



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-411

Proposal Title: Education and Stewardship: Our National Bird in Minnesota

Project Manager Information

Name: Scott Mehus

Organization: National Eagle Center

Office Telephone: (651) 565-4989

Email: scott@nationaleaglecenter.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The proposed project will foster environmental stewardship and conservation across Minnesota by significantly expanding hands-on, environmental education through mobile live eagle experiences and removing barriers to youth participation.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$276,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2028

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.

There is a need to educate, inspire, and empower more of Minnesota's young people to become environmental stewards and advocates. This proposal, Taking Eagle Education & Experiences Across Minnesota (Project TEAM), fosters environmental stewardship statewide by removing existing barriers and increasing opportunities for students to have formative, environmental experiences. In the face of increasing environmental degradation and decreasing biodiversity, many young people are experiencing a sense of anxiety and hopelessness. In MN, there are 130 different native species identified as endangered. Project TEAM leverages increased attention on the Bald Eagle (since officially becoming the national bird in 2024) to share a powerful conservation success story, educating and inspiring 17,000 Minnesotans over two years.

Many school districts and libraries, particularly in rural and low-income areas, lack the financial capacity to provide these formative experiences. This proposal will dramatically increase opportunities for Minnesotans, especially young people, to have formative experiences that lay the groundwork for lifelong environmental stewardship. NEC education staff will strategically reach out to these areas, offer scholarship support for programming, and tailor education to meet the needs of their students. This work will help strengthen an ethic of environmental stewardship among Minnesota's younger generations for years to come.

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.

Project TEAM significantly expands the NEC's successful mobile eagle experience programs, while also reducing financial barriers for school districts and community partners to participate regardless of budget constraints. Last year, NEC's mobile live eagle programs reached more than 5,000 Minnesotans across nearly 50 separate programs. Through Project TEAM, NEC will reach 17,000 (including 7,700 youth) Minnesotans over two years. NEC will do this by proactively engaging low-income schools, increasing capacity to deliver more outreach programs throughout the year, and reducing financial barriers for school and community partner participation. Critically, this project creates a scholarship fund so low-income districts and community partners have equal access to the transformative experience of live eagle encounters.

The Bald Eagle is the greatest conservation success story in American history. Through sustained advocacy and a commitment to stewardship, policies and practices were changed to protect Bald Eagle populations. There is an opportunity to share this empowering story through hands-on, direct experiences, (which are effective ways to inspire and cultivate a lifelong stewardship ethic), while also exposing young people to environmental education careers. Now is an ideal time for this expansion, as the Bald Eagle was officially named the national bird in 2024.

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?

Project TEAM cultivates the next generation of environmental stewards in Minnesota by expanding NEC's successful mobile eagle encounter program and by reducing financial barriers to participation.

Proactively engage at least 40 underserved school districts or communities (with no existing relationship with the NEC) about the mobile eagle program and scholarship fund;

Educate and inspire 7,700 Minnesota students (17,000 total individuals) through over 120 mobile eagle education and encounter programs over two years;

At least 50% of new schools or communities will indicate interest in additional mobile programs, and assist NEC with locating local sponsors for continued outreach.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Taking Eagle Education and Experiences Across Minnesota (Year 1)

Activity Budget: \$136,725

Activity Description:

With recent increased attention on the Bald Eagle, and a need to share and empower young people through a conservation success story, the NEC will increase organizational capacity and reduce financial barriers through a new scholarship fund.

NEC staff will compile a list of priority districts and communities by reviewing publicly available income/poverty data. This will include particular attention to Native Nations, including the four Dakota Nations and the seven Anishinaabe (Chippewa/Ojibwe) Nations. NEC staff will communicate with priority sites, sharing information about the scholarship fund and inviting them to participate.

NEC staff speak directly with the school or host site, learning how to adapt programs to meet the needs of the students (and families, if applicable) that they serve. Programs will include a brief description of environmental education career pathways, with NEC professional education staff serving as an example.

Mobile programs will educate young people on the conservation success of the Bald Eagle, current habitat threats, and ways to be environmental stewards, all while connecting them directly to live eagles and raptors and fostering a deep stewardship ethic.

Finally, NEC staff will develop a community sponsor program in Year 2, sustaining the program's access to low-income partners.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Priority districts and communities identified; engagement list compiled	August 31, 2026
Used van purchased to support additional outreach work	September 30, 2026
New school districts (and community partners) contacted; new partners identified; Year 1 programming calendar built	September 30, 2026
Outreach programs conducted; surveys distributed and collected.	June 30, 2027
Evaluation data analyzed and conclusions incorporated into following year programming	July 31, 2027

Activity 2: Taking Eagle Education and Experiences Across Minnesota (Year 2)

Activity Budget: \$139,275

Activity Description:

NEC staff will continue to build a list of priority districts and communities by reviewing publicly available income/poverty data, expanding on the work in 2026. This will include particular attention to Native Nations, including the four Dakota Nations and the seven Anishinaabe (Chippewa/Ojibwe) Nations. NEC staff will communicate with priority sites, sharing information about the scholarship fund and inviting them to participate.

