



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-278

Proposal Title: Akepa Youth and School Program

Project Manager Information

Name: Terry Gips

Organization: Alliance for Sustainability

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Email: info@afors.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Our innovative Akepa Youth & School Program seeks to develop youth environmental leadership, promote healthy lifestyles, build community, save money, protect our environment, and help young people overcome hopelessness and eco-anxiety.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$896,000

Proposed Project Completion: May 31, 2028

LCCMR Funding Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (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.

Young people feel a deeply concerning sense of hopelessness and eco-anxiety from many well-documented challenges in their communities and ecosystems:

Eco-Anxiety - A 2024 Lancet study found 85% of young people feel extremely to moderately worried about climate change and its impacts, with 38.3% saying their feelings about climate change negatively affect their daily life

Mental Health and Discrimination - The CDC found 44% of youth experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness and that more than half of Black, Asian and multiracial high school students reported perceived racism

Environmental Injustice - The EPA found environmental impacts fall disproportionately on people of color and low-income communities, including breathing more particulate matter and “race appears to be an important factor for exposure in nearly all regions” with serious lung, heart and other public health challenges

Need for Early Civic Engagement - Researchers have consistently found early civic engagement is mutually beneficial to young people and their communities, with The American Academy of Pediatrics finding it affects well-being and mental health, while reducing health-risk behaviors

It’s essential to address these multifaceted challenges to fully engage young people in having healthy, productive lives, both protecting our natural resources and being active citizens.

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.

Our innovative Akepa Youth & School Program addresses young people’s challenges with well-being, eco-anxiety, environmental justice and civic engagement through a multi-faceted effort promoting sustainability, health, equity and kindness (S.H.E. Kindness) in their schools, organizations, homes and communities.

This youth leadership, education, action and creativity program informs, inspires and engages teenagers to take personal and environmental action, have healthy, sustainable lifestyles, build community, save money and protect the environment. It’s delivered by energetic and diverse college interns through:

Akepa Presentation: An entertaining, educational and empowering presentation will be accompanied with an eBook and website with pre- and post-survey.

Taking Action: Students undertake one action in each area of sustainability, health, equity and kindness for one month and track their progress, receiving an ePrize at a celebration.

Students for Sustainability: This student-run group will conserve energy, compost, plant trees, create gardens and protect ecosystems.

Sustainability Team: Administrators, educators, students and parents address operations.

S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize: Students share their artistic expressions from music to videos.

On-going Learning: We’ll offer peer learning, workshops and an annual conference/celebration.

Outreach and Impactful Communications: Publicize Akepa to expand participation and funding.

Evaluation: Conduct an evaluation and social impact analysis.

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?

Akepa will engage young people in protecting and conserving Minnesota's natural resources by encouraging them to express their environmental concerns and informing them about the positive impact they can have so they'll be inspired to take action.

Students will be encouraged to enjoy nature and to work to reduce energy, water, waste, toxics and consumption. They'll learn to recycle and compost, plant trees, create gardens and pollinator habitat, protect ecosystems and support sustainability and climate action in their school district and city.

Furthermore, young people will be empowered to take action to address environmental challenges in disproportionately-impacted, under-served communities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Akepa Presentations to Youth Groups and Middle and High Schools

Activity Budget: \$124,000

Activity Description:

Objective: To address the 85% of young people who feel hopelessness and eco-anxiety, the Alliance will offer its educational and empowering 40-minute Akepa presentation, eBook and website to 5,000 middle and high school students in 20 middle and high schools and youth organizations throughout MN, half of which will be in under-served communities.

