



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-164

Proposal Title: Elevating Teachers as Local Water Leaders Through Education

Project Manager Information

Name: Seth Thompson

Organization: Freshwater Society

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: In partnership with local government units, we will implement a teacher leadership development program that equips teachers with requisite knowledge, resources, and skills to lead community action for water health.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$350,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding Category: Water (B)

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?

Region(s): Metro

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.

Water is a central part of the Minnesotan identity. Yet while we value water, Minnesotans face challenges in protecting and preserving our water. Compounding these threats is the fact that many Minnesotans have become disconnected from water systems in their community. It is vital to cultivate community leaders that understand how water flows around us, our impact on water, and what we must do to protect it. Ensuring access to clean water for all Minnesotans in the future requires powerful collective action, from individual residents to large government agencies. Teachers are powerful community leaders, with the ability to translate impact exponentially through the education and experiences they provide to their students. This work aims to build a network of local government unit partners within the Twin Cities to create leadership training for teachers that supports their development and educators and empowers them to lead meaning community action to support clean water. Building on over a decade of success in training local water champions through the Minnesota Water Stewards program, this new teacher pathway will not only empower teachers, but also create a ripple effect of leadership through the next generation of local water leaders.

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.

This work will provide learning opportunities and technical assistance for Minnesota teachers and youth through a series of professional development workshops and supported classroom action step projects. Over the course of three years, we proposal to work with 50 teachers in the Twin Cities, resulting in clean water action projects for more than 1,500 urban youth. Recruited teacher participants will participate in a water-themed professional learning community that supports knowledge building in fundamental water sciences, locally relevant water policy and governance, and effective water action. To compliment the PLC, teachers will participate in a summer workshop series to develop new skills that support clean water action that aligns to the water management plans of their local government units. Finally, teachers will develop a clean water action project that engages their students in a project-based learning experiences that directly contributes to one of the clean water goals of the relevant local government unit.

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?

This project will protect Minnesota's water by providing support to local leaders implementing clean water action projects. These projects will align to the relevant water management plans of their local government unit resulting in tangible benefits for water such as reduced nutrient loading, decreased plastic pollution, implementation of water best management practices, and reduction of water consumption. By working with teachers and students, this project will not only have immediate measurable impacts on water, but also create a strong positive water ethic in the next generation of water leaders, ensuring positive impacts for decades to come.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Creating a water-themed teacher professional learning community

Activity Budget: \$100,000

Activity Description:

This professional learning community (PLC) model engages cohorts of 25 educators in a structured, collaborative learning experience designed to deepen knowledge and build confidence around water education and civic engagement. The PLC blends asynchronous and synchronous learning to create flexibility while fostering meaningful peer connection. Participants begin with guided online modules that introduce foundational concepts related to water systems, hydrology, and watershed science. These modules are paired with curated readings, short expert videos, and applied classroom resources.

Discussion boards provide space for reflection, shared problem-solving, and exchange of local context, allowing teachers to connect water foundations to their own communities and student populations. As the cohort progresses, content expands to explore water policy, governance structures, and equity considerations, helping educators understand how decisions about water are made and who is most impacted.

Three live synchronous online sessions anchor the experience, creating opportunities for dialogue with content experts, peer collaboration, and action planning. The final phase focuses on public action for water, equipping teachers with tools to support student-led inquiry, community engagement, and civic participation. Together, this approach cultivates both subject-matter expertise and a supportive professional network committed to advancing water literacy and community-informed action.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Recruit first teacher cohort of 25 teachers	December 31, 2027
Complete first round of PLC programming for teachers	May 31, 2028
Recruit second cohort of 25 teachers	December 31, 2028
Complete second round of PLC programming	May 31, 2029

Activity 2: Developing teacher's clean water action skills through summer training workshops

Activity Budget: \$200,000

Activity Description:

We will develop and deliver three skill-building workshops designed to equip teachers with practical knowledge and classroom-ready tools to address pressing water challenges. Each workshop combines applied science content and hands-on strategies that educators can translate directly into student learning and clean water action projects.

