



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

M.L. 2026 Approved Work Plan

General Information

ID Number: 2026-508

Staff Lead: Michael Varien

Date this document submitted to LCCMR: May 21, 2026

Project Title: Climate-Smart Counties and Communities: Collaborative Resiliency Solutions

Project Budget: \$827,000

Project Manager Information

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Project Reporting

Date Work Plan Approved by LCCMR: June 17, 2026

Reporting Schedule: April 1 / October 1 of each year.

Project Completion: June 30, 2029

Final Report Due Date: August 14, 2029

Legal Information

Legal Citation: M.L. 2026, Chp. 104, Sec. 2, Subd. 03h

Appropriation Language: \$827,000 the second year is from the trust fund to the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota for the Institute on the Environment to provide technical expertise and support to predominantly rural and small communities and counties across Minnesota to develop climate resiliency plans and implement projects that enhance local resiliency.

Appropriation End Date: June 30, 2029

Narrative

Project Summary: This project proposes a novel way to help rural and small communities and counties across Minnesota develop and implement locally-driven resiliency plans that tap world-class expertise in Minnesota and Germany.

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Rural counties and small communities in Minnesota face increasing challenges in building resilience to climate change and adapting to a shifting energy landscape. Historically, energy production in Minnesota has been centralized, leaving local governments with limited experience in managing decentralized renewable energy infrastructure. Decision-making on land use for these new energy systems lies with county boards, whose members often lack technical expertise in climate resilience and sustainable energy. This gap in knowledge, combined with the absence of established best practices for county-community-private sector collaboration, impedes local governments from effectively planning and implementing sustainable solutions.

Financial constraints further exacerbate the problem, particularly in rural areas where counties and communities struggle with limited resources. Many lack the capacity to hire dedicated personnel with expertise in climate adaptation, renewable energy, and sustainability planning. Without adequate technical support, local governments remain reactive rather than proactive, making it difficult to seize opportunities for innovation or leverage external expertise effectively. This capacity gap leaves Minnesota's rural communities vulnerable to climate-related disruptions.

To address these challenges, new cooperative models are needed that encourage knowledge-sharing and joint problem-solving.

What is your proposed solution to the problem or opportunity discussed above? Introduce us to the work you are seeking funding to do. You will be asked to expand on this proposed solution in Activities & Milestones.

To empower Minnesota's counties and communities in developing climate resilience, this project fosters collaboration among counties and communities—and integrates expertise from Germany's sustainability initiatives—to develop actionable solutions and accelerate resiliency efforts. Supporting municipalities and businesses with short-term in-house renewable energy technical expertise is designed to bridge the expertise gap and empower communities to develop forward-thinking resiliency strategies.

Key components:

Regular Virtual Technical Meetings: Virtual meetings will connect experts and stakeholders from Minnesota and North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) to discuss current resiliency barriers and present concrete solutions. The approach facilitates continuous learning and adaptation. To overcome language barriers, simultaneous interpretation services will be provided.

Resiliency Technical Services: Counties, municipalities and private sector businesses will be able to request funding to hire technical experts focused on renewable energy, environmental engineering, and/or sustainability to develop resiliency plans or implement solutions.

Workshops: These 2-day workshops serve as collaborative platforms, bringing together 25-30 county and community representatives from Minnesota and technical experts from Germany. Participants will share experiences and co-create actionable solutions tailored to local contexts. The workshops stand to produce a range of model approaches that will inspire counties and communities across Minnesota.

What are the specific project outcomes as they relate to the public purpose of protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of the state's natural resources?

At least 11 communities will work with a technical expert to develop a project that best suits their needs. Outcomes will include things like resiliency plans and infrastructure changes that will better protect natural resources and Minnesota's environment.

Through regular meetings, participants will learn from each other and build stronger ties across the state. Participating communities will become Minnesota resiliency leaders and share the results of their efforts through our project website, fact sheets, and other media. We will compile a final report highlighting these leaders as case studies to inspire others to do their own resiliency projects.

Project Location

What is the best scale for describing where your work will take place?

Statewide

What is the best scale to describe the area impacted by your work?