Tasks and Outcomes: Conduct trainings for the diverse college and graduate school interns who will present, do outreach to schools and youth organizations and manage logistics for the presentations. Provide the presentations with both Pre and Post-Surveys and compile the results, with goals that will show:

90% say the presentation was good or excellent

80% feel more hopeful

90% commit to doing one action in each aspect of sustainability, health, equity and kindness (S.H.E. Kindness)

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Conduct Trainings for First Interns	July 31, 2026
Begin Outreach to Schools	July 31, 2026
Presentations at Schools	April 30, 2027
Obtain Data from Pre- and Post- Surveys from First Schools	April 30, 2027

Activity 2: Students Overcoming Hopelessness Through Taking Action for Sustainability, Health, Equity and Kindness

Activity Budget: \$93,000

Activity Description:

Objective: Students will undertake one or more of 5 actions in each area of sustainability, health, equity and kindness (S.H.E. Kindness), track their progress for 30 days, receive an ePrize at a concluding celebration and complete an overall evaluation.

Tasks and Outcomes:

Each student will receive an Akepa eBook, select their S.H.E. Kindness actions and input their data daily through the Akepa website, receiving acknowledgement and feedback. We hope these actions will become habits over the month.

The impact of each student's actions will be compiled and shared, along with those of their classmates, so they can see the difference they've made.

They'll receive e-Awards at a celebration and complete a final survey.

Akepa will also benefit the college and grad student interns by helping to build a new generation of sustainability leaders and equipping them to bring about S.H.E. Kindness in their universities, hometowns, and future workplaces.

The 30 day evaluation will hopefully show:

80% will give the Akepa website a positive review

80% completed their Take Actions

80% give a positive review of the process

10% say they'll be involved in Students for Sustainability and/or the Sustainability Team

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Students Receive eBook and Complete S.H.E. Kindness Actions	April 30, 2027
e-Awards Given Out and Final Survey Given Out	April 30, 2027
Obtain Data from Pre- and Post- Surveys from First Schools	April 30, 2027

Activity 3: Student-Run Group, Students for Sustainability, Conducts Environmental Projects with Their School, Organization and Community

Activity Budget: \$80,000

Activity Description:

We will recruit and help organize the creation of a student-run group in each school or youth organization, Students for Sustainability. It will bring in environmental educators, encourage nature appreciation and do field trips to better understand ecosystems.

They will undertake a wide variety of projects, such as: reducing energy, water, waste, toxics and consumption. They'll also learn to recycle, compost, plant trees, create gardens, preserve pollinator habitat, protect ecosystems and support sustainability and climate action in their school district and city.

Furthermore, they will work in under-served communities to address environmental challenges in disproportionately-impacted communities.

Students for Sustainability will be established at 80% of the school or youth groups with at least 5 students undertaking three or more projects.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Students for Sustainability Groups Recruited and Organized	April 30, 2027
Students for Sustainability Projects	April 30, 2027

Activity 4: Sustainability Teams at Each School or Organization to Address Their Policies and Operations

Activity Budget: \$123,000

Activity Description:

Objective: Develop a Sustainability Team at each school or youth organization composed of administrators, staff, students and parents that will address its policies, programs and operations, while providing opportunities for service learning, internships and mentorships.

Tasks and Outcomes:

The Alliance will help form a Sustainability Team at each school or organization that will include a diverse group of administrators, educators, students and parents to address its policies, programs and operations. Presentations will be shared about various environmental operational issues and a training will be offered about the Natural Step in order to help better understand sustainability, develop a baseline analysis and create a sustainability vision and action plan for the school or organization.

The Team will also develop opportunities for service learning, internships and mentorships with business, government and nonprofits.

A Sustainability Team will be created at 80% of the school or youth groups composed of at least 1 administrator, 4 students, 4 staff or educators and 4 parents. 90% of the Teams will report one or more positive actions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Sustainability Teams Meet	April 30, 2027
Sustainability Teams Outreach and Mentorship Initiatives	April 30, 2027

Activity 5: S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize for Student Artistic Expressions on Sustainability, Health, Equity and Kindness

Activity Budget: \$98,750

Activity Description:

Objective: The Alliance will develop and announce a S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize competition seeking entries of student artistic expressions regarding all aspects of sustainability, health, equity and kindness that will be judged and awarded with meaningful prizes, as well as promoted to inspire others.

