



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2026 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2026-578

Proposal Title: Explore Minnesota With COPAL

Project Manager Information

Name: Carolina Ortiz

Organization: Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: COPAL will provide outdoor programming and leadership opportunities for 600+ BIPOC families and youth, and produce a report recommending improvements to enhance natural outdoor spaces that are inclusive and accessible.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$400,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 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.

Routinely visiting parks and engaging in outdoor activities increases peoples' commitment to water and land conservation (DeVillie et al., 2021). Yet according to the DNR's most recent State Parks Visitor Survey, only 11% of visitors to Minnesota's state parks identify as BIPOC, compared to the overall population of 22% (Minnesota DNR, 2022). Barriers include cost, transportation, knowledge of outdoor spaces, and language access.

Parks and outdoor activities hold a special significance in diverse cultures. Many cities and towns throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and South America host outdoor festivals in town squares, and many cultural traditions include connections to the natural world. For BIPOC families, the lack of culturally-relevant educational and language resources in Minnesota's natural spaces can make it difficult to navigate the outdoors.

ENRTF funding will allow COPAL to expand programming to create accessible and inclusive avenues to Minnesota's parks and outdoor activities for English- and Spanish-speaking BIPOC communities. Through evidence-based, hands-on, and engaging curriculum, a diversity of youth and families will learn about wetland and native grassland restoration and careers in environment and natural resources.

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.

In 2024, COPAL engaged 345 BIPOC youth and families in natural outdoor recreation. We collaborated with the Land Stewardship Project to host a farm tour in Austin and worked with colleges, universities, and community groups for a total of 15 events across the state. We addressed barriers to participation by hosting events in English and Spanish, providing transportation, and covering any fees. Each event was created in collaboration with naturalists to ensure an evidence-based curriculum.

ENRTF funding will allow COPAL to hire an Outdoor Specialist to create engaging bilingual youth programming focused on wetland and native grassland restoration and careers in the environment and natural resources. We will tie this work into our Environmental Justice Committee – a volunteer-led group that meets monthly to inform COPAL's programming - to ensure clear, consistent processes of youth engagement and leadership. COPAL will work closely with naturalists, state park rangers, DNR staff, and event participants to produce a report detailing ways the DNR can enhance natural resources-based outdoor recreational spaces in communities across the state.

Through this work, COPAL will contribute to all Minnesotans, especially young people, having access to and taking advantage of opportunities to connect to the lands and waters of Minnesota.

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?

COPAL will connect 600+ predominantly BIPOC families and youth with the outdoors while producing clear next steps to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of Minnesota's natural spaces. Specifically, we will expand partnerships, engage BIPOC youth and families in outdoor spaces, and increase participants' knowledge about wetland and native grassland restoration and careers in the environment and natural resources. Our work with our Environmental Justice Committee, particularly youth members, will result in 50 new attendees participating in programming. Finally, we will develop a report with recommendations for the DNR to enhance natural resources-based outdoor recreational spaces.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Innovative, culturally-relevant youth and family programming that addresses social, economic, and physical barriers to natural outdoor recreation

Activity Budget: \$267,807

Activity Description:

Objective: Provide evidence-based, hands-on, and engaging curriculum and programming to bring a diversity of youth and families to outdoor experiences

Tasks & How They're Accomplished: Host monthly culturally-relevant outdoor education events that engage BIPOC youth and families throughout the state. Tasks include working closely with naturalists to create engaging, evidence-based curriculum and partnering with BIPOC groups to co-host the events. Events focus on connecting youth with careers in the environment and natural resources, environmental stewardship, and wetland and native grassland restoration.

Outcomes: Expand partnerships, engage BIPOC youth and families in outdoor spaces, and increase participants' knowledge about careers in the environment and natural resources as well as wetland and native grassland restoration

Impact: All Minnesotans, especially young people, have access to and take advantage of opportunities to connect to the lands and waters of Minnesota

Evaluation: Registration forms and verbal/written post-event surveys to capture demographic and qualitative data

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Work closely with 2-3 naturalists to incorporate wetland and native grassland restoration curriculum into programming	December 31, 2026
Engage 1-2 training partners to create curriculum focused on careers in environment and natural resources	January 31, 2027
Continue existing partnerships with 3 predominantly BIPOC organizations	June 30, 2028
Form 4 new partnerships with BIPOC groups to reach more participants throughout Minnesota	June 30, 2028
Engage at least 600 BIPOC youth and families throughout Minnesota	June 30, 2028
In post-event surveys, 80% of participants will name ways they will engage with the outdoors	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Create leadership opportunities for a diversity of young people to connect with the outdoors

Activity Budget: \$58,800

Activity Description:

Objective: Create avenues for youth participants of COPAL's member-based Environmental Justice Committee to serve as leaders in COPAL's outdoor programming

Tasks & How They're Accomplished: The Environmental Justice Committee meets monthly to inform COPAL's work. With a focus on youth members, the committee will be invited to serve as engagement ambassadors who will conduct outreach to increase participation in outdoor events. Staff will train engagement ambassadors in outreach techniques and will provide mentorship throughout year 1 with the goal that engagement ambassadors will lead at least 2 events in year 2.

