



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-483

Proposal Title: Talking Energy: Engagement to Impact

Project Manager Information

Name: Sally Bauer

Organization: Hennepin County

Office Telephone: (612) 543-0547

Email: sally.bauer@hennepin.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The proposed project will provide engagement, education, workforce development, and implementation support surrounding residential energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy to residents in Hennepin County.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$2,529,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Energy (E)

Project Location

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

Region(s): Metro

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.

Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are driving climate change, causing higher temperatures, more extreme storms, flooding, and changes to ecosystems. Reducing GHG emissions is a critical step to protecting our environment and natural resources. Hennepin County has a population of 1.25 million people, representing nearly one fourth of the population of Minnesota. The county is a significant contributor to statewide GHG emissions, of which 40% come from the residential energy sector. Reducing household energy use while electrifying homes and expanding solar adoption are crucial strategies for cutting emissions. Existing programs often fail low- and moderate-income communities, providing insufficient outreach, education, financial support, and navigation services. Residents in the 50 to 80% area median income range do not qualify for the Weatherization Assistance Program but struggle to afford efficiency upgrades (see HED Wait List Map attachment). The proposed project will provide funding to install clean energy and efficiency solutions and offer programmatic support that reduces energy costs and GHG emissions. This project also addresses key steps laid out in the Minnesota Climate Action Framework to support energy efficiency, renewable energy, and green jobs for low-income communities. Together, these efforts will lessen environmental impacts while building resilience and economic vitality in communities.

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.

Talking Energy: Engagement to Impact is a multi-jurisdictional, cross-sector partnership involving multiple cities, over half a dozen community-based organizations (CBOs), and two local Resilience Hubs. In close collaboration with CBOs, we will implement a comprehensive community engagement approach. Beginning with listening sessions, we will research community energy priorities, needs, and opportunities. We will also provide targeted outreach and education on energy efficiency, electrification, and green workforce pathways.

To achieve tangible improvements, we will leverage our county- and city-led housing preservation programs for qualified low-income residents, expanding these services to include no-cost energy audits, weatherization, and energy efficiency projects. Housing will be evaluated for additional clean energy no-cost improvements, such as converting gas appliances to electric and installing solar panels. Finally, we will collaborate with two Resiliency Hubs to add rooftop solar at each site, ensuring the local community directly benefits from cleaner energy and enhanced resilience to climate impacts.

Overall, this project aims to engage 1,500 people and achieve a projected 350 metric ton reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. By centering community input and delivering direct benefits, Talking Energy positions Hennepin County as a model for equitable, community-driven climate solutions that protect Minnesota's environment and support residents in need.

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?

Outcome 1 – Community Engagement: Engagement with 500 residents informs report for future energy action and 1000 residents educated on energy efficiency, clean energy, and green workforce opportunities.

Outcome 2 – Residential Energy Efficiency & Electrification: Decrease energy use in homes through energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy resulting in a 350 metric ton reduction in GHG emissions.

Outcome 3 – Solar Energy at Resilience Hubs: Support the installation of rooftop solar at two Resilience Hubs. This will build community resiliency and result in annual three metric ton reduction in GHG emissions per site.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Research most effective approaches to drive energy action. Educate residents in energy efficiency, electrification, renewable energy, and green jobs.

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

With an objective to research the best practices to drive energy action, we will contract and partner with community-based organizations (CBOs) serving vulnerable communities in the county. The CBOs will host listening sessions (with an estimated 500 residents) to understand community needs and best approaches to motivate action around energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy. This research will inform a report offering concrete recommendations on how to educate and catalyze community action during future interventions. Building on these insights, we will engage an additional 1,000 residents providing resources for energy efficiency and renewable energy and identify households that would benefit from energy auditing. Resources that will be highlighted include energy rebates, city programs, opportunities for low-income households to access weatherization and electrification services, and clean energy workforce opportunities. Efforts will be led by two full time Climate Community Liaisons, in partnership with Center for Energy and Environment's (CEE) Electrify Everything, and utilizing our Trusted Messenger program. This will include outreach events, energy efficiency training, electrification workshops, and recruiting an estimated 300 households for in-home education visits. This multi-pronged approach ensures we develop culturally relevant outreach, expand community awareness, and catalyze meaningful greenhouse gas reductions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
5 CBO contracts executed for community research and engagement	November 30, 2026
15 community listening sessions completed by CBOs reaching 500 residents	January 31, 2027
One research report synthesizing engagement results completed	August 31, 2027
30 tabling and community education events participated in by Hennepin County, CEE, and CBOs	June 30, 2029
300 households sign up and participate in in-home education visits	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Complete energy audits and relevant weatherization improvements for low-income households in Hennepin County.

