



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2025 Request for Proposal

## General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2025-016

**Proposal Title:** Advancing Equity in Environmental Education

## Project Manager Information

**Name:** Sara Lemke

**Organization:** Camp Fire Minnesota

**Office Telephone:** (612) 540-3043

**Email:** giving@campfiremn.org

## Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** Scholarships will provide inclusive Environmental Education for 7,900 Minnesota youth, addressing gaps in both classroom and outdoor learning. Aligned with state standards, the project supports ENRTF goals for equitable access.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$700,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** June 30, 2027

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Environmental Education (C)

## 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

## Narrative

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

Camp Fire Minnesota is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing access to nature for young people for the past 100 years. Programs include camps, environmental field trips, and afterschool programs; in 2023, we welcomed 9,500 youth, 43% participating through financial assistance. With a legacy spanning a century, we offer enriching outdoor experiences to youth both in classrooms and at our 103-acre property in Excelsior. Our mission, "With nature as our catalyst, we energize youth to discover their spark so their futures glow brighter," guides our initiatives.

In Minnesota, disparities in outdoor engagement persist, with only 5% of people of color visiting state parks and significant STEM achievement gaps among minority students. To bridge these gaps, Camp Fire seeks funding for inclusive outdoor education scholarships, inviting under-resourced youth to participate in our Environmental Education curriculum aligned with Minnesota State Education Standards. Despite a 35% increase in the scholarship budget from 2023 to 2024, our capacity for support in 2024 is already reached just two months into the year. ENRTF funds will empower 7,900 Minnesota students over two years, fostering inclusivity and increasing the knowledge and skills of students to cultivate a sustainable lifestyle and restore and maintain a healthy

### **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 tackle the disparities in outdoor education, our strategic initiative focuses on collaborating with schools where 60% or more of students participate in free and reduced lunch (FRL) programs. This approach aims to bridge the gap in access to inclusive outdoor recreation and STEM opportunities. An accomplishment in 2023 was the engagement of 80% BIPOC youth in our Environmental Education programs, with 72% eligible for FRL, and 85% benefiting from scholarship aid.

Our programs, led by Camp Fire Minnesota, are conducted in classrooms, community parks, and our 103-acre property in Excelsior. Our curriculum is developed in collaboration with educators and youth, with an existing catalog of 17 STEM courses aligned with Minnesota State Education Standards and 10 Outdoor Education courses. Topics range from animal adaptations to renewable energy.

Camp Fire prioritizes removing barriers to nature-based programs, placing the needs of young people and partner organizations at the forefront. Funding support is essential to sustain and expand our efforts. Currently reliant on individual donors and foundations, we seek assistance from LCCMR to address the increasing demand for scholarships, ensuring equitable access. This partnership would mark a pivotal moment in our century-long commitment to fostering discovery and building capacity for future growth.

### **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?**

This project will:

- 1) Guarantee scholarships for 7,900 youth who will have increased knowledge and skills through Environmental Education coursework tied to Minnesota State Education standards that directly align with LCCMR's ENRTF strategic goals of cultivating a sustainable lifestyle and support a healthy and biodiverse natural environment.
- 2) 80% of youth welcomed will report understanding the importance of caring for the natural world around them.
- 3) 95% of educators will report that the activities address the learning objectives they were hoping to address.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Advancing Equity in Environmental Education for 7,900 Minnesota Youth

**Activity Budget:** \$700,500

**Activity Description:**

Our objective is to ensure that our program offerings reach low income and BIPOC young people. To be successful, we will communicate to school representatives, partner organizations, and individuals via email, website, and phone to announce the ENRTF funded scholarship opportunities. We maintain a database of 536 schools and educators that have an interest in Environmental Education experiences but lack the funding. Camp Fire Minnesota will provide scholarships to young people based on need, as determined by Free and Reduced Lunch Rates, identified through an application process. The provision of scholarships will encourage an entire group of young people to attend one or multiple programs, not just those of financial means.