The first workshop focuses on supporting water quality, with particular attention to nutrient reduction and chloride management best practices. Teachers will explore sources and impacts of nutrient pollution and road salt, learn about prevention and mitigation strategies, and practice integrating data collection and stewardship activities into their curriculum. The second workshop centers on drinking water protection with an emphasis on groundwater sources. Participants will build understanding of groundwater systems, source water protection, contamination risks, and public health considerations. The session will highlight how local decisions, infrastructure, and land use influence drinking water safety. The third workshop addresses water conservation strategies that can be implemented at home and school. Educators will examine water use patterns, climate variability impacts, and conservation practices, while developing

student-centered projects that promote responsible water use. Each workshop will be offered twice over the life of the project, with teacher feedback integrated to refine the workshops for the second offering.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Complete first clean water workshop series	August 31, 2028
Complete second clean water workshop series	August 31, 2029

Activity 3: Translating training into clean water impacts through support action step projects with students

Activity Budget: \$50,000

Activity Description:

Teachers and project staff will co-develop student clean water action projects that align to the watershed management plans of our local government partners. These plans commonly prioritize reducing nutrient pollution, limiting chloride contamination, increasing infiltration, and engaging the public in stewardship. Projects will guide students through investigating a locally relevant water challenge, analyzing data, and implementing a solution that contributes to documented watershed goals.

One example project could focus on chloride reduction. Students would conduct a winter salt audit of school grounds and nearby sidewalks, measuring application rates and mapping high-use areas. Using best management practices, they would develop a salt reduction plan that includes proper calibration of spreaders, storage improvements, and educational signage promoting “less salt, same safety.” Students would then track salt use before and after implementation, estimating reductions in chloride loading to nearby storm drains. If a watershed plan includes measurable chloride reduction targets, student data can demonstrate contribution toward that goal. This project supports authentic civic engagement, provides quantifiable environmental benefits, and strengthens partnerships between schools and local watershed staff while advancing long-term clean water objectives.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Finalize action step designs for first cohort	September 30, 2028
Implement action step projects with first cohort	May 31, 2029
Finalize action steps projects with second teacher cohort	September 30, 2029
Implement action step projects with second cohort	May 31, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Abby Moore	Mississippi Watershed Management Organization	LGU Partner	No
Lindsay Schwantes	Capitol Region Watershed District	LGU Partner	No
Angie Hong	Washington Conservation District	LGU Partner	No
Joe Barten	Lower Mississippi River Watershed Management Organization	LGU Partner	No
Ben Kusch	TriDistrict CAPS Program	School Partner - Teacher Recruitment and Action Step Project Support	No
Amy Winter	South Saint Paul Public School	School Partner - Teacher Recruitment	No
Miles Lawson	Independent School District 197	School Partner - Teacher Recruitment	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.

Project findings, clean water action project data, and educational tools developed will be shared through public presentations and watershed partner briefings to ensure results inform local resource management. We will provide summary reports and data dashboards to watershed districts and municipal staff to support evidence-based decision-making. Curriculum materials and project templates will be published online for free public access, ensuring longevity and replication. All project materials will be hosted on the Freshwater website and be licensed under creative commons so they are free for others to use. Generally communication will include materials printed for community events, social media, and school showcases, with all communications acknowledging support from the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund in accordance with ENRTF guidelines.

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?

The teacher participants will serve as empowered leaders that translate their training into high impact activities throughout their community. In this manner, program impacts are distributed and implemented by the teachers and students through their action steps and sustained action to protect and preserve Minnesota's water. After this initial pilot effort, long-term funding to continue to support teacher programming would leverage the partnerships with local

government units to explore partnership income streams and secure additional investments from foundation and philanthropic partners.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Supporting Minnesota Teachers to Implement Culturally Sustaining Environmental Education	M.L. 2024, , Chp. 83, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05c	\$295,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Seth Thompson

Job Title: Programs Director

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

Seth K. Thompson is the Programs Director for Freshwater and brings over a decade of experience in implementing public engagement and outreach programs to the team. He previously ran the Public Engagement team in the College of Biological sciences where he oversaw the design and delivery of programming that served over 10,000 Minnesotans a year. He has extensive experience in grants management and program design, particularly related to work in public education and K-12 programming. He has extensive experience working with K-12 teachers, having provided professional development programming for over 75 teacher partners and maintains strong connections with K-12 teachers and administrators across the Twin Cities. At Freshwater, he provides programmatic support and leadership for the community engagement and education efforts, including the Minnesota Water Stewards program, Adopt-a-River program, and Water Workforce Pathways program.

Thompson also has an extensive scholarly record in the fields of aquatic ecology and STEM equity, with more than 15 peer-reviewed publications across the two spaces.