Outcomes: At least 50 new attendees will participate in COPAL's outdoor programming

Impact: Committee members will become representatives of COPAL's work, gaining the skills to serve as leader advocates in conservation, preservation, and protection of Minnesota's outdoors.

Evaluation: Individual conversations and listening sessions with committee members

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Hire an Outdoor Specialist to increase staff capacity to focus on the Environmental Justice Committee	October 31, 2026
Engage 40 people in COPAL's Environmental Justice Committee throughout programming	June 30, 2028
Mentor 3 youth committee members to serve as engagement ambassadors	June 30, 2028
Engage 50 new attendees in outdoor events by mentoring engagement ambassadors	June 30, 2028
Support engagement ambassadors in leading at least 2 outdoor events during year 2 of funding	June 30, 2028

Activity 3: Craft a report with recommendations to enhance natural resources-based outdoor recreational spaces that are inclusive and accessible to all

Activity Budget: \$73,393

Activity Description:

Objective: COPAL will develop a report detailing specific ways in which the DNR can enhance natural resources-based outdoor recreational spaces in communities across the state

Tasks & How They're Accomplished: COPAL will evaluate our outdoor programming to determine success in expanding availability of outdoor spaces to all. Specific tasks may include developing a logic model, conducting focus groups, analyzing post-event surveys, and interviewing participants, naturalists, and DNR staff.

Outcomes: COPAL will present report findings to the DNR and collaboratively determine steps to increase the accessibility and inclusivity of public lands

Impact: All Minnesotans will have access to and take advantage of opportunities to connect to the lands and waters of Minnesota

Evaluation: Evaluation may include focus groups, post-event surveys, and interviews

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Draft and sign an MOU with an evaluation firm	January 31, 2027
Create a logic model	April 30, 2027
Conduct focus groups and/or interviews with at least 10 participants, naturalists and DNR staff	September 30, 2027
Write the report	March 31, 2028
Publicize the report through events and communications channels	May 31, 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?

COPAL will evaluate our outdoor programming to produce a report with recommendations to enhance outdoor spaces. We will share the report with DNR staff, community groups, and on our communications platforms, which reach over 65,000 people per month. After project completion, COPAL will utilize our strong partnerships - which we expect to grow throughout the outdoor events - to determine the needs of BIPOC communities in preserving and conserving Minnesota's natural resources. We will utilize our report to demonstrate the need for continued funding, which we will present to the many funders with whom we already have strong relationships.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Carolina Ortiz

Job Title: Associate Executive Director and Environmental Justice Director

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

Carolina Ortiz is the Environmental Justice Director at Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina COPAL Education Fund (COPAL). Hailing from Zacatecas, Mexico, Carolina embodies the spirit of resilience and determination. Her advocacy for environmental justice is not just a vocation but a lived experience, drawing strength and motivation from her own encounters and those of her community.

Carolina's impactful footprint extends far beyond her role, encompassing a profound depth of environmental advocacy, coalition management, media advocacy, and steering key legislative initiatives. She led the Frontline Communities Protection Coalition to pass the cumulative impacts legislation, a law identifying neighborhoods where residents are most vulnerable to harmful polluting projects. Carolina is also a Board member of Alianza Americas, a network working to create an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable way of life for migrant communities in the United States.

Funding from LCCMR will allow Carolina to oversee the ongoing implementation of a culturally-relevant and innovative environmental justice project that ensures all Minnesotans, especially young people, have access to and take advantage of opportunities to connect to the lands and waters of Minnesota. Carolina's specific responsibilities will include managing and supervising personnel and partnerships, overseeing the implementation of grant activities, evaluating the impact of grant activities, and using results to improve future activities and outcomes.

Organization: Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina

Organization Description:

Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina (COPAL) was founded in 2018 to better the quality of life for Latine families by building collective power, transforming systems, and creating opportunities to live a dignified life in Minnesota. COPAL's environmental justice (EJ) program protects, conserves, preserves, and enhances Minnesota's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources by strengthening the power and influence of Minnesota's Latine and BIPOC communities. The program engages in coalitional and non-partisan 501c3 work and organizes monthly outdoor events to raise awareness about EJ issues impacting our BIPOC families.

