



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-147

Proposal Title: Rural Resilience Coordination

Project Manager Information

Name: Samuel Sharp

Organization: Region Nine Development Commission

Office Telephone: (507) 646-9635

Email: samuel@rndc.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This proposal will implement regional resilience planning across nine counties in southern rural Minnesota, providing technical assistance that moves projects toward implementation, strengthening communities' ability to prepare for extreme weather.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$500,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Resiliency (A)

Project Location

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

Region(s): SE, SW,

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

Region(s): SE, SW,

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 only 1 full-time and 1 part-time municipal sustainability coordinator across the 72 rural cities that make up our nine-county region. With limited professional staff, rural communities in our region struggle to keep pace with emerging challenges while managing tight budgets and essential day-to-day responsibilities. Without additional capacity or systems that create long-term efficiencies, these communities cannot fully develop or implement the projects needed to protect natural resources, improve long-term resilience, and mitigate climate change.

Southern Minnesota faces escalating climate risks, energy resilience struggles, and natural resource vulnerabilities. Our nine-county region is over 85% agricultural land, and much of it lies within the Minnesota River Basin, where continuous year-after-year row crop production, drain tiling, and extreme weather intensifies nutrient runoff, erosion, and recurring flood–drought cycles. These pressures degrade water quality locally and downstream, yet this part of the basin has received far fewer resilience-focused investments than other regions. Communities also face aging and inefficient public facilities, energy infrastructure, and housing stock - all of which are compounded by extreme weather events. Without the capacity to dream, design, and implement projects, these communities are left behind from accessing even the simplest public programs and opportunities.

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.

Our proposed solution is to expand rural capacity by establishing RNDC as the regional sustainability coordinator across our nine-county area. This initiative will provide the staffing, technical expertise, and early-stage project development support that rural communities need to move on from simply acknowledging challenges to implementing practical, on-the-ground resilience solutions.

RNDC will offer hands-on technical assistance, guiding communities through issue identification, feasibility analysis, partner coordination, and project scoping for efforts such as nature-based flood mitigation, stormwater and water-storage readiness, water and soil quality improvements, and energy-resilience and efficiency measures. To support local decision-making, RNDC will provide free grant writing, in-kind project management, and early technical assistance, including solar and efficiency prescreening and utility-oriented strategies that help communities evaluate options without costly preliminary engineering.

In addition, RNDC will engage a wide variety of public, private, and non-profit stakeholders to support project development and ensure access to credible expertise. A core element of the approach is building or strengthening local sustainability committees and working groups, providing durable community leadership and helping sustain momentum after the initial project development phase. Together, these efforts will help rural communities advance locally relevant, implementable natural resource and resilience projects.

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?

Assist communities in identifying nature-based solutions adaptive to extreme weather and to the benefit of local ecosystems.

Provide free solar modeling for public buildings.

Develop a regional resilience plan to guide future project development.

Provide free resilience-focused grant writing to secure funding resources.

Support communities in implementing energy audit findings and energy conservation measures.

Establish or engage with at least nine local committees to develop local capacity.

Provide in-kind staff support to at least 20 communities through technical assistance.

Develop a public-facing resilience landing page to expand access to tools, resources, and project case studies.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Regional Resilience Planning: Community Engagement and Tracking

Activity Budget: \$75,000

Activity Description:

This activity builds the core infrastructure needed to coordinate rural climate, energy, and natural resource resilience efforts across Region Nine’s nine counties and 72 communities. The objective is to engage with and meet our rural communities where they are to learn about the needs and projects that excite them. We will start with a regional engagement and planning process to learn about issues and document past successes. This planning process will result in the development of our resilience landing page and a regional resilience plan. The Resilience Landing Page will house decision-support tools, a curated resource library, and highlight examples from successfully implemented local projects to guide early-stage ideation and celebrate our successes to date.

The second output of this activity will be the compilation of a regional resilience plan that outlines projects and goals that our regional partners will work on in the years to come. The plan will be divided by sector to develop specific and actionable goals that reflect our residents, businesses, utilities, and local governments’ goals. This document will act as a regional resilience plan that all our communities and partners can leverage for grant applications.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Begin regional planning and engagement process	September 30, 2027
Publish regional resilience plan	May 31, 2028
Finalized system for community engagement and implementation support	July 31, 2028
First version of Resource Landing Page	August 31, 2028
Full Resource Landing Page Published	December 31, 2028

Activity 2: Community Support and Implementation

Activity Budget: \$240,000

Activity Description:

This activity will begin after the planning process and community engagement have both started. It will provide implementation-focused support that helps rural communities move from planning into action. It will deliver boots-on-the-ground technical assistance, feasibility analysis, and project management to begin and accelerate projects that protect natural resources, mitigate climate change, and strengthen community resilience.

Tasks will include but won’t be limited to: helping communities take next-step actions like developing capital stacks after energy audits, advancing nature-based flood mitigation, supporting stormwater management, solar modeling at municipal facilities, and general project management. RNDC will offer a wide-ranging support model providing deep, targeted, and light-touch assistance to meet the depth and breadth of community needs.