NEC staff speak directly with the school or host site, learning how to adapt programs to meet the needs of the students (and families, if applicable) that they serve. Programs will include a brief description of environmental education career pathways, with NEC professional education staff serving as an example.

Mobile programs will educate young people on the conservation success of the Bald Eagle, current threats, and ways to be environmental stewards, all while connecting them directly to live eagles and raptors and fostering a deep stewardship ethic.

Concurrently, NEC staff will work to develop partnerships and secure new funders to sustain mobile programming beyond LCCMR funding.

Finally, NEC staff will collect and review all surveys, evaluate and analyze the data to drive future programming. Staff will also compile and submit the final report to LCCMR.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
New school districts (and community partners) contacted; new partners identified; Year 2 programming calendar built	September 30, 2027
NEC staff will develop a community sponsor program to support mobile programming beyond LCCMR funding	May 31, 2028
Outreach programs conducted; surveys distributed and collected	June 30, 2028
Evaluation data analyzed and conclusions incorporated into following year programming	June 30, 2028
Final report submitted to LCCMR	June 30, 2028

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?

Project TEAM is a two-year, catalytic investment to expand the Eagle Center's mobile eagle encounter and education program. As programming impacts more school districts and communities, NEC will identify private funders to help continue scholarships, including launching a 'community sponsorship' program that empowers funders to pay for mobile programs in specific schools, districts, and communities. As more statewide mobile programming occurs, NEC's increased profile will help to identify and secure additional private, philanthropic partnerships to fund expanded mobile programming beyond the project period.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Scott Mehus

Job Title: Director of Education

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

NEC Director of Education Scott Mehus has led the Center's education department for nearly 20 years, including overseeing mobile environmental education programming. He directly manages three full-time avian education specialists and a programs & events manager, while reporting directly to the Executive Director. He will be responsible for the project to meet all objectives, working closely with his staff on implementation.

Last year, under Director Mehus' leadership, the NEC reached more than 5,000 individuals through outreach and engagement programs, and more than 40,000 individuals were served by the NEC's on-site programming. He has overseen enhanced exhibit and on-site programming, as well as directed improvements to the mobile eagle encounter programs. With established relationships with regional schools and partners, as well as a deep network of environmental education professionals, Director Mehus is the ideal leader for this project.

Director Mehus also leads the Golden Eagle Project, which documented the first Golden Eagle nesting in Minnesota nearly twenty years ago. He has continued that annual effort while developing plans to increase and enhance data collection, and has published three peer-reviewed articles on his work during his tenure at the NEC.

Organization: National Eagle Center

Organization Description:

The National Eagle Center, based in rural Wabasha County, is a unique nature center focused on environmental education through direct experiences with live Bald Eagles and other raptors. Our mission is to connect people with eagles in nature, history and culture. Our educational programs cultivate rich natural and cultural understanding and facilitate a lifelong stewardship ethic. We currently care for five permanently injured raptors, who all serve as ambassadors during educational programs. Incorporated as EagleWatch, Inc in 1995, we started as a volunteer-run eagle viewing group in the 1980s and opened as the "Eagle Center" in 1999. Following a successful capital campaign, NEC hopes to grow from a regional to statewide leader in environmental education. Increasing access to and enhancing our mobile environmental education programs, as well as expanding our citizen science projects, helps NEC achieve that strategic goal.

Each year, NEC welcomes tens of thousands of children, adults, and families who explore interactive exhibits, enjoy naturalist-led field trips, and meet our permanently injured Bald Eagle Ambassadors. In FY24, reached nearly 5,000 people by delivering over 45 mobile environmental education programs.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Director of Education		Project Manager, will manage project team and mobile eagle encounter and education program			30%	1		\$78,000
Avian Education Specialist		Project team member, will conduct mobile eagle encounters and education programs			30%	0.5		\$20,150
Avian Education Specialist		Project team member, will conduct mobile eagle encounters and education programs			30%	0.5		\$19,500
Programs & Events Manager		Project team member, coordinates mobile eagle encounters and education programs with clients			30%	0.8		\$52,000
Avian Education Specialist Lead		Project team member (lead educator), will conduct mobile eagle encounters and education programs			30%	0.3		\$15,600
Avian Care Director		Project team member, coordinates care of raptors, will conduct mobile eagle encounters and education programs			30%	0.2		\$13,000
Administrative Support		Project team member, will proactively engage low-income schools (vetting for scholarship fund)			0%	0.2		\$6,500
Administrative Support		Project team member, will proactively engage low-income schools (vetting for scholarship fund)			0%	0.2		\$6,500
Seasonal Education Staff (Year 2)		Project team member, will conduct mobile eagle encounters and education programs			0%	1		\$14,150
							Sub Total	\$225,400
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Large image panels (18"x24") qty 20	Large panels help clearly display visuals and talking points to large groups					\$800