We will document scholarship support provided throughout our 3 core programs: Environmental Education, Summer and School Break Camp, and After School Explorers. All programs are currently offered at no-cost or on a sliding scale. Camp Fire Minnesota's nature-based initiatives serve as a transformative space for youth to rediscover the joy of fun in nature amidst the camaraderie of supportive peers and mentors. The outcome of this work will ensure financial accessibility of all our programs to 7,900 youth.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Create list of current and waitlist partners creating engagement plan alongside educators and youth.	September 30, 2025
Send scholarship information and applications to schools, partners, and individuals we serve and new audiences.	December 31, 2025
Work with current and new partners to identify needs and extra learning support in EE.	April 30, 2026
Update program offerings based on feedback and identified needs from partners and young people.	September 30, 2026
Share updated program offerings and applications to current schools and partners and new audiences.	December 31, 2026
85% of participants will report they value nature and understand importance of the natural world.	April 30, 2027
Partner with 50 schools and community organizations to participate in Camp Fire programs through scholarships.	June 30, 2027
7,900 young people will experience Environmental Education with Camp Fire through our scholarship program.	June 30, 2027

## 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?**

Advancing Equity in Environmental Education is implemented in partnership with educators and youth to build upon our catalog of 17 STEM courses tied to Minnesota State Education Standards and 10 Outdoor Education courses. ENRTF funds will provide strategic scholarship support with current and new partners serving under-resourced populations. With support from ENRTF, this project builds the network of partnerships for Camp Fire to reach diverse school districts and provides environmental education and hands-on learning experiences for 7,900 Minnesota youth. Camp Fire Minnesota is committed to enhancing and expanding our scholarship fund over time with public and private long-term funding

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Sara Lemke

**Job Title:** Director of Development & Communications

**Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.**

Sara Lemke's qualifications make her suited to manage the proposed project. With a decade of leadership experience in non-profit development and grant writing, Sara brings a wealth of expertise to the table. Sara's extensive experience coordinating grant-funded scholarship programs directly aligns with the nature of the proposed project. Her proficiency in navigating the complexities of grant management ensures that the project's financial resources are effectively utilized and allocated by grant requirements. This experience also equips her with the skills to identify and secure additional funding opportunities to support the project's sustainability goals.

Furthermore, Sara's background in non-profit development underscores her strategic understanding and ability to oversee projects from conception to execution. She is adept at setting clear objectives, developing comprehensive strategies, and mobilizing resources to achieve desired outcomes. Sara's strategic mindset enables her to anticipate potential challenges, devise innovative solutions, and adapt to changing circumstances, ensuring the project stays on track and delivers impactful results.

In addition to her technical expertise, Sara possesses strong interpersonal skills and a collaborative leadership style. She builds and maintains relationships with diverse stakeholders, including donors, partners, volunteers, and program participants. Sara's ability to effectively communicate and engage stakeholders fosters trust, transparency, and support, which are essential for project success.

**Organization:** Camp Fire Minnesota

**Organization Description:**

Camp Fire Minnesota, a nature-based youth development organization, fosters inclusivity by providing outdoor experiences to Twin Cities youth. Established in 1924, Camp Fire Minnesota proudly marks its centennial in 2024, having spent a century welcoming Minnesotans to enriching nature adventures. Guided by the mission, "With nature as our catalyst, we energize youth to discover their spark so their futures glow brighter," our organization implements this vision through three key programs: preK-12 Environmental Education field trips and in-class programs, nature-based summer and school-break camps, and after-school nature programs in the community. In 2023, we successfully facilitated nature experiences for 9,500 youth, extending our reach through diverse programs and ensuring accessibility by providing financial assistance to 43% of participants in Camp Fire programming.



## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								

		Environmental Education for 7,900 Students	Provision of scholarship funding averaging \$89/student to underserved youth for day and overnight environmental education learning experiences.					\$700,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$700,000</b>

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--



## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
Cash	Community Crime Intervention & Prevention Grant, OJP	Support of program staff to operate programs and program supplies.	Secured	\$525,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$525,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	Opus Foundation	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies.	Pending	\$200,000
Cash	Otto Bemer Foundation	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies.	Pending	\$150,000
Cash	Program Fees	Fess of summer camp programs.	Pending	\$3,000,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$3,350,000</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$3,875,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$4,575,000**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [2be92d9d-6e6.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Last fall, as part of our 2023 Youth Storytelling Contest, young people submitted artwork, stop motion videos, stories, and poems sharing how being in nature sparks joy, magic, or growth in their world. The creativity of these young people beautifully expresses the importance of Camp Fire Minnesota programs....

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
990 Camp Fire Minnesota	<a href="#">f87da6a6-03f.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution & Letter	<a href="#">8c7c33c4-09a.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
2022 Annual Report	<a href="#">771f0fb8-d78.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**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 proposal:**

Kori Redepening, Camp Fire Minnesota

