



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-336

Proposal Title: West Central Minnesota Solar and Climate Action Support

Project Manager Information

Name: Cedar Walters

Organization: West Central Initiative

Office Telephone: (218) 739-2239

Email: cedar@wcif.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: West Central Initiative (WCI) will implement two solarize campaigns with Solar United Neighbors, conduct extensive outreach with stakeholders around climate impacts, and update the Minnesota Region 4 Climate Action Plan.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$291,000

Proposed Project Completion: February 28, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Energy (E)

Project Location

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

Region(s): Central

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

Region(s): Central

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.

WCI started implementing projects related to solar energy in 2024 to help smaller communities take advantage of financial incentives for solar projects and to remove barriers for homeowners, businesses and non-profits interested in going solar. Through these efforts, we see how a lack of community capacity holds communities back from developing solar that would provide benefits to their communities, both for savings on energy bills, but also improved community resilience and greenhouse gas reductions from energy production generally. We also encountered a lack of awareness of the benefits of solar and how solar works, as well as misinformation that prevents homeowners or smaller organizations from pursuing solar projects.

In addition to these barriers, we see a need to include climate-related topics more broadly in regional conversations about community health and resilience. Climate is not frequently part of conversations at the community level in rural MN, even though climate impacts are already affecting lives and livelihoods in the region and across the state. There is a clear need to help local decision makers understand current and future impacts so they can plan for how projected changes will affect health, infrastructure, local economies, and other aspects of rural life.

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.

WCI is supporting cooperative models for solar projects that remove barriers and increase access to solar energy in rural areas. WCI is supporting a solarize campaign with Solar United Neighbors (SUN) in 2025 that uses a cooperative buying pool and consumer advocacy and education to remove barriers and bring down the cost of solar for smaller projects. WCI would continue to build on this work with the proposed project support in this application through future solarize campaigns.

In addition to supporting increased adoption of solar energy, WCI is a regional voice for climate issues in the region through the Region 4 Climate Action Plan (CAP) with convenings, outreach, and promotion of successful projects in the region. The CAP presents an ongoing opportunity for incorporating climate risks and opportunities into more conversations at the regional, community, and individual level. There is also a need for a CAP update in 2028 that will incorporate progress on goals in the CAP adopted in 2023, as well as revised actions that better reflect the priorities and opportunities available to the rural communities we serve.

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?

Outcomes include: an increase in awareness and adoption of solar in the region that will increase community resilience, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions; increase awareness of climate impacts and opportunities, deepen stakeholder engagement and collaboration, and boost collective efficacy around climate solutions through implementation of the CAP; and creation of an updated CAP that will better reflect west central Minnesota. Climate will increasingly impact natural resources including water, air quality, and wildlife. This work seeks to connect rural audiences to these impacts and inspire them to be part of community based and individual solutions.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Solar United Neighbors Campaigns and Project Support

Activity Budget: \$128,000

Activity Description:

Task: Create and implement two consecutive promotional campaigns in partnership with Solar United Neighbors (SUN), a vendor-neutral non-profit that coordinates solar buying co-ops for homeowners, small businesses, and non-profits in the region.

Outcome: Multiple completed solar projects and increased awareness of benefits of solar in the region.

Task: Award four subgrants to non-profit organizations in the region to support solar installations that will result in cost savings that can be reinvested into the mission and work of the selected non-profits.

Outcome: Four successful solar projects completed that benefit non-profits serving the region, and that show how cost savings of solar can be reinvested in communities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Create and implement promotional campaign for SUN coop for 2026/27 program	March 31, 2027
Create and implement promotional campaign for SUN coop for 2027/28 program	March 31, 2028
Award subgrants to four non-profit organizations in the region pursuing solar projects with SUN	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Climate Action Plan Outreach and Implementation

Activity Budget: \$73,000

Activity Description:

WCI is an advocate for climate action and sustainable development in the region, and incorporates climate impacts and community resiliency into conversations at the regional, community, and individual level.

Task: Promote the Region 4 Climate Action Plan (CAP) and corresponding Sustainable Development Goals that are part of WCI's strategic framework through events, field trips, city council visits, regional coordination, outreach, and communication activities that can be implemented as actions from the CAP. The CAP includes eight community sectors – Buildings and Energy, Transportation and Mobility, Health and Safety, Waste Management, Local Food and Agriculture, Water and Wastewater, Green Space and Trees, and the Climate Economy. Outreach and stakeholder collaboration will be distributed across these eight sectors to build regional partnerships, knowledge, and resource sharing that will strengthen individual and collective efforts to address climate challenges. Possible regional collaboration on outreach and events could include Soil and Water Districts, state agencies, higher ed institutions, non-profits serving the region, local units of government, and more.

Outcome: Increased awareness of regional climate impacts and solutions, increased stakeholder engagement and collaboration, and more collective efficacy around climate solutions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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Host monthly virtual meetings with stakeholders and the public focused on actions from the CAP	December 31, 2026
Host 3-4 events annually to highlight successful projects and organizations working on climate action	November 30, 2027
Host monthly virtual meetings with stakeholders and the public focused on actions from the CAP	December 31, 2027
Host 3-4 events annually to highlight successful projects and organizations working on climate action	November 30, 2028
Host monthly virtual meetings with stakeholders and the public focused on actions from the CAP	December 31, 2028

Activity 3: Climate Action Plan Update

Activity Budget: \$90,000

Activity Description:

The Minnesota Region 4 Climate Action Plan (CAP) was adopted in 2023 by West Central Initiative's Board of Directors. The CAP was created in partnership with a consulting firm, and was the first regional climate action plan in the Midwest. The CAP is ambitious and serves as a menu of options for communities, organizations, and individuals for making progress on climate action and community resilience. The CAP will need an update and review in 2028 to reflect progress made, and also to revise the CAP to better reflect rural communities and their challenges and opportunities in the context of climate impacts and the clean energy transition.