In the past, RNDC has advanced similar actions through coordinating contractor trainings, efficiency installs for disadvantaged households, solar RFP development, and stormwater and wastewater planning. Our outputs for this activity will cover similar actions and more, including developing project scopes, feasibility plans, pre-engineering considerations, and natural resource assessments. These outputs will accelerate local projects across southern rural Minnesota. Evaluation will occur through completion of milestone steps, validation by technical partners, and documented progress toward implementation readiness.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Initial community intake and prioritization	December 31, 2027
Initial feasibility and scoping support underway	January 31, 2028
Draft scopes + decision memos for priority projects completed	December 31, 2028
Technical assistance provided for projects in 20 communities	May 31, 2030
Final activity evaluation + project progress summary completed	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Free grant writing for rural resilience and environmental projects

Activity Budget: \$85,000

Activity Description:

This activity provides no-cost grant writing and funding strategy support for rural communities seeking to advance conservation, natural resource protection, renewable energy, water management, and climate resilience projects. The objective is to reduce capacity barriers that prevent small towns from accessing state, federal, and philanthropic funding. RNDC will identify funding opportunities, prepare competitive applications, develop detailed budgets, support match strategies, and coordinate strong multi-partner collaborations.

5-7 projects per year will receive grant-development support for initiatives such as public-building solar and efficiency upgrades, utility resilience, wetland restoration, water-storage and flood-mitigation projects, stormwater and green-infrastructure improvements, and sustainable transportation. Outputs include completed applications, partner support letters, match plans, and a regional grant pipeline tracker.

These outputs increase the number of locally driven projects that move from concept to implementation, critical in an agricultural region where water-quality improvements, wetland restoration, and flood-reduction projects generate meaningful upstream and downstream benefits for natural systems and rural economies. Evaluation will be based on number of applications submitted, awards received, total dollars leveraged, and documented progress on funded resilience initiatives.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Regional grant pipeline established	December 31, 2027
Write and submit at least 5 applications prepared and submitted (Year 1)	June 30, 2028
Write and submit at least 5 applications prepared and submitted (Year 2)	June 30, 2029
Write and submit at least 5 applications prepared and submitted (Year 3)	June 30, 2030

Activity 4: Establish and support local committees to guide rural resilience action

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

This activity builds long-term local capacity by establishing and supporting small community groups in rural communities to guide natural resource and climate resilience actions. Many towns have struggled to move projects forward because they have part time city council members and a part time city clerk as their only staff. In these instances, it is often engaged community members and community champions who can lead projects towards implementation. But only if they have the opportunity to do so. We will fill that gap by developing new committees and supporting existing groups.

Each community will have its own set of circumstances that influence the direction of projects and initiatives. This could include residential efficiency, stormwater improvements, habitat or wetland restoration, or sustainable transportation. The objective is to create durable leadership teams that identify priorities, coordinate partners, and move projects toward implementation more efficiently.

RNDC will support nine committees and groups through regional training, peer-learning sessions, being an active member in their discussions to help them apply proven resilience practices. Committees will receive decision-support templates, example scopes, and dedicated staff time to strengthen their on-the-ground initiatives. Evaluation will assess committee participation, work-plan completion, and the number of projects advanced.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
First round of joining or forming community groups completed	December 31, 2027
Initial training + peer-learning sessions delivered	August 31, 2028
Priority project lists and early action plans developed	December 31, 2028
Support at least nine committee with tools and facilitation	June 30, 2029
Committee evaluation + next phase action plans completed	June 30, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Robert Ed	Darcy Solutions	Provide high-level technical insight on ground-source heat pump feasibility and support RNDC in exploring geothermal options as community energy-resilience opportunities emerge.	No
Joseph Stangel	Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Provide expert review of nature-based solutions, hydrologic considerations, and restoration opportunities that embody regional resilience and natural resource-based project development.	No
Kimberly Musser	Water Resources Center, Minnesota State University - Mankato	Offer technical support and expert review: GIS integration, water-resource advisory, and review of resilience-planning workflows.	Yes
Joel Haskard	Clean Energy Resource Teams	Provide technical knowledge on clean energy systems and access to funding opportunities.	No
Kay Gross	Greater Blue Earth River Basin Alliance	Provide advisory support on watershed-based resilience strategies, nature-based solutions, water-quality improvements, and soil health project development. Act as potential funding source for rural communities to implement these practices.	No

Dissemination

Describe your plans for dissemination, presentation, documentation, or sharing of data, results, samples, physical collections, and other products and how they will follow ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

All public-facing materials, including the Landing Page, the Region Nine Resilience Plan, presentations, documents, and downloadable resources, will be made publicly accessible and will acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (ENRTF) as required. RNDC will share project findings with local governments, SWCDs, watershed groups, utilities, and community organizations through briefings, committee meetings, and regional partner networks. The landing page will serve as a permanent repository for data summaries, project examples, and guidance materials, ensuring long-term accessibility beyond the grant period. Dissemination efforts will ensure communities and partners can easily access, apply, and benefit from the work supported by ENRTF.

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?