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Virtual Technical Meetings to Connect Stakeholders and Experts, Address Resiliency Barriers, and Identify Actionable Solutions

Activity Budget: \$187,847

Activity Description:

County and municipal leaders and connected stakeholders need to develop a deeper understanding of resiliency measures and how they are interconnected to achieve resilience objectives. To ensure cost-effective waste management and environmental protection, counties benefit from greater knowledge of renewable energy and resource potential. The team will host seven virtual technical 90-minute meetings per year, similar to the Climate Smart Municipalities program meeting design, to allow participants and subject matter experts to access the latest solutions on these issues and develop measures that will fit the distinct profile of their community. The meetings will be promoted using newsletters and a project website and be structured to be interactive and engaging, pairing integrative technical solutions with an information exchange between project participants. Technical information will be summarized in fact sheets and circulated after each meeting. The virtual format ensures efficiency and access across Minnesota. An interpreter (in-kind) will ensure that technical expertise available in Germany will be fully accessible to Minnesotan participants. These meetings will be the backbone for a statewide collaborative network of counties, communities, and businesses that want to lead on resiliency measures and hope to inspire others. We will track participation and engagement to assess program impact.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
organize and host 7 virtual meetings per year with technical experts and active participation	June 30, 2027
organize and host 7 virtual meetings per year with technical experts and active participation	June 30, 2028
organize and host 7 virtual meetings per year with technical experts and active participation	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Resiliency Technical Services to Support Local Resiliency Project Development and Implementation

Activity Budget: \$389,915

Activity Description:

Counties, municipalities and businesses can request funding to hire technical experts (up to \$18,000/project; at least 11 projects across 3 years) focused on renewable energy, environmental engineering, and/or sustainability to develop tailored resiliency plans or implement a resilience project. This activity will focus on rural areas as they often lack the staff and access to new technical expertise to develop their specific resiliency solution. The temporary technical experts or appropriately-skilled student interns will devote 32 hours/week for five months to each project. The project leaders will work with interested Minnesota communities to identify a specific resiliency issue, find an expert or intern, and develop a work plan. Participating communities will be required to commit staff time for mentoring and continuous project engagement. They will also be asked to arrange at least one in-house presentation on approaches and/or results. They will be invited to share their specific resiliency plan or project at one of the virtual meetings to ensure dissemination and optimal collaborative learning. Their projects will be summarized and shared through the website and newsletter. The impact of the project and in-kind contributions of these entities will be assessed and reported after each completed project.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Invite applications, evaluate, select counties/communities/partners to receive funds, award funds - cohort 1	July 31, 2026
implement, monitor, and close awarded projects - cohort 1	December 31, 2026
Invite applications, evaluate, select counties/communities/partners to receive funds, award funds - cohort 2	March 31, 2027
3 Minnesota counties, municipalities or businesses complete resiliency plans or projects in year 1	June 30, 2027
Implement, monitor, and close awarded projects - cohort 2	December 31, 2027
Invite applications, evaluate, select counties/communities/partners to receive funds, award funds - cohort 3	March 31, 2028
4 Minnesota counties, municipalities or businesses complete resiliency plans or projects in year 2	June 30, 2028
Implement, monitor, and close awarded projects - cohort 3	December 31, 2028
4 Minnesota counties, municipalities or businesses complete resiliency plans or projects in year 3	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Workshops with Community Representatives and Technical Experts to Co-Create Actionable Solutions Tailored to Local Contexts

Activity Budget: \$249,238

Activity Description:

These 2-day workshops serve as collaborative platforms, bringing together 25-30 county, community, and business representatives from Minnesota and technical experts from Germany. Participants will share experiences and co-create actionable solutions tailored to local contexts. The workshops stand to produce a range of model approaches that will inspire counties and communities across Minnesota. By partnering with German experts from North-Rhine Westphalia, Minnesota county and community leaders can collaboratively learn from Germany's initiatives, accelerating Minnesota resiliency efforts. A facilitator will ensure a smooth and effective meeting. Results of the workshop will be made available on the project website and highlighted in newsletters, social media, and shareable fact sheets or videos. Efforts will be made to ensure the participation of the counties' and municipalities' legislators. The project's communications expert will ensure timely and specific outreach through the website, newsletter, and collaboration with representatives of different stakeholder groups who can distribute prepared communications. Participants will receive an honorarium to ensure broad participation, consistent with LCCMR fund expectations. As the project's key initiation and final capstone activity, we will evaluate the effectiveness of project activities after the workshop through an evaluation questionnaire and interviews with key participants to improve and shape future programming.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
2-day workshop "MN Collaborative Resiliency Solutions 2027"	June 30, 2027
2-day workshop "MN Collaborative Resiliency Solutions 2029"	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Troy Goodnough	University of Minnesota	Co-Principal Investigator	Yes

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

Dissemination and sharing of project results is key to reaching our project goals. Each of the project's three components involves a dissemination and sharing aspect as indicated above.

Throughout the project, summaries of the technical meetings and workshop will be available on the project website and highlighted through other communications, including newsletters, social media, and fact sheets. We will work with representatives of the different stakeholder groups to identify the best communications channels to reach their audiences and tailor communications to fit those channels. We will incorporate broader public-facing communications that will raise awareness and inspire others as well as more specific communications that may be more technical in nature and of use to county/city employees. We will also provide high-level communications that counties/cities can share with their residents.