Tasks and Outcomes: The Alliance will develop the guidelines for the prize, obtain meaningful prizes, recruit a distinguished panel of judges, promote the event among all the schools and organizations, conduct the competition, announce the winners at the Annual Akepa Conference and Awards Ceremony, and widely promote their entries through social and mainstream media to create public awareness, encourage other young people to take action, help recruit new schools and obtain additional funding.

The Alliance will encourage students to artistically express themselves through poetry, rap, dance, music, TikTok videos, photography, painting and other art forms.

We expect that at least 10% of students will submit an artistic creation, 80% will say it was a positive experience and 80% will say they shared their creation with others on social media.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
S.H.E. Kindness Prize Announced	July 31, 2026
Winners of Prize Announced at Annual Conference, Entries Promoted in Media	April 30, 2027
Obtain Data from Pre- and Post-Surveys	April 30, 2027

Activity 6: Peer Learning, Workshops, Conference/Celebration/Awards Celebration to Share Best Practices and Continual Improvement

Activity Budget: \$134,250

Activity Description:

Objective: Ongoing peer learning circles and workshops will be created amongst the participating schools and organizations to continually develop best practices. This will be furthered by an annual gathering of all participants, in combination with an annual celebration and Awards Ceremony

Tasks and Outcomes: We believe that it's essential to continually improve using best practices that can be shared among the participants and their organizations. Consequently, we will establish virtual and in-person peer learning circles specifically for Students for Sustainability and the Sustainability Teams that will meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. We will also offer workshops on specific environmental and sustainability issue areas open to any of the participants.

We'll also offer workshops on Sustainability and the Natural Step to support the institutions in developing a more full understanding of sustainability and the opportunity to conduct an institutional assessment and develop a sustainability vision and action plan for the institution.

Finally, we'll hold an annual Conference with a Celebration and Awards Ceremony to share best practices and experience and acknowledge the winners of the S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Ongoing Peer Learning Circles and Workshops	April 30, 2027
First Annual Akepa Conference with Celebration and Awards Ceremony	April 30, 2027

Activity 7: Conduct Outreach and Impactful Communications to Publicize Akepa and Expand Its Participation and Funding

Activity Budget: \$108,000

Activity Description:

Objective: Make academic officials, potential funders and the public aware of Akepa to expand the number of participating schools and organizations, while attracting additional funding.

Method: We'll write pieces for publications, seek publication in other outlets, and arrange for speaking engagements at conferences and media interviews.

Tasks and Outcomes: Utilize Alliance and Akepa communications resources to publicize the program:

Alliance Publications and Presentations: Publish 12 Alliance's Transformative Sustainability weekly eNewsletter and Substack, 12 posts in our 6 social media channels, 6 Op-eds and at least 24 presentations at the State Fair, Rotary Clubs, congregations and other venues

Akepa social media channels: We'll share at least 52 posts in Akepa's own channels

Academic and Professional Presentations: We'll speak to at least 6 academic, environmental education and sustainability conferences and gatherings.

Articles and Interviews: We'll publish at least 24 articles in popular media and educational, environmental education and sustainability journals, plus at least 12 TV, radio and other interviews in newspapers, magazines, podcasts and

newsletters

Bloggers and Influencers: Develop relationships and posting partnerships with at least 6 bloggers and influencers.

Evaluation and Impact: We'll evaluate based on our accomplishing the above and measure impact based on funding received and schools added.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Ongoing Weekly Newsletters, Substack, Social Media, Op-Eds	May 31, 2027
Presentations	May 31, 2027
Interviews and media	May 31, 2027

Activity 8: Evaluation and Social Impact Analysis for All Aspects of Akepa

Activity Budget: \$135,000

Activity Description:

Objective - Fully evaluate and modify Akepa so it can be an effective, low-cost and replicable program while conducting a social impact analysis in order to document and quantify all the benefits so a strong case can be made for support from potential funders.