Organization: Freshwater Society

Organization Description:

Freshwater is a trusted science and education organization based in Minnesota working for clean and reliable water in our region. Founded in 1968 by community members who decided to act when they discovered water quality issues on Lake Minnetonka, we became the first freshwater biology research lab in North America. Over the last fifty years, the organization has shifted from an emphasis on primary research to incorporate more education and policy advocacy. Ensuring access to clean water for all Minnesotans in the future requires powerful collective action, from individual residents to government agencies. Collective action and sound physical science continue to be at the heart of our work. Freshwater takes a comprehensive look at water and recognizes the need for multiple approaches to empower people to protect it. Freshwater understands that to truly reach people, we have to meet people where they are and listen to their needs, rather than impose our own. To that end, we believe strongly that people who will be impacted by a decision need to be involved in naming the problem being addressed, and in crafting the solution.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Seth Thompson		Project Lead - Administrative oversight of the project including milestone management and budget monitoring. Thompson will oversee the partnership development and participant recruitment efforts and provide technical assistance to teacher participants in their action step designs. Will also provide supervision and support of the project manager.			30%	0.3		\$45,000
Alex Van Loh		Provide day to day management of project tasks including managing teacher PLCs, developing skills workshops, and providing support for action step projects.			25%	0.6		\$60,000
Chyann Mosey		Mosey will contribute to development of and implementation of the skills workshops, PLC management, and provide technical support for the teachers clean water action projects.			25%	0.15		\$15,000
							Sub Total	\$120,000
Contracts and Services								
Jeffers Foundation	Service Contract	Jeffers will implement a water-themed workshop for teachers as part of their ongoing teacher workshop series.				0		\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Action step support - \$500 per teacher	Allow for clean water action steps					\$25,000
	Tools and Supplies	Skills workshop kits - \$400 per teacher	Support teacher skill development					\$20,000
	Tools and Supplies	Web plugins and learning management software	Teachers will participate in an online professional learning community that is facilitated through a learning management system. The learning management system enables					\$6,000

			assignment tracking, content hosting, online discussion boards, and certification of requirement completion. This will cover the annual fee for this software.					
							Sub Total	\$51,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Local Travel	to schools and workshops					\$10,000
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	3 local conferences per year average of \$1333 per conference	dissemination of project findings					\$12,000
							Sub Total	\$22,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	2 trips per year average 3k per trip	Present at national conferences	X				\$18,000
							Sub Total	\$18,000
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Production of printed materials necessary for report dissemination	This will cover the printing cost of dissemination materials such as project flyers, info sheets, and reports that can be distributed during the dissemination events as described in the work plan.					\$4,000

							Sub Total	\$4,000
Other Expenses								
		Teacher stipends - \$2500 per teacher for completion of all program aspects	Stipends unsure sustained participation and project completion. Teachers will receive \$250 for PLC participation, \$1,500 for summer workshop completion, and \$750 once they have completed their action steps project.	X				\$125,000
							Sub Total	\$125,000
							Grand Total	\$350,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Travel Outside Minnesota	Conference Registration Miles/Meals/Lodging	2 trips per year average 3k per trip	Will support project dissemination through presentation of project model at relevant national conferences.
Other Expenses		Teacher stipends - \$2500 per teacher for completion of all program aspects	Requiring teachers to go above and beyond typically PD and commit to specific action steps aligned to water management plans. Stipends will help ensure teachers complete their clean water action projects.

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
In-Kind	Unrecovered Indirect Costs	In-kind contribution of unrecovered indirect costs that are unallowable reimbursements per LCCMR guidance. We calculated in-kin contribution as 15% total modified direct costs	Pending	\$52,500
			Non State Sub Total	\$52,500
			Funds Total	\$52,500

Total Project Cost: \$402,500

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [e01874bd-be3.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Flyer describing program activities and outcomes...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Audited Statement	02c7d7ee-468.pdf
990	188c9b90-a68.pdf
Evidence of Good Standing	289fcb7f-00b.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Approval	908d6255-d67.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Washington Conservation District Support	3de8d8b5-567.pdf
Capital Region Support Letter	2c80434e-f06.pdf
MWMO Support Letter	6bec56ac-075.pdf
Lower Mississippi River	6aa631b9-d65.pdf
TriDistrict Letter	e2ca59cf-dcf.pdf
Jeffers Support Letter	e1646867-915.pdf
Open World Learning Support Letter	1671d66c-667.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:

None

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