			during programs, especially in larger venues.					
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Haast Eagle foot	The Haast Eagle (now extinct) was the largest eagle species ever to live. The replica foot is used to demonstrate scale and size differences compared to Bald Eagles and Golden Eagles during programs.					\$168
	Tools and Supplies	Images Case	This travel case holds and protects the large image panels during transport.					\$42
	Equipment	Haast Eagle Foot Travel Case	This case carries and protects the replica Haast Eagle foot (fragile) during transport.					\$125
	Equipment	Haast Eagle Foot Display Case	This case displays the replica Haast Eagle foot, while also protecting it from handling.					\$162
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Bald Eagle Egg	This replica is used to demonstrate the size and shape of a Bald Eagle egg during programs since real eggs cannot be used.					\$42
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Golden Eagle Egg	This replica is used to demonstrate the size and shape of a Golden Eagle egg during programs since real eggs cannot be used.					\$42
	Tools and Supplies	Replica American Robin Egg	This replica is used to demonstrate the size and shape of an American Robin egg for comparison during programs since real eggs cannot be used.					\$26
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Bald Eagle foot	This replica is used to show the size and features of a Bald Eagle's foot during educational programs.					\$56
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Golden Eagle Skull	This replica is used to show the size and features of a Golden Eagle skull during educational programs.					\$157
	Tools and Supplies	Replica Raptor Skull Set	This set contains replica skulls for several native species of raptors for demonstration, study, and comparison during educational programs.					\$576
	Equipment	Acrylic Display Cases 8"x4"x"4 (qty 7)	These cases display various replica items and protect them during educational programs.					\$722

	Equipment	Wingspan Stick (lumber and paint)	This homemade tool is used during educational programs and allows participants to compare their wingspan (arms held out) to various types of birds and raptors found in Minnesota.					\$95
	Tools and Supplies	Canvas Bags	These small canvas bags hold pea gravel measures to specific weights of different native birds and is used during weight comparison demonstrations during educational programs.					\$50
	Tools and Supplies	Red-tailed Hawk Egg	This replica is used to demonstrate the size and shape of a Red-tailed Hawk egg during programs since real eggs cannot be used.					\$37
							Sub Total	\$3,100
Capital Expenditures								
		Used van	The van will be purchased to support additional outreach work.	X				\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$15,000
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								

		Scholarship Fund (Year 1)	The scholarship fund will help cover program costs for low-income school districts and community partners allowing them to have equal access to the transformative experience of live eagle encounters.					\$13,000
		Scholarship Fund (Year 2)	The scholarship fund will help cover program costs for low-income school districts and community partners allowing them to have equal access to the transformative experience of live eagle encounters. The goal is to expand mobile outreach in year two, thus the increase amount reflects that increase.					\$19,500
							Sub Total	\$32,500
							Grand Total	\$276,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Capital Expenditures		Used van	<p>Vans are large enough to hold the eagles' travel crates along with additional equipment and supplies used as part of mobile eagle encounter and education program. The Center plans to use these capital expense funds as a portion of the total purchase cost leveraging other sources (donations, partners, etc.) to cover the rest.</p> <p>Additional Explanation : The van will transport educators, the live eagles, and equipment/supplies used as part of mobile eagle encounter and education program. And additional van is needed in order for the Center to expand its outreach program and delivery more mobile education programs. Vans are required due to the size of the eagle travel crates.</p>

Non ENRTF Funds

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

Total Project Cost: \$276,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [9ace45fb-8ba.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

The service area for Project TEAM is the State of Minnesota, shown in the image,...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
National Eagle Center IRS Tax-Exempt Letter	64610759-3fb.pdf
National Eagle Center 990_2022	add8909b-f97.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
National Eagle Center Board Resolution Approval Letter	94716656-592.pdf
National Eagle Center Board Resolution Approving LCCMR Funding Request for Project TEAM	157f1fb4-fc3.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support_MinnesotaVAHospital	8d4553bf-b6d.pdf
National Eagle Center Event/Program Photography	a8b6f70d-f8f.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?

N/A

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")?

Yes

Do you certify that background checks are performed for background check crimes, as defined in Minnesota Statutes, section 299C.61, Subd. 2, on all employees, contractors, and volunteers who have or may have access to a child to whom children's services are provided by your organization?

Yes

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

James Clinton, Ed Hahn, Ed Minnema, Tiana Lueck, Tiffany Ploehn

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

N/A