Task: Conduct a review and update of the Minnesota Region 4 Climate Action Plan to assess progress on climate goals for the region, revise the plan to better reflect the communities WCI serves, and communicate regional progress on climate action goals.

Outcome: Stakeholder engagement around climate progress and regionally relevant actions, completion of revised CAP including completed or ongoing projects, and increased awareness of regional progress on climate action.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Secure consulting services to guide CAP review and update	November 30, 2027
Gather data on greenhouse gas emissions, projects, and other metrics to assess progress	April 30, 2028
Solicit input on updating the CAP with formation of stakeholder plan review committee	May 31, 2028
Draft revised CAP document and conduct review with stakeholder plan review committee	September 30, 2028
Publish updated CAP, promote progress, revised goals and priority climate actions	December 31, 2028

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
John Anderson	Solar United Neighbors	Program partner for Solar United Neighbors solarize campaigns	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?

Outcomes from solarize campaigns will continue to have impacts after this project is complete, as example projects tend to drive further adoption as local knowledge about the technology grows. A CAP revision would result in an updated planning document that would serve as a roadmap for climate resilience in west central Minnesota for years to come. CAP implementation is ongoing, and will continue to be part of the organizational scope of work after conclusion of the project. Other funding sources may be sought for future solar efforts, implementation of the updated CAP, and related activities after completion of described projects.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Cedar Walters

Job Title: Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs

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

The project manager – the Director of Climate and Sustainability Programs – has a background in environmental science and science education, as well as experience in grant administration and project management for both philanthropic and state funds. The project manager has in-depth knowledge of climate and sustainability efforts in the west central Minnesota region that West Central Initiative serves, and will leverage knowledge and relationships across the region to implement the activities described in this application. The project manager would coordinate project tasks and expenses, and track progress and ensure project milestones are met. The project manager has demonstrated success with using grant funds appropriately and meeting project goals and timelines, and fulfilling invoicing and reporting requirements in a timely manner. The project manager supervises staff that would work on project elements outlined in this proposal, and as such would be able to ensure all staff involved in the project are accountable for project success. The project manager also has a strong background in education and outreach, which are critical components of the proposal. Past projects led and/or administered by the project manager include: planning and implementation for a new commercial composting pickup program, planning and implementation for multiple years of a backyard composting bin sale and education program, planning and implementation of a plastics recycling makerspace, as well as current projects that include planning and implementation of a municipal solar project cohort that provides technical support and project management for rural communities, and planning and administration of a Solar United Neighbors solarize campaign for 2025.

Organization: West Central Initiative

Organization Description:

West Central Initiative (WCI) is one of six independent community foundations created by the McKnight Foundation in 1986 to help address a historic crisis in the farming and mining sectors. In 1995 WCI also became the Economic Development District for Region 4.

WCI is a member of the ten-region Minnesota Association of Development Organizations. Our status as both an Initiative Foundation and Regional Development Organization allows us to connect local government unites and residents of our

nine-county service region to a broad array of government and private funding and programs. WCI's mission is to serve to improve west central Minnesota through funding, programs, and technical assistance. Our vision is for a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable world in west central Minnesota. WCI staff support regional development in six core areas: community planning, transportation planning, our Early Childhood Initiative, climate action, Live Wide Open program, and maps and measures of regional development, which includes regional strategic planning, and a regional progress dashboard for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Climate Program Manager		Manage climate related staff, interns, projects and implementation, lead on select outreach and engagement efforts; direct and implement CAP review process			28%	0.63		\$77,000
2 climate and energy staff		plan, promote and implement SUN campaigns; promote and implement CAP activities, complete CAP review tasks			28%	0.75		\$75,000
							Sub Total	\$152,000
Contracts and Services								
Consulting services, TBD	Service Contract	Consultant services for review and update of climate action plan				0.1		\$40,000
							Sub Total	\$40,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Approximately 1500 miles at .70/mile	Mileage costs for regional meetings and field trips					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000

Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Publication	2 x years of promotion for Solar United Neighbors solar purchasing campaign	Create and implement promotional and outreach campaign for Solar United Neighbors solar purchasing group	X				\$16,000
							Sub Total	\$16,000
Other Expenses								
		Subawards to nonprofit entities pursuing solar projects - 4 subawards	Subawards to nonprofit organizations in the region to offset project costs of solar installations					\$80,000
		8 climate-related events	Miscellaneous event expenses including speaker stipends and venue rental fees.					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$82,000
							Grand Total	\$291,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Printing and Publication	Publication	2 x years of promotion for Solar United Neighbors solar purchasing campaign	these promotion and advertising expenses are solely to achieve outcomes of the Solar United Neighbors solar coop program: to increase access and adoption of solar energy in rural communities for homeowners, businesses and nonprofits, and to increase awareness of benefits of solar energy in rural communities.

Non ENRTF Funds

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

Total Project Cost: \$291,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [39f8363d-491.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Example solarize campaign flyer...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Certificate of Good Standing	cfda255c-bc5.pdf
WCI 990	eb928ca8-bee.pdf
WCI Financial Audit 2024	4c62c7ec-b1f.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Letter of Authorization	d33dc21f-05f.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support	7664995c-345.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?

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:

Griffin Peck, West Central Initiative; Trevor Gervais, West Central Initiative

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