The most powerful component of our dissemination effort, however, is its people and the network they are building over the course of the project. Each local government partner, each of the technical interns, each of the participants in the virtual and in-person activities is a multiplier who will authentically communicate with peers and others about the project. This is an invaluable resource that will be active every day. Focusing on depth of dissemination will ensure the intended long-term effect of our project. What does success look like? By 2029, when this project formally ends, all eleven of the participating counties and communities are recognized across Minnesota as models for locally tailored and collaborative resiliency solutions and become resources for other MN counties and communities.

All communications produced by this project will properly credit ENRTF and LCCMR and use the logo when appropriate. We will tag when using social media and submit to the LCCMR newsletter when appropriate.

Long-Term Implementation and Funding

Describe how the results will be implemented and how any ongoing effort will be funded. If not already addressed as part of the project, how will findings, results, and products developed be implemented after project completion? If additional work is needed, how will this work be funded?

Ensuring the long-term implementation and financing of the project's results requires strategic institutionalization and funding mechanisms. By embedding climate resiliency strategies into county policies and planning frameworks, local governments can sustain resiliency efforts beyond the project's duration. Regular knowledge-sharing through established regional networks (e.g. Association of MN Counties, MN Inter-County Association, League of MN Cities) will maintain momentum and facilitate adaptation to evolving challenges. One immediate tool for advancing and anchoring a resiliency mindset and ensuring sustainable investments is for counties to create a dedicated resiliency/sustainability officer position to help the county's communities and businesses.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Principal Investigator		will be task leader, will oversee the direction of all aspects of the program, will supervise project staff and contracts to achieve the project outcomes			36.6%	1.95		\$364,462
Co-Principal Investigator		will lead and support technical services and resiliency projects, will provide mentorship to project teams, will collaborate with PI on technical content for workshops and meetings			36.6%	0.45		\$60,456
Communications Specialist		will support communication design strategy associated with the project, including development of internal communications (e.g. newsletters) for project participants and external communications for the public (e.g. website content, articles, video/digital content)			32.3%	0.54		\$53,287
Research Project Manager		will support project team planning, engagement and coordination, contract management, progress tracking, and reporting			32.3%	0.54		\$43,351
Grant Administrator		will support budgeting, financial tracking, and reporting			32.3%	0.06		\$6,954
Undergraduate Project Assistant		will assist task leaders with participant recruitment and engagement, virtual meeting support, and communications development			0%	1.11		\$36,865
							Sub Total	\$565,375
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Facilitator will guide discussions, ensure participation, manage time, and help the group achieve goals of the 2-day workshops by fostering collaboration.				0.04		\$12,000
TBD	Service Contract	Deploy service contracts to support Minnesota municipalities or businesses to fund resiliency projects (up to \$18,000/project; at least 11 projects across 3 years). These projects will require technical services from engineering interns that this contract will support. The contracts would have specific deliverables such as a resiliency plan.				3.36		\$165,600

							Sub Total	\$177,600
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Workshop supplies for 2-day, in-person workshop preferably at a non-metro location (once in year 1 and once in year 3)	Supplies such as name tags, wayfinding signs, easels, rolling carts and flipcharts will enable workshop participants to engage fully and without difficulty.					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$2,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 project personnel will travel approximately 100-350 miles 2 times per year at a rate of \$750 per person per trip	2 project personnel will travel within Minnesota to engage with project participants and host the workshops					\$9,000
							Sub Total	\$9,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printed materials for in-person workshops including flyers, factsheets and programs	Printed materials will help workshop attendees engage and participate in the activities as well as have materials to bring back to their communities					\$1,025
							Sub Total	\$1,025
Other Expenses								