Activity Budget: \$1,114,500

Activity Description:

Hennepin County currently offers single-family housing preservation programs serving approximately 200 low-income households (up to 80% area median income with 63% of under 50%). We will expand services to include home energy audits and weatherization. As a sub-awardee, the City of Minneapolis will scale up residential energy efficiency strategies to serve low-income and affordable housing properties.

A total of 130 households who are not eligible for the Weatherization Assistance Program will receive a free energy audit, that includes installation of energy-saving materials, a test to measure for air leaks, an infrared inspection of insulation, a heating system and water heater evaluation, and a report with a scope of work for insulating and air sealing. Based on those recommendations, we anticipate 68 households working with weatherization contractors to complete insulation, air sealing and ventilation work to improving energy efficiency. Our team will also secure available rebates and incentives on behalf of the property owner. After rebates, the average cost per home is expected to be \$7,000 for weather sealing and insulation. By expanding resources and incentives for households not otherwise served, this project boosts energy efficiency and reduces greenhouse gas emissions.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Minneapolis City Council approves the City to receive the sub-award	August 31, 2026
Policies and procedures for residential decarbonization project identification and prioritization are established	August 31, 2026
Contract between Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis executed	September 30, 2026
130 low-income qualifying households receive energy audits (65 metric tons reduction in GHG emissions)	June 30, 2029
131 households receive weatherization (131 metric tons reduction in GHG emissions)	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Complete residential electrification and renewable energy installations for low-income households in Hennepin County.

Activity Budget: \$1,114,500

Activity Description:

Upon completion of activity 2, households will be assessed for additional clean energy upgrades and if feasible, implemented. Potential measures include upgraded electric service, energy efficient heat pump hot water heaters, dual-fuel heat pumps for heating and cooling, electric stove conversion, and solar panels. Each project will follow a decision tree that prioritizes greatest benefit and considers site-specific conditions.

We estimate installing 45 gas-to-heat pump water heaters, 75 dual-fuel heat pumps, 34 electric stove conversions, and 10 residential solar panel systems. Altogether, these installations will decrease GHG emissions by 154 metric tons annually, while also lowering utility bills, and improve indoor air quality. Expanding these services will enable the county to evaluate the interest in these opportunities and feasibility of long-term expansion of services at the county. Average costs will range from \$3,500 for heat pump water heaters to \$18,000 for dual fuel heat pumps or furnace replacement. By offering these upgrades at no cost to eligible households, we help ensure broader access to clean energy solutions that protect the environment, enhance public health, and strengthen energy resilience.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
75 ccASHPs dual fuel heat pumps installed (reducing 88 metric tons of GHGs)	June 30, 2029
45 electric heat pump water heaters installed (reducing 46 metric tons of GHGs)	June 30, 2029
25 electric induction stoves installed	June 30, 2029
10 solar panel projects installed (reducing 20 metric tons of GHGs)	June 30, 2029

Activity 4: Install rooftop solar systems at two community Resilience Hubs serving communities disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Activity Budget: \$200,000

Activity Description:

Resilience Hubs are community-serving facilities that use renewable energy and energy storage to serve as a pillar of emergency management and critical infrastructure in times of need, such as extreme climate disruption. Many community organizations in Hennepin County are developing plans and seeking support to establish these Resilience Hubs. We will develop an open request for proposals (RFP) and follow a predeveloped criteria to select two CBO Resilience Hubs for a roof top solar installation.

Applicants will be required to provide a detailed work plan with timeline and contractor selection process in addition to a budget that includes how they will cover any required costs not covered by the Talking Energy: Engagement to Impact

funds. Once sites are selected, we will collaborate with the selected CBOs to ensure regular updates are provided on work progress to ensure the project stays on track and the county will provide support as needed.

By integrating solar power into Resilience Hubs, we directly increase local resilience, reduce GHG emissions, and equip neighborhoods to better withstand climate-related emergencies. This targeted investment expands equitable access to clean energy, strengthens community infrastructure, and serves as a model for future resilience projects in Hennepin County.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
RFP and selection criteria are developed and RFP is posted	September 30, 2026
Proposals are reviewed based on criteria, two sites are selected, and contracts are executed	December 31, 2026
If needed, additional financing to close funding gap is identified and secured by CBOs	March 31, 2029
Rooftop solar arrays are installed	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Isaac Evans	City of Minneapolis	The City of Minneapolis will increase residential energy efficiency strategies to serve low-income and affordable housing properties expanding existing contracts they manage. This will include energy audits and additionally energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy installations for low-income households in Minneapolis.	Yes
John Kinara	Brooklyn Park	Brooklyn Park is a second ring suburb of Minneapolis where over 60% of residents identify as Black & Indigenous People of Color and nearly one third of residents are estimated to be cost-burdened. With high numbers of low- and moderate-income residents, many participants in the project will reside in Brooklyn Park.	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?