After the project concludes, communities will be prepared to continue advancing resilience projects through the funding strategies, scoping documents, and partnerships developed during the grant period. Community champions and sustainability task forces will imbue long-term local capacity and empowerment. The resilience landing page and region-wide resilience plan will enable individuals, communities, and broader partnerships to act and move ideas forward, referencing concepts and resources established throughout the project. As more projects and ideas come online, RNDC will commit to maintaining these deliverables and update the plan and landing page accordingly, ensuring proper documentation and core storytelling elements are captured.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Samuel Sharp

Job Title: Energy and Environment Planner

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

Samuel Sharp is the Energy and Environment Planner with the Region Nine Development Commission, supporting rural communities in south-central Minnesota through grant writing, educational outreach, and climate-focused planning. In his 3 years with the Region Nine Development Commission, he has managed grants and projects funded by the DOE, MPCA, and Minnesota Department of Commerce. His work bridges local governments with technical expertise and strategic partnerships, enabling access to resources for clean energy opportunities and climate-resilient solutions. Samuel co-developed a Climate Resilience Plan for the City of Comfrey, MN, featuring energy efficiency and environmental initiatives as the focal point, and is currently working to replicate these efforts with other communities throughout the nine-county region. Samuel has also supported efforts to complete an Energy and Environmental Resilience Plan for the City of Fairmont, MN, facilitating community-led discussion and working to create project opportunities catered towards long-term resilience. Most recently, Samuel assisted the City of Henderson, MN in securing funding to complete a stormwater and wastewater management plan through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, seeking to implement nature-based solutions and alleviate years of historical flood risks. Samuel serves as the primary contact between RNDC and the Minnesota Climate Adaptation Partnership (MCAP), serving as a key collaborator seeking to pair academic climate modeling with real-life application and integrating climate resilience as a core concept across community planning initiatives.

Samuel also has experience working in the private sector focusing on environmental consulting and supporting large-scale energy project implementation. Samuel graduated from the University of Minnesota - Duluth, receiving a B.S. in Biology and minor in GIS.

Organization: Region Nine Development Commission

Organization Description:

The Region Nine Development Commission (RNDC) serves nine counties across South Central Minnesota, supporting economic and community development. As a regional planning organization, RNDC provides technical assistance, funding support, and strategic planning for rural local governments, businesses, and nonprofits. Our work spans areas such as economic resilience, clean energy, transportation, food rescue and workforce development. RNDC plays a key role in fostering regional collaboration by connecting communities with local partners as well as state, federal, and philanthropic resources to promote sustainable growth. With more than 50 years of regional experience, RNDC works alongside counties and communities to build local capacity. This long-standing connection throughout the region enables RNDC to authentically engage with our communities. With a focus on equity and sustainability, RNDC helps municipalities navigate complex challenges, from housing to climate adaptation. Its programs encourage local leadership, workforce training, and business support to strengthen the region's economic foundation. Through partnerships with higher education institutions, industry, and government agencies, RNDC advances initiatives that improve quality of life while driving long-term growth and vitality.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Energy and Environment Planner		Manage project deliverables, engage community partners, provide grant writing support, and guide rural implementation			28%	1.2		\$160,000
Environment and Sustainability Planner		Engage community partners, provide grant writing support, and guide rural implementation			28%	1.2		\$160,000
Finance Director		Manage grant finances			28%	0.09		\$15,000
Communications Manager		Provide outreach and engagement support			28%	0.15		\$20,000
Community Planner		Engage community partners, provide grant writing support, and guide rural implementation			28%	0.9		\$84,500
							Sub Total	\$439,500
Contracts and Services								
TBD	Service Contract	Technical consultants to support additional analysis of energy and environmental resilience issues impacting communities beyond internal staff capacity				0.6		\$30,000
TBD	Service Contract	GIS Mapping to be provided by a competitively selected contractor				0.6		\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$45,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Community meeting and engagement supplies	Funding for materials to implement active engagement with community members. These could be poster boards for tracking ideas, educational materials, and displays developed by staff.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000

Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Reimbursed at Federal Rate	To connect with communities and stakeholders during the planning process and to develop projects.					\$4,000
							Sub Total	\$4,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Printing educational and outreach materials	To educate community partners on our project offerings and educate community members on the need for and success of projects implemented as part of this project.					\$1,500
							Sub Total	\$1,500
Other Expenses								
		Room Rental	Rental of meeting spaces and convening spaces for events.					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$5,000
							Grand Total	\$500,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
---------------	---------------------	-------------	--

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Tax Levy and Philanthropic Funding	Cover the indirect costs of staff time for the project	Secured	\$90,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$90,000
			Funds Total	\$90,000

Total Project Cost: \$590,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [9e792fd7-dc3.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Map of Region Nine Development Commission's nine counties; including major roads, waterways, cities and populations....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
2024 RNDC Annual Financial Audit Report	d1a82891-bd0.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Region Nine Board Resolution	3da4cddc-cf6.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letters of Support	5966f40f-d40.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:

Sabri Fair, Environment and Sustainability Planner | Region Nine Development Commission
Lisa Callahan, Consultant | Region Nine Development Commission

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