



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-281

Proposal Title: Oscar Mike: Nature Engagement for the Military Community

Project Manager Information

Name: Anita Hering

Organization: U of MN - Extension Center for Family Development

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This project will broaden the reach and impact of Oscar Mike, an evidence-based walking program adapted specifically for the Veteran/military community that integrates nature engagement, stewardship, and outdoor appreciation

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$192,000

Proposed Project Completion: July 31, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary 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.

Studies have shown the benefits of outdoor recreation experiences for Veterans, including:

- Social reconnection – group outdoor experiences fostered healthy relationships
- Life-improving change – nature renewed veterans' motivation
- Inner peace/Psychological healing – nature inspired self-reflection, acceptance, and discovery
- Processing and reflection – outdoors boosted psychological well-being

Arthritis rates are higher among Veterans:

- 1 in 3 Veterans diagnosed with Arthritis
- Higher Arthritis rates among veterans compared to nonveterans ages 18-44
- Higher prevalence of Arthritis among veterans with disabilities

Pilot demonstrations of Oscar Mike, an adaptation of the evidence-based Walk with Ease (WWE) program, have shown beneficial opportunities for Veterans/military community members to utilize skills and leadership in outdoor settings

This adaptation enables participating Veterans and military community members to use their military experiences to lead outdoor skills, engagement and recreation activities

There is an unmet need in Minnesota's programmatic ecosystem:

- Statewide accessible walking program specifically adapted for and led by the military/veteran community, assuring relevance and connection
- Physical, mental and social health benefits through group physical activity and nature engagement
- Enabling participants to utilize their skills and leadership related to nature-based settings to educate and benefit peers
- Addressing a health issue that has pronounced prevalence for the military/veteran community

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.

Solution: Expansion of the Oscar Mike project from a regional pilot to a sustainable statewide programmatic effort

Walk With Ease (WWE) is an evidence-based walking program developed to support participants in incorporating or increasing regular walking into their lives yielding benefits including arthritis pain reduction, and increased balance, strength and walking pace. Extension conducted a regional peer-led pilot of WWE adapted for the military/veteran community through a co-creation process ("Oscar Mike" = "On the Move" - when a military unit is in motion) in which peer-leaders and participants are supported in leadership and active participation in stewardship and appreciation of Minnesota's natural resources drawing from their military training and experiences. Our pilot study outcomes indicate that participation has a positive impact on mood and mental wellbeing through integrated peer-led engagement with nature. Oscar Mike is showing great promise for additional outcomes such as confidence and leadership skills in nature settings, social connectedness and support for both trained peer leaders and participants. Interest is growing to expand this model from its current regional reach to a model statewide leveraging partnerships with military organizations such as the MNNG Joint Prevention & Support Services as well as parks, recreation, and natural resources partners.

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 15 partnerships for implementation of the Oscar Mike program with parks/recreation organizations from across Minnesota to support and optimize the program with resources for stewardship and appreciation of Minnesota's natural settings and resources

Enhancement of co-created nature-engagement tools and resources for stewardship and appreciation of Minnesota's natural settings and resources within a replicable Oscar Mike curriculum package

Implementation of Oscar Mike by 30 trained peer leaders to reach 250 Veteran/military community participants showing overall positive results related to walking in natural settings with integrated nature-engagement resources for stewardship and appreciation of Minnesota's natural resources.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Develop/strengthen partnerships with Parks-related organizations for implementation and enhancement of Oscar Mike

Activity Budget: \$30,573

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to develop partnerships with Parks/Trails (local, regional, state) organizations to optimize Oscar Mike implementation with support and tools to help participants engage with nature and ultimately be incorporated into the program curricular resources. Activity 1 will involve Extension staff reaching out to Parks/Trails in areas where Oscar Mike is likely to be implemented. Extension will share about the program and brainstorm/ beneficial resources and support for engagement with and stewardship of natural settings by program participants as they are walking, optimally at those Park/Trail sites. Activity 1 will set the stage for positive experiences for participants in natural/park settings, with the potential for participants gaining comfort in the Park/Trail as a positive and nature-engaged walking environment. The Parks/Trails relationships will further create a network of supporters for Oscar Mike, potentially broadening its reach and enhancing its quality. Activity 1 will be documented through meeting notes and partnership agreements regarding the delivery of Oscar Mike, and evaluated through feedback and reflections surveys of Park/Trail personnel conducted by Extension staff as well as surveys and focus groups of Oscar Mike Participants.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Partnership Agreements with 15 local/regional/state organizations related to parks/trails	July 31, 2028
Documented resources and support provided by Parks to enhance Oscar Mike programs	July 31, 2029
Evaluation report summarizing feedback from Park/trail partners as well as Oscar Mike participants	July 31, 2029

Activity 2: Implement up to 25 Oscar Mike classes reaching 250 participants from the Veteran/Military community

Activity Budget: \$130,604

Activity Description:

The first objective of Activity 2 is to have 30 military/veteran community members complete evidence-based, online Arthritis Foundation Walk with Ease training, CPR certification, and Oscar Mike peer leader training. Next, 30 trained military/veteran community member peer leaders will receive guidance to assist with recruitment and outreach for local Oscar Mike programs. The trained military/veteran community member peer leaders are connected with Extension and other Peer-leader mentors for technical assistance with leading Oscar Mike programs, receive materials/educational reinforcements, and receive guidance from and connections to supportive community systems and institutions, Parks/Trails, U of MN Extension, community centers, senior services, etc. for implementation and enhancement of their Oscar Mike programs. Up to 250 military/veteran community members will participate in Oscar Mike programs throughout Minnesota led by trained peer leaders. Activity 2 will be documented through meeting and training notes, peer leader attendance and training completion logs, documentation of recruitment efforts, and Oscar Mike participant attendance and feedback forms.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
All 30 peer leaders complete all 3 requirements of the Walk With Ease training	July 31, 2028

All 30 peer leaders receive assistance with recruitment, outreach, materials/educational reinforcements and connections	July 31, 2028
All 30 peer leaders receive assistance with recruitment, outreach, materials/educational reinforcements and connections	July 31, 2028
250 documented military/veteran community members participate in Oscar Mike programs throughout MN	July 31, 2029

Activity 3: Complete a replicable Oscar Mike curriculum package integrating effective tools, resources and activities for nature-engagement and stewardship

Activity Budget: \$30,823

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to develop a replicable package for training and implementation of Oscar Mike based upon formal and informal feedback from military peer leaders and participants. Activity 3 will involve the 30 trained military/veteran community member peer leaders providing input and feedback about the program and their experiences both formally and informally. The 250 Oscar Mike participants will also be invited to share input and feedback about the program and their experiences both formally and informally. In Activity 3 the input and feedback will be incorporated into a package of nature-engaged tools and resources by Extension staff, rendering Oscar Mike a replicable program to continue to be used state-wide and effectively adapted for the military/veteran community. Activity 3 will be documented and evaluated by Extension staff through feedback forms, meeting notes, and partnership agreements regarding the nature-engaged tools, resources and activities for Oscar Mike, as well as through the existence of a replicable Oscar Mike curriculum package of tools and resources.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Formal and informal feedback from peer leaders and participants regarding tools, resources and activities	July 31, 2028
Newly created and completed Oscar Mike curriculum package with added tools, resources and activities	July 31, 2029
Evaluation report summarizing feedback and reflections from peer leaders and participants regarding new tools, resources,	July 31, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Erin McHenry Wolf	Minnesota Department of Health	Arthritis Program Coordinator, Health Promotion & Chronic Disease Division	No
Anne Voight/Barry Venable	St. Cloud Veterans Affairs Medical Center	MOVE! Program/Public Affairs	No
Mike Mills	Beyond The Yellow Ribbon - Central MN Warrior to Citizen	Board Chair	No
Kristen Hughes	St. Cloud State University Veterans Resource Center	Director	No
Paula Woischke	Whitney Senior Center	Director	No

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?

- 1) SNAP-Ed. Extension SNAP-Ed program is already utilizing WWE across the state for nutrition education and obesity prevention efforts. Oscar Mike will be an important new addition included in its approved curriculum for SNAP-eligible members of the Veteran/military community.
- 2) Veteran Administrations. Extension will provide support for Oscar Mike to be included as an aspect of the MOVE weight loss program currently being implemented through the Veterans Administration Clinics and Hospitals for supporting physically active lifestyles as an element of healthy weight management.
- 3) Parks. Extension's partnerships will extend beyond the grant period for ongoing co-implementation of Oscar Mike

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Anita Hering

Job Title: Extension Educator

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

Anita Harris Hering was hired in May of 2005 by the University of Minnesota Extension as a Regional Extension Educator for the Center for Youth Development. In March 2015 she joined the Department of Family, Health and Wellbeing as an Extension Educator for Military Families. Her expertise is in the area of youth, families, volunteer and partnership development, curriculum development, program quality, interactive learning experiences, and working with military Service members, their families, and Veterans. Previously she also worked with Operation Military Kids.

In addition, her passion and current work include teaching incarcerated fathers, working with later life issues, and providing educational opportunities around mental health and wellbeing.

Anita attended the College of St. Benedict and St. John's University for her undergraduate degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Special Education. In 1990 she received her Masters in Non-Public School Administration & Educational Leadership from the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul.

Since 2007 Anita has been active with the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon-Central MN Warrior to Citizen in the St. Cloud area and the state-wide initiative, serving as a volunteer Chairperson, Co-chairperson, and Treasurer for the Regional BTYR (9 cities). In 2024, in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Health, Anita launched the evidence-based Walk with Ease pilot for active and reserve military and Veteran community members, which is now known as Oscar Mike.