A third party evaluation of the overall Program will be conducted by the NY-based Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education, one of the nation's long-time leaders in the field of sustainability education. They have been a pioneer and innovator in developing, facilitating and evaluating sustainability education programs across the country.

We will conduct a social impact analysis of the entire program conducted by Minneapolis-based EcoTone, one of the nation's leaders in the field. They will provide important third party verification, documentation and a social impact report with infographics and return on investment that will be used to assess the model and its viability for replication, scaling and funding.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Third-Party Evaluation of Overall Program (Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education)	May 31, 2027
Evaluation and Social Impact Analysis (EcoTone)	May 31, 2027

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jamie Cloud	Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education	Consultant and Evaluator	Yes
EcoTone	EcoTone	Evaluation and Social Impact Analysis	Yes

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?

Before and after surveys will be conducted, along with a one month survey. These results will be used to make modifications to Akepa, along with an overall first-year evaluation and social impact analysis. Ongoing peer learning circles and workshops will be created amongst the participating schools and organizations to continually develop best practices. This will be furthered by an annual gathering of all participants, in combination with an annual celebration.

Ongoing funding will be provided through our Sustainability Partnership Program with business, crowdfunding, 1% for the Planet, major donors, foundation funding, GiveMN and Alliance members and Friends.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Terry Gips

Job Title: President

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

Terry Gips has been a sustainability leader in the public, private and nonprofit sectors for 51 years as a director, legislative assistant, consultant, agricultural economist, Natural Step Instructor, speaker and author of Breaking the Pesticide Habit and The Humane Consumer and Producer Guide. He volunteers full-time as the President of the Alliance for Sustainability (www.afors.org), which he co-founded in 1983 following work on organic and sustainable agriculture in 45 countries.

As CEO of Sustainability Associates, he works with Fortune 500, medium and small business and government, academic and religious institutions to save money, improve performance and become sustainability leaders.

Previously, he worked as White House and Congressional aide, Aveda Director of Ecological Affairs and Sustainability, Cargill economist and grain merchant, Executive Director of the International Alliance for Sustainable Agriculture, Wall Street brokerage assistant, Minneapolis College of Art & Design Sustainable Design Program Adjunct Faculty and Co-founder and Director of the University of California Cooperative Extension's Sacramento Community Garden Program.

He's a long-time member of the Social Venture Network and the American Sustainable Business Network, as well as Twin Cities Rotary EcoClub. He was Co-Chair of Business for Social Responsibility--Upper Midwest and Chair of the City of St. Louis Park Environment and Sustainability Commission.

Terry was Founding Board member of the Coalition on Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES), Co-founder of the Living Green Expo, Founding Vice-Chair of Congregations Caring for Creation and President of the Wedge Coop. He served as board member of the National Coalition Against the Misuse of Pesticides (Beyond Pesticides) and the Pesticide

Action Network North America.

He graduated from Claremont McKenna College in Public Affairs and completed his M.S. in Agricultural and Applied Economics at UC Davis and an MBA at the Yale School of Management.

Organization: Alliance for Sustainability

Organization Description:

Visionary leaders from around the world founded the Alliance in 1983 with the mission of co-creating sustainability on a personal, organizational and planetary level. We developed one of the first definitions of sustainability: ecologically sound, economically viable, socially just and humane, embodying our highest values for treating people, animals and the planet.

The Alliance has worked collaboratively with diverse Minnesota nonprofits, businesses, policymakers and community members on all aspects of sustainability, from sustainable agriculture, ecosystem and groundwater protection to renewable energy, climate and environmental education.

In response to the murder of George Floyd, the climate crisis and anti-democracy efforts, we re-evaluated our work in 2020 and developed our comprehensive Campaign for Sustainability, Health, Equity and Kindness (S.H.E. Kindness).

