 opt-out fee is terrific. He said he has a son that is a millennial and he understands how important sustainability is and that this sounds like a good program to establish.

Chair Mahaney asked the administration what the process would be to turn this into an ongoing student fee. Mr. Leach said it would be calculated to see what dollar amount would be necessary for the University to achieve the needs of the plan and a formal recommendation would be brought to the Board for approval. Chair Mahaney then asked if the students ultimately voted on the fee. Trustee Popp said we should take a step to understand what we are trying to accomplish – what are the tangibles of this fund. Mr. Tristan Ruiz, outgoing ASNMU President, clarified the question about the \$5 opt-out green fund fee – the fee was on the ASNMU 2018 referendum ballot and the students did vote in favor of the opt-out fee. Trustee Popp asked what percentage of the student body voted. Mr. Ruiz said there were 912 votes; of those voting, 76% voted in favor of the opt-out green fund fee. Trustee Popp said the evidence is there that the students are going to do something and, as previously stated, it aligns with the mission and vision of the University and these are the types of initiatives we want to see on our campus.

President Erickson said he believes this is the right way to step into this because there is a process that needs to be determined to build it out correctly. The idea of the University funding this on a one-year experimental basis gives us time to look at this and see how it all fits together.

Chair Mahaney asked the students how much money was saved when they did the Turn Down the Lights day on campus this past semester. They explained they worked with Ms. Kathy Richards who is on the Sustainability Advisory Council. They turned down the corridor lights in most of the academic buildings and saved approximately 5,600 kwh, which is \$700 over five days, and equates to approximately \$36,000 annually if this were to be done every day. Chair Mahaney said their initiative made NMU look fiscally smart and they are providing economic justification for this program – he commended them for their efforts.

Being no further discussion, Chair Mahaney called the question and the following action was taken:

The motion passed with eight (8) for and zero (0) against.

The next year the EcoReps launched with Olivia Walcott serving as the first paid sustainability student-employee at NMU. In spring 2019, the Board of Trustees granted the EcoReps an additional \$20,000 for their efforts. The funds were allocated to the Center for Student Enrichment and the cost approval officer is Chris Greer the Dean of Students.

In October of 2019, another campus-wide survey was conducted to determine if students were still interested in or supportive of the Green Fund. The question was posed to NMU students:

“Two years ago, the student body voted for a \$5 opt-out fee for a green fund. Do you support the student-led \$5 opt-out fee for sustainability initiatives?”

One hundred percent of student survey respondents (n= 267 students) voted “YES” - demonstrating overwhelming support for the Green Fund.

The survey results along with updates about the projects that EcoReps had led on campus (Turn Down the Lights, Zero Waste Games, Fix-it Friday, Bike Week & Tune-up Tuesdays, etc.) was presented (again) to the Board of Trustees in spring 2020.

At the budget meeting in the summer of 2020, the **Board of Trustees approved the Green Fund.** The first tuition bill that included the \$5 opt-out fee was in Fall 2020. The first Green Fund proposal was submitted in September 2020. When that proposal arrived, there was no protocol for selecting and funding projects. Thus, the President’s Council quickly put together guidelines for the EcoReps and the President’s Sustainability Advisory Council to review and submit proposals, to be approved by the President’s Council. As of Fall 2022, the process is as follows:

Green Fund Fee Process

Northern's newly instituted Green Fund Fee will generate about \$50,000 per year for sustainability efforts. The following process has been approved for the annual management of the fee.

Funding Process

Step 1: EcoReps will develop proposals for the Green Fund Fee, understanding that all costs related to the operations of EcoReps and all sustainability efforts must not exceed \$50,000 annually unless carry-forward funds are available from previous years. Each proposal must be presented in a 1-3 page concept paper, including any known timeline and budget elements. The paper must explain how the sustainability project/initiative supports NMU's mission, vision, core values and/or strategic plan, and it must provide information on how it benefits current or future NMU students and the long-term sustainability of the university. To clarify, a proposal requesting funds to support operations of EcoReps should be submitted separately from proposals for specific projects.

Step 2: The EcoReps' Green Fund Fee proposals would go to the NMU Sustainability Advisory Council, which has student, faculty, staff, administration and community representation. The Council would review the proposals, add additional commentary (more information on timeline, costs, benefits, etc.) and prioritize the projects, initiatives, and operations in a funding recommendation that would go to the President's Executive Council.

Step 3: Prior to submission to the President's Executive Council, the funding recommendations will be provided to the VP Finance office for initial review, and the recommendations may be sent back with questions or comments related to the budgets.

Step 4: The President's Executive Council would review the Sustainability Advisory Council's recommendation of priorities and approve it or send it back with questions or comments.

Step 5: Some aspects of a Green Fund Fee recommendation may need Board of Trustees approval, but most will be university operations and not need BOT approval. However, the BOT will be kept informed of the sustainability efforts.

Annual Timeline

EcoReps develop proposals for the following academic year (i.e. 2022-23) during fall semester (i.e. fall 2021). Beginning in Fall 2021, proposals must be submitted to the Sustainability Advisory Council by end of November. Fiscal year 2021-2022 proposals must be submitted to the Sustainability Advisory Council no later than February 5, 2021. The Sustainability Advisory Council reviews proposals and forwards its recommendation to the Executive Council by the end of February. The President's Executive Council reviews and approves or returns by end of March. April is used for fine-tuning proposals. Distribution of funds to the appropriate University unit would be made in the fall semester.

Financial Oversight

The Finance and Budget Office will manage and disperse the Green Fund Fee to the appropriate unit(s) overseeing the sustainability projects, initiatives, and operations as part of the University budget process. The Finance and Budget Office will develop the needed reporting tools to manage accountability of the fee usage.

Green Fund Balance History

Year 1 - \$45,075 was collected; \$27,415 in Fall 2020 and \$17,660 in Winter 2021

Year 2 - \$50,000 was collected in Fall 2021 & Winter 2022

Year 3 - \$25,000 in Fall 2022 & \$23,000 is predicted for Winter 2023

2022 Green Fund Funded and Implemented Projects:

Solar installation at 1400 Presque Isle Avenue	\$50,000 (bid was \$49,901.60)
Rain Garden (<i>complete</i>)	\$4,000 (spent \$3,993.41)
Clover Lawn (<i>complete</i>)	\$2,500 (spent \$1,753.05)
Beekeeping Equipment	\$4,500 (spent \$759.66)
Composting	<u>\$2,000</u> (nothing spent to date)
Total Designated for 2022 Projects	\$63,000

Budget balance (as of October 2022)

EcoReps - \$9,118
Green Fund - \$44,000