Organization: U of MN - Extension Center for Family Development

Organization Description:

University of Minnesota Extension helps the University extend scientific knowledge and expertise to the public in key areas including communities, youth and families, food and agriculture, and the environment through education, community engagement, co-learning and co-creation. Extension's Department of Family, Health and Wellbeing (FHW) helps families make informed decisions leading to better health, financial security, and wellbeing. The FHW team successfully delivers whole-family, whole community prevention programs and reaches 110,000 individuals or more annually through education and initiatives in Minnesota communities. FHW programs focus on family resiliency and health and nutrition, with special efforts in the areas of chronic disease prevention, mental flourishing, financial literacy, food security, food justice, and the rural opioid crisis.

FHW has a strong track record of strengths and experience for supporting the military community, including:

- * Lived experience as Veterans, Service Members, and Military Family members
- * Leadership with education within military and veteran community institutions and training programs such as pre- and post-deployment education
- * Close working relationships and Board and Leadership positions with organizations and stakeholders related to the military/veteran community, e.g.: DoD and OneOp, MN Military Mental Health Coalition, Department of Veterans Affairs, Joining Community Forces, and MN Beyond The Yellow Ribbon

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Anita Hering, Extension Educator		PI on the grant			36.6%	0.6		\$75,951
Stephanie Hakes		SNAP Ed Health and Wellness Coordinator			32.3%	0.15		\$16,411
							Sub Total	\$92,362
Contracts and Services								
Graphic Design firm TBD	Service Contract	Design logo for Oscar Mike program				0.01		\$500
							Sub Total	\$500
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	350 Tshirts	To create program identity and belonging					\$7,000
	Tools and Supplies	40 Binders	To hold Peer Leader materials					\$120
	Tools and Supplies	250 Participant essential safety gear items (walking sticks, safety vests, etc)	For safety of participants while walking in different environments and terrains					\$6,250
	Tools and Supplies	250 Walk with Ease participant books	Essential learning materials for Oscar Mike participants					\$3,750
	Tools and Supplies	30 Peer Leader Teaching Kits (re-usable supplies for participants eg, stretch bands, small weights, and safety supplies for demo),	Essential items for leading Oscar Mike courses					\$9,000
	Tools and Supplies	120 food supplies for healthy snack demos	Integration of healthy snack-making demos as part of Oscar Mike classes	X				\$5,400
							Sub Total	\$31,520
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 staff x 3000 miles/each @ \$0.70/mile = \$4200; 2 staff x 12 overnight lodging/each @ \$130/night = \$3120; 2 staff x 24 M&IE/each @\$51 = \$2448	Extension staff attending partnership development meetings, trainings for Peer Leaders, conducting evaluation activities, meeting for curriculum development					\$9,768
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 people x registration at MN conference @ \$500 = \$1000	Share results of LCCMR Oscar Mike project					\$1,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Uber rides for Oscar Mike participants, 75 participants X 6 RT rides x \$29	Transportation for participants who do not have transportation to get to Oscar Mike course sites.					\$13,050
	Other	30 Van rental for field trips to parks for Oscar Mike @ \$500/van rental	Transport Oscar Mike participants for a field trip to a park or trail to support nature engagement					\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$38,818
Travel Outside Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 staff travel and registration for national conference @ \$1500 = \$3000	Share results of LCCMR Oscar Mike program	X				\$3,000
							Sub Total	\$3,000
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	40 Training manuals x \$50 = \$2000; 40 Poster sets x \$40 = \$1600	Essential supplies for Peer Leaders to teach Oscar Mike (and extras if lost or damaged)					\$3,600
							Sub Total	\$3,600
Other Expenses								

		30 Arthritis Foundation Walk with Ease Leader Online Training @ \$90 = \$2700	Essential training required for Peer Leaders who are teaching Walk with Ease					\$2,700
		30 CPR Training @ \$100 = \$3000	CPR training is required for Peer Leaders teaching Walk with Ease					\$3,000
		30 compensation for Peer Leaders @ \$300 = \$9000	Compensation in the form of gear or a gift card for Peer Leaders for giving a minimum of 8 full days of their time to lead Oscar Mike for their peers					\$9,000
		Compensation for 100 Oscar Mike participants for participation in focus group or other intensive evaluation @ \$75/each = \$7500	Compensation for extra time, expertise and input to shape the Oscar Mike curriculum in the form of gear or a gift card					\$7,500
							Sub Total	\$22,200
							Grand Total	\$192,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		120 food supplies for healthy snack demos	The foods used are for demonstrating healthy food preparation techniques and options and are part of the educational program and not solely provided as a snack or meal for participants separate from the educational purpose.
Travel Outside Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	2 staff travel and registration for national conference @ \$1500 = \$3000	The results of the program will be of national interest for Veterans Affairs and SNAP-Ed and will warrant sharing beyond Minnesota

Non ENRTF Funds

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

Total Project Cost: \$192,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [97e6991a-34b.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of the University of Minnesota Twin City Campus, Regional Extension offices and County Extension Offices in MN...

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
U of MN SPA Letter	e11b55c4-033.pdf
Letter of Support - MDH	162e694a-0f2.pdf
Photo of 1st WWE Peer Leadership Training with military	708f9312-342.jpe
Letter of Support - Beyond The Yellow Ribbon	4ab5aba6-e23.pdf
References/Citations	1b43068d-8fd.docx

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 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 proposal:

N/A

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