Through this project, we will reduce GHG emissions, advance energy efficiency and expand clean energy benefits. Community engagement performed will help effectively plan future energy projects. Through continued coordination with stakeholders, we can scale successful interventions and integrate lessons learned into future infrastructure projects, creating a long-term ripple effect that fortifies Hennepin County's commitment to a sustainable, equitable future. The effort to reduce GHG emissions is ongoing and requires multiple funding streams over the course of many years. Successful implementation of this project will help build the case for future funding requests through multiple federal, state, local, and foundation opportunities.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sally Bauer

Job Title: Energy Project Manager

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

Sally Bauer is an Energy Project Manager for the Hennepin County Climate and Resiliency Department. Sally has 15 years of experience in grants and project management, community engagement, and clean energy and holds a Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership, Policy, and Development from the University of Minnesota. As the Energy Project Manager, she drives externally focused energy projects to reach county climate goals. This includes the county's participation in Xcel Energy's Partners in Energy program and the development of a county energy plan. This process comprised of extensive community engagement with residents, community-based organizations (CBOs), and city and county staff.

Additionally, she is leading a federally funded Weatherization and Electrification Study to identify targets and implementation strategies for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in residential buildings. She is a key collaborator with internal departments, cities, clean energy experts, and CBOs to further county energy work. As project lead for Talking Energy: Engagement to Impact, Sally would oversee meeting all grant requirements, subgrantee relationships, request for proposals, CBO collaborations, and cross-county departmental partnerships.

Prior to coming to the county, Sally was the Emerging and Renewable Technologies Program Administrator at the Minnesota Department of Commerce Energy Division. She led the development of a legislatively funded energy storage program for outside Xcel Energy territory. She engaged closely with utilities, energy storage companies, and clean

energy and equity advocates to best utilize state resources for the greatest impact. Additionally, Sally worked for the clean energy nonprofit Fresh Energy supporting the government affairs team at the state legislature. These experiences ensure both a deep understanding of the state's energy sector and the importance of being a careful steward of state fiscal investments.

Organization: Hennepin County

Organization Description:

Hennepin County is the largest county in Minnesota. The county's mission is "to serve residents through transformative services that reduce disparities, eliminate inequities, and create opportunity for all." The Climate & Resiliency department focuses on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and helping residents to adapt to our changing climate. A key goal is transitioning to renewable energy sources and reducing overall energy use, especially in communities most vulnerable to climate impacts. The department provides information and resources to aid in the transition to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, as laid out in the Hennepin County Climate Action Plan (adopted in 2021).

Climate & Resiliency has a successful track record of managing state-funded and federally-funded projects. In 2024, Hennepin County was selected for an Energy Efficiency & Conservation Block Grant and a Communities Sparking Investment in Transformative Energy Grant to further promote education and implementation of energy efficiency. Using diverse funding streams and effectively managing these awards underscores the county's commitment to protecting the environment, reducing disparities, and enhancing equitable access to cleaner energy solutions.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Housing and Economic Development Program Manager		Administer residential weatherization and electrification program			36%	0.75		\$125,280
Housing and Economic Development Project Manager		Manage individual residential weatherization and electrification projects			36%	3		\$403,443
							Sub Total	\$528,723
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Subaward	Contractual: procurement and installation of rooftop solar array on community resilience hub				0		\$100,000
TBD	Subaward	Contractual: procurement and installation of rooftop solar array on community resilience hub				0		\$100,000
City of Minneapolis	Subaward	Contractual: Partner to implement weatherization and electrification work				0		\$500,000
TBD	Service Contract	Contractual: Hennepin County will solicit proposals from community-based organizations to conduct community engagement on energy efficiency, electrification, and renewable energy topics. We will select between 4-6 organizations to engage with diverse communities in multiple languages. Activities will include community conversations, tabling events, presentations, and educational communication materials.				3		\$100,000
TBD	Service Contract	Contractual: Hennepin County will release a solicitation to contractors requesting proposals to conduct weatherization projects within single family homes.				0.75		\$458,177
TBD	Service Contract	Hennepin County will release a solicitation to contractors requesting proposals to conduct electrification projects within single family homes.				0.75		\$740,000

							Sub Total	\$1,998,177
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Visit project sites to ensure quality	Travel from the office to project sites (residential homes) using the IRS mileage rate of .70 cents per mile					\$2,100
							Sub Total	\$2,100
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$2,529,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
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Non ENRTF Funds

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

Total Project Cost: \$2,529,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [3afea917-317.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of homes waiting for upgrades in Hennepin County...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2023 Single Audit	c70ec6ab-875.pdf
Comprehensive Financial Report	f75d83c7-8bd.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Hennepin County Authority to Apply Letter	1743594a-bb3.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letters of Support	77f8299b-2ce.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:

Jessica Spanswick, Michael Jensen, Rebecca Golden, Maddy Hohenstein all of Hennepin County

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

