**PROJECT TITLE: MN GreenStep Schools: Statewide Launch in 12 Schools**

**I. PROJECT STATEMENT**

This proposal integrates environmental best practices with hands-on environmental education. Funding will launch the MN GreenStep Schools program in 12 schools which become catalysts in their regions, yielding education and environmental outcomes.
**Program:** MN GreenStep Schools is a statewide challenge, assistance, and recognition program for schools and districts responding to their desire to improve their operations and outcomes in three areas: reducing environmental impacts and cost, improving health, and providing environmental education. The program is free and voluntary and is based on the concept of the successful MN GreenStep Cities program, which has spread across the state. MN GreenStep Schools program addresses best practices in energy, water, waste, habitat, and healthy buildings, and also integrates these with environmental education through experiential learning opportunities in K-12 schools across the state. The program design framework is complete with an initial set of criteria, tools, and resources in development. MN GreenStep Schools is a program of the University of Minnesota, the MN Pollution Control Agency, and their partners.
**Goal**: Environmental education through hands-on projects and community events that yield measurable environmental and economic benefits, and exploration of professional and trade STEM careers.
**Outcomes:** Funding will enable completion of online program elements for all to use, and support an inaugural set of 12 schools that will catalyze momentum in 6 Minnesota regions. Students and their schools will benefit with hands-on experiential learning that makes a difference in human and environmental health outcomes and opens up STEM and other career opportunities to students.
**How**: To meet the goal and achieve outcomes, there are two activities: 1) Establish the support structure for schools to participate and improve overtime, including website recognition, online connections to resources and opportunities, and simple, online documentation. 2) Launch a statewide MN GreenStep Schools program into 12 school districts, while also providing free access to the program for any interested school in Minnesota.
**Need, Opportunities, Response**: Schools and Districts are looking for guidance and step-by-step support to provide environmental education that integrates with facilities improvement to protect human and environmental health, and save on operational cost (Phase 1 report [www.mngreenstepschools.org](http://www.mngreenstepschools.org)). An initial small survey in 2018 yielded 18 schools or districts interested in participating. As the Minnesota energy and environmental landscape is changing those who plan for current and future opportunities stand to benefit. Schools and Districts need peer examples to motivate and inform change. This grant is necessary to support an inaugural set of 12 Minnesota schools to become regional catalysts, demonstrating program success, serving as a resource model for other schools in their region, and laying out long-range plans for advanced achievement.

**II. PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND OUTCOMES**

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| **Activity 1 Title: Prepare Program Resources and Recruit Schools for Launch in Year 2.****Description:**Implement the full criteria, tools, and resources into the website, working in partnership with local school districts, community members, and program partners. Develop a competitive application process and hire an outreach coordinator to recruit and support schools across the state (both the 12 catalyst schools and additional schools.) Identify assistance providers to accelerate school action.**ENRTF BUDGET: $101,591**

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| **Outcomes**  | **Completion Date** |
| 1.  Website updated with functionality to support program launch in year 2 including google docs platform for reporting and communicating progress, and initial population of database of resources and supporting resource organizations.   | 2/2021 |
| 2.  Outreach coordinator hired  | 2/15/2021 |
| 3.  Competitive Application Process developed and issued. | 3/30/2021 |
| 4.  Initial 6 schools selected | 6/1/2021 |

**Activity 2:** **Launch Statewide Program in 12 School Districts****Description:** Support 12 school districts across the state to set up school teams, pass resolutions, and implement best practices to achieve outcomes in environmental education and environmental impact. University of Minnesota will manage the project, supporting 12 catalyst schools (and others interested), engaging resource organizations, and conducting evaluations to inform the program development. Youth Eco Solutions (YES!, formerly Youth Energy Summit), will lead enhanced support, implementation, and outcomes in 12 schools, drawing on their proven, youth-led model and statewide network. Any school may participate in the program, but the 12 regional catalyst schools will receive enhanced training and seed funds, and will commit to providing feedback to the program, sharing their story, and being a resource for future school participants. In each school, students will be empowered to become community leaders and innovators in environmental protection, clean energy, and waste reduction. School teams are led by at least one educator and one facilities or administrative staff, who are supported by MN GreenStep Schools program staff and partner resource organizations specific to their projects.  The 12 regional schools will be selected through a competitive application process based on need, equity, opportunity for impact, readiness, and commitment. Students, school district staff, teachers, parents and community members will work together to learn about the built and natural infrastructure of their school and landscapes as they develop skills to save energy and water, reduce waste, and protect natural habitat by leveraging existing environmental education curriculum and connecting to resources through the program. The 12 schools will create a long-range vision for clean-energy, restorative environmental impacts and financial sustainability.

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| **ENRTF BUDGET: $452,722** |  |

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| **Outcome** *(Based on, 6 schools in year 2, and 6 added schools in year 3)* | **Completion Date** |
| *1.*200 + students directly involved in hands-on environmental education and stewardship | *For each outcome:First half: 6/30/2022Second half:6/30/2023* |
| *2.*100+ school staff will be involved in implementing and sharing best practices |
| *3.*24 + school resource organizations will engage and support schools in the program |
| 4.  An estimated 6,000 (500 per school) other students and community members will learn about the school improvement story and outcomes |
| 5. Education and Actions taken for 5-10% reduced energy, water, waste, or stormwater runoff, and student-led long-range clean energy and environment visions developed. |
| 6.  12 schools will obtain Step 1-2 recognition level in the MN GreenStep Schools program |

**III. PROJECT PARTNERS AND COLLABORATORS:**Project partners include leadership by University of Minnesota’s Minnesota Design Center and Institute on the Environment, with MN Pollution Control Agency, MN Environmental Quality Board, and Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center/YES!. Collaborators include MN Department of Education (incl. Green Ribbon Schools,) MN Department of Health, school districts, community members, and businesses. **IV. LONG-TERM IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING:**Based on the growth that MN GreenStep Cities has realized, we anticipate that after the grant period, 20 new school/district participants will join per year, and existing participants will increase their achievements and outcomes over time. Outside of this grant, the University of Minnesota and program partners are leading a continuation plan for long-term program governance and financial sustainability. |  |