COPAL has scaled to a staff of 46 that engages a network of 53,500 stakeholders throughout Minnesota. Almost all (98%) of COPAL's staff speak Spanish, and 89% identify as Latine. Staff have roots in over 7 countries, and of those identifying as Latine, all moved to the United States or have parents/grandparents who did. Our staff come from diverse backgrounds, giving COPAL a rich tapestry from which to understand the Latine experience.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Environmental Justice Coordinator		Coordinating lead acting as a liaison for families and communities to ensure effective implementation of environmental justice initiatives.			20%	0.5		\$31,200
Environmental Justice Director		Project lead overseeing strategic direction and implementation of environmental justice projects, with a focus on community engagement and empowerment.			20%	0.6		\$86,400
Outdoor Specialist		Planning and executing outdoor activities and programs, fostering a connection between communities and the environment.			20%	2		\$124,800
Communications Coordinator		Managing promotion of events and the final report through social media, targeted emails, newsletters, COPAL's website, and COPAL's in-house 24/7 radio station			20%	0.3		\$19,655
Videographer & Photographer		Capturing visuals and testimonials during events, creating compelling videos to showcase community involvement and impact.			20%	0.4		\$25,958
Podcast/Radio Tech		Hosting and producing podcasts, radio broadcasts, and/or radio spots aimed at increasing community participation and engagement.			20%	0.2		\$12,480
Health and Wellness Navigator		Connecting community members to outdoor events when they call COPAL's hotline for assistance			20%	0.5		\$33,696
							Sub Total	\$334,189
Contracts and Services								
Baztec Fishing	Subaward	Engage Baztec Fishing for sustainable fishing practices and knowledge sharing within the project scope.				1		\$9,000
Huellas Latinas	Subaward	Collaborate with Huellas Latinas to integrate Latine perspectives and contributions into project initiatives.				1		\$9,000
Contracted report design and analysis	Service Contract	Contract with an evaluation firm to design surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups, collect data, and				2		\$10,000

		analyze results to assess the project's impact on the community and conservation efforts.						
Cultural Performance Per Year	Subaward	Partner with one organization per year to host a cultural performance or demonstration at an event to celebrate and showcase the diversity of Latine and BIPOC cultures, fostering community engagement.				2		\$4,000
							Sub Total	\$32,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	360 reusable grocery bags (15 per event)	Collaborate with local grocery stores or markets to offer reusable bags as an alternative to single-use plastic bags, reducing plastic waste and promoting sustainable shopping practices.					\$2,500
	Tools and Supplies	360 reusable water bottles (15 per event)	Distribute reusable water bottles as giveaways at events, workshops, or community gatherings, promoting sustainability.	X				\$2,800
	Tools and Supplies	Paint, chalk, paper, pencils, extra supplies	Invest in arts and crafts supplies for creative expression workshops that integrate art with nature, fostering personal connections with the environment through activities like painting, sculpture, and photography.					\$1,500
	Equipment	2 bikes, tennis rackets, or other equipment	Purchase or rent outdoor recreation equipment like bikes, tennis rackets, or fishing gear to provide hands-on experiences for participants, promoting outdoor engagement and active lifestyle choices.					\$2,500
							Sub Total	\$9,300
Capital Expenditures								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	1 outdoor event per month to different areas in MN, so 24 events to report mileage	Cover expenses for staff members to attend outdoor events or to report findings at events.					\$2,500
	Other	Provide transportation for community members to attend events (2 events/year)	Reduce the barrier of transportation costs for BIPOC community members to increase participation at outdoor events.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$7,500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	600 event flyers, 300 brochures, and 50 posters	Budget for printing event flyers, brochures, posters, and educational materials in both English and Spanish					\$3,500
	Printing	30 comic books	Create illustrated comics targeting children and families to raise awareness about conservation and outdoor stewardship, fostering a sense of responsibility towards nature.					\$9,500
	Printing	600 multilingual trail maps	Print trail maps and guides in multiple languages to ensure inclusivity and accessibility of outdoor recreation opportunities for non-English speakers.					\$2,000
							Sub Total	\$15,000
Other Expenses								
		Parking and entrance fees for 200 participants	Cover parking and park entrance fees to remove barriers for community members to attend events, ensuring inclusivity and participation.					\$2,011
							Sub Total	\$2,011

							Grand Total	\$400,000
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Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		360 reusable water bottles (15 per event)	Water is not always present at outdoor areas. Having water on hand reduces the financial barrier of participants having to purchase their own refreshments and ensures participants do not become dehydrated or get heat stroke.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Climate & Clean Energy Equity Fund	Covers ineligible & prohibited expenses plus part of the remaining personnel costs. All other personnel costs are covered by grants for programming unrelated to outdoor events.	Potential	\$60,700
Cash	McKnight Foundation	Covers ineligible & prohibited expenses plus part of the remaining personnel costs. All other personnel costs are covered by grants for programming unrelated to outdoor events.	Potential	\$168,334
			Non State Sub Total	\$229,034
			Funds Total	\$229,034

Total Project Cost: \$629,034

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [730325ff-88d.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Demonstrates several of the areas where COPAL's outdoor events are held....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
COPAL Form 990 2023	950021c6-1ae.pdf
COPAL 2023 Audit	4de0307d-b13.pdf
COPAL Certificate of Good Standing	6d66f7dd-7d6.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
COPAL Board Resolution Letter	c27e55cd-32f.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Photos from COPAL's outdoor events	82d41663-9e4.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")?

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:

Maria Bertrand (Grants Manager), COPAL

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