The Campaign is bringing about fundamental systems change through personal and organizational transformation and impactful public policies. Our strategy is to support and amplify the work of aligned groups to build a diverse, inclusive alliance of more than one million people and organizations working together to shift systems in education, business and government. We developed four Programs building upon our past work: Business, Public Policy, Outreach & Communications for Impact and Akepa Youth & School Program, which we're seeking support for.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
President		The President will oversee all operations of the Akepa program.			25%	1.26		\$157,500
Executive Director		The Executive Director will work with the President to oversee the functionality of the Akepa program.			25%	1.65		\$206,250
Akepa Program Director		The Akepa Program Director will specialize fully on the Akepa Program and ensure functionality and efficiency.			25%	2.25		\$168,750
Communications Coordinator (Amy Durr)		The communications coordinator			25%	0.9		\$67,500
College Student Interns		The Akepa Program will be facilitated by a diverse, engaging group of college and graduate school interns. These interns will use their relatability to engage with students, give presentations and encourage local action for sustainability. \$15,000/intern/year x 4 interns = \$60,000.			0%	9		\$135,000
							Sub Total	\$735,000
Contracts and Services								
Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education	Service Contract	Consulting and Evaluation				3		\$75,000
EcoTone	Service Contract	Evaluation and Social Impact Analysis				2		\$58,000
							Sub Total	\$133,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Food & Refreshments for School Celebrations and Annual Conference	To offer food & refreshments for teenagers at key events	X				\$11,000
							Sub Total	\$11,000
Capital Expenditures								

							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Quantities will depend on whether presentations are in-person or virtual.	To deliver Akepa Presentations to schools and organizations in Minnesota, as well as helping to set up Students for Sustainability and Sustainability Teams.	X				\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
		e-Awards and S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize	Provide e-Prizes to each student who completes their four Take-Actions for 30 days: \$2.50/prize (with an in-kind contribution of \$7.50, total value \$10 per student) x 5,000 students = \$12,500. The amount for the S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize is \$100/prize (with additional in-kind) x 20 prizes = \$2,000.	X				\$14,500
		Venue and AV for Annual Akepa Conference, Celebration and Awards Ceremony	To provide an inexpensive, accessible meeting space for Akepa participants to share best practices and conduct ongoing learning.					\$1,500
							Sub Total	\$16,000
							Grand Total	\$896,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		Food & Refreshments for School Celebrations and Annual Conference	We feel having light snacks and beverages at the school celebrations is a minimal cost (\$125/school) and a minor yet important way to celebrate the hard work of the students in taking action. The larger cost of \$8,000 for a low-cost lunch, beverages and snacks (\$20) for all 300 attendees at the annual Akepa Conference, Celebration and Awards Ceremony is an important draw and acknowledgement for the hard work of the students and staff.
Travel In Minnesota	Miles/Meals/Lodging	Quantities will depend on whether presentations are in-person or virtual.	These minor expenses would be used to reimburse our interns and staff for any needed travel for presentations or follow-up with schools and organizations in Minnesota.
Other Expenses		e-Awards and S.H.E. Kindness Creativity Prize	e-Prizes are essential to provide the incentive for young people to make the serious commitment to take four daily actions for sustainability, health, equity and kindness for one month so that the actions become lifelong habits. Funding for the e-Prizes will be an important incentive for young people to take the time to create and submit their artistic expressions about S.H.E. Kindness. These awards will be an important recognition of their hard, creative work.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	-

Total Project Cost: \$896,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [95122c64-7e2.docx](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Visual Component document...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
990	1891b294-c73.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
250319 Board Approval of LCCMR Grant Proposal- Alliance for Sustainability's Akepa Youth & School Program	dc8ddd49-bb8.pdf

Administrative Use

Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?

No

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 Commissioner's Plan applies.

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

Yes

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

Yes

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

No

Does your project include original, hypothesis-driven research?

Yes

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:

Terry Gips, Amy Durr, Joe Parmigiani, Timothy Li

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