		Stipend of \$1,000 per participant for 30 participants to attend 1 workshop in years 1 and 3. Stipend will cover their workshop preparation, participation, and follow-up and offset 75% of the cost of attendance.	Compensates Minnesota community leaders for their contribution to and participation in the workshop					\$60,000
		Workshop space rental for 2-day, in-person workshops preferably at a non-metro location (once in year 1 and once in year 3)	The 2-day workshops will require meeting space to host 30 participants, several technical experts, and project personnel.	X				\$3,000
		Food and refreshments for 2-day, in-person workshops preferably at non-metro location (once in year 1 and once in year 3). Rates based on UMN per diem rates for St. Cloud, MN (2x lunch @ \$19, 1x dinner @ \$28, 1x breakfast \$16, 2x \$15/person/day snacks/break refreshments = \$112/person x 40 persons which includes speakers and community leaders).	Food and refreshments nourish participants who will be engaged in discussion and workshop activities all day for 2 days.	X				\$9,000
							Sub Total	\$72,000
							Grand Total	\$827,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Other Expenses		Workshop space rental for 2-day, in-person workshops preferably at a non-metro location (once in year 1 and once in year 3)	Meeting space will ensure that all participants can attend in-person and engage fully in the workshop. Although we use virtual meetings very effectively for joint learning and quick information exchange elsewhere in the project, the in-person workshops are designed to iteratively collaborate in small groups and jointly as the larger 30+ member team over the 2 days to produce actionable results. A physical meeting space that is appropriately equipped and located, preferably, in a convenient location for rural Minnesota participants is essential for that.
Other Expenses		Food and refreshments for 2-day, in-person workshops preferably at non-metro location (once in year 1 and once in year 3). Rates based on UMN per diem rates for St. Cloud, MN (2x lunch @ \$19, 1x dinner @ \$28, 1x breakfast \$16, 2x \$15/person/day snacks/break refreshments = \$112/person x 40 persons which includes speakers and community leaders).	Participants will be asked to spend 2 days with each other for a deep-dive workshop and away from their normal routines. Food will need to be provided so that participants may fully engage in discussion and workshop activities for the entirety of the workshop. We will provide approximately 40 attendees (30 project participants plus 10 technical experts and staff) with 1 dinner, 2 lunches, 1 breakfast, and light refreshments throughout the day for a cost of \$4,500 per workshop. The individual cost items are Lunch \$19, dinner \$28, breakfast \$16 plus 2x \$15/person/day snacks/break refreshments = \$56/person/day. We will work with local businesses to obtain these provisions.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	\$ Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Funds will be deployed from donor gifts to UMN Institute on the Environment.	For meetings involving technical experts from Germany, language interpretation is necessary as it enables full participation, engagement, and comprehension for all meeting attendees. Interpreters will be funded at a rate of \$125 per hour with expected 248 hours of work required to cover all virtual and in-person meetings across 3 years.	Secured	\$31,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$31,000
			Funds Total	\$31,000

Total Project Cost: \$858,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [645b631a-183.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Infographic showing how Climate-Smart can help MN counties and municipalities develop tailored resiliency plans...

Supplemental Attachments

Capital Project Questionnaire, Budget Supplements, Support Letter, Photos, Media, Other

Title	File
Letter of Support--Olmsted County Commissioner David H. Senjem	5f879d3c-036.pdf
U of M letter authorizing submission	1fddd351-675.pdf
U of M annual financial report 2024	b09064e6-5e1.pdf
U of M signed financial statement 2024	80130c7f-e88.pdf
attachment_logisticsAndProcessDetailsForActivity2	dda3a1dd-71e.pdf
2026-508_OutcomesAndDeliverablesTrackingTable	67ee371c-dea.pdf

Difference between Proposal and Work Plan

Describe changes from Proposal to Work Plan Stage

To reduce our project costs to meet the recommended funding amount, we scaled back our project activities in the following ways. The number of virtual meetings was reduced to 7 per year (Activity 1). We reduced the funding available for counties, municipalities and businesses to request to hire technical experts and plan to support at least 11 projects across the 3 years (Activity 2). We reduced the number of 2-day, in-person workshops to 2 occurrences – once near the start and once near the end of the project (Activity 3). A grant administrator and an undergraduate project assistant were added to the project and all personnel salaries and efforts were updated.

In this work plan, we included a description of our dissemination efforts and an updated visual component that better represents our project.

Additional Acknowledgements and Conditions:

The following are acknowledgements and conditions beyond those already included in the above workplan:

Do you understand and acknowledge the ENRTF repayment requirements if the use of capital equipment changes?

N/A

Do you understand that travel expenses are only approved if they follow the "Commissioner's Plan" promulgated by the Commissioner of Management of Budget or, for University of Minnesota projects, the University of Minnesota plan?

Yes, I understand the UMN Policy on travel applies.

Does your project have potential for royalties, copyrights, patents, sale of products and assets, or revenue generation?

No

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

N/A

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF?

N/A

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

No

Does the organization have a fiscal agent for this project?

No

Does your project include the pre-design, design, construction, or renovation of a building, trail, campground, or other fixed capital asset costing \$10,000 or more or large-scale stream or wetland restoration?

No

Do you propose using an appropriation from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund to conduct a project that provides children's services (as defined in Minnesota Statutes section 299C.61 Subd.7 as "the provision of care, treatment, education, training, instruction, or recreation to children")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this project:

Dr. Claire Anderson, research project manager, Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

Yes, I understand