



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-203

Proposal Title: Expanding Inclusive Access to Nature-Based Recreation Statewide

Project Manager Information

Name: Kyle Smith

Organization: U of MN - College of Biological Sciences

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This project investigates barriers limiting nature-based recreation participation among underrepresented groups, focusing on safety, belonging, cultural acceptance, and financial access, to inform more inclusive outreach and strengthen long-term conservation engagement.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$260,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)

Secondary Category: Education and Outdoor Recreation (C)

Project Location

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

Statewide

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

Statewide

When will the work impact occur?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

Describe the opportunity or problem your proposal seeks to address. Include any relevant background information.

Nature-based outdoor recreation is associated with substantial benefits for physical health, psychological well-being, and social connection. However, access to these benefits is not equitably distributed. Individuals with intersecting identities, including those who are gender-diverse, LGBT, living with disabilities, or economically disadvantaged, often encounter physical, social, and structural barriers that constrain participation in natural spaces. Concerns related to personal safety, belonging, cultural acceptance, and financial cost may further limit meaningful engagement.

Although agencies and nonprofit organizations have invested in outreach initiatives, much existing research informing these efforts has relied on readily accessible or already active participants. This approach limits understanding of how programs are experienced by historically underrepresented communities and obscures the institutional factors that may unintentionally exclude potential participants.

Public institutions have an obligation to design outdoor recreation and conservation programs that meet the needs of all constituents. Fulfilling this responsibility requires directly engaging communities whose perspectives have been underrepresented in past research and planning. By centering these voices, this project will generate actionable knowledge about barriers, preferences, and conditions that foster inclusion. Findings will inform more responsive outreach strategies and the development of equitable, community-centered recreation opportunities that strengthen public trust and support for long-term conservation efforts.

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 the first phase, qualitative data will be gathered through focus groups and collaborative design workshops. We will use a consensus-building technique to guide participants, specifically from LGBTQ+, gender-diverse, and BIPOC communities, to develop a nuanced understanding of the ways in which constituents connect with nature, feel belonging and acceptance, and are constrained from participating in nature-based activities. Additionally, participants will collaborate to co-develop the specific components of culturally relevant outdoor programs that could improve accessibility and relevancy. In doing so we will further identify salient factors that facilitate participation in nature-based activities.

The second phase will involve the administration of multi-modal social surveys to obtain generalizable data regarding attitudes, motivations, and experience preferences for future participation in nature-based activities. Participants will also be asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions that may provide further detail about individual experiences and perception. We will use a discrete-choice modeling technique to uncover the key factors and potential important tradeoffs that promote or thwart participation. In doing so, our research accounts for diverse perspectives to reveal patterns in behavior and inform policies or programs that enhance accessibility and engagement.

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?

The long-term goal of this project is to support the development of improved outreach and engagement strategies that address inequities in recreation access and foster sustained participation in nature-based activities among diverse communities. In doing so, the project aims to enhance the social and ecological benefits of outdoor recreation for all Minnesotans.

The overall objective of this application is to identify and better understand the barriers and facilitators shaping participation in wildlife-associated recreation across sexual orientation and gender. The proposed project will gather in-depth information from community members about their experiences, perceived barriers, and preferences for learning about, engaging

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Focus groups understand individual experiences, perceptions, and preferences for nature-based recreation

Activity Budget: \$115,000

Activity Description:

We will conduct up to 15 focus groups designed as participatory design workshops. We will form a formal advisory committee of constituents to ensure the process is a co-creation effort where community members serve as experts in developing new outreach practices and curriculum. To systematically identify the primary barriers to participation and the key factors that would increase interest in nature-based activities, we will employ the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) during focus groups. This method will facilitate the equitable contribution of ideas from participants and ensure that diverse perspectives are captured. Participants will individually generate ideas, engage in a moderated discussion to clarify and expand on these ideas, and then prioritize the most important factors through a ranking process.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design focus groups and elicit participants	October 31, 2027
Conduct focus groups	February 28, 2028
Conduct analysis, identify primary findings, and draft executive summary of findings	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Quantitative survey effort

Activity Budget: \$145,000

Activity Description:

We will collect data via an online survey using a multi-modal contact approach. We will target a total of 900 completed survey participants statewide. We will work in collaboration with nonprofit and other partners to help recruit participants for the study.

The quantitative survey will focus on understanding individual's previous interests and experiences with nature-based recreation, constraints and barriers that limit access or participation, and identifying components of nature-based activities or outreach programs that are most likely to facilitate future participation. To inform that discrete choice analysis, we will use results from focus groups to identify the salient factors that facilitate or thwart participation in nature-based recreation.

We will use the output of the survey to develop Inclusive Outdoor Outreach & Programming Toolkit to act as a guide for state and local natural resource agencies. It will include adaptable curriculum modules for nature-based events, standardized safety and welcoming protocols, and culturally resonant communication templates. We will also host outreach workshops with the study communities and natural resource and outdoor recreation agencies throughout Minnesota (e.g., Minnesota DNR, Minneapolis Parks & Recreation, University of Minnesota Extension) to present key findings, suggestions for implementation, and host a forum for dialogue about best practices.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design survey instrument	September 30, 2028
Implement survey data collection	December 31, 2028

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.

We will disseminate project results through multiple channels to ensure broad participation, awareness, and practical use. Community members, partner organizations, and participants will receive summaries of findings through a combination of workshops, webinars, and plain-language reports. We will ensure that collaborators can review and provide feedback on materials. We will also prepare recommendations, tools, and policy briefs that will be made available to local managers and organizations focused on nature-based recreation. Findings will also be shared with the public via reports, summaries, and presentations at community events. We will include a funding acknowledgement and the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund on all materials. Additionally, results will be published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at professional conferences, with all data and documentation maintained to ensure accessibility.

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 long-term goal of this project is to strengthen outreach and engagement strategies that address inequities in recreation access and foster sustained participation in nature-based activities among diverse communities. We aim to better understand the barriers and facilitators shaping wildlife-associated recreation across sexual orientation and gender by gathering in-depth perspectives on experiences, constraints, and preferences for engaging with nature. Findings will inform practical, evidence-based recommendations and materials to assist local, state, and nonprofit organizations in developing outreach efforts and programs that are inclusive, responsive, and equitable for diverse constituents across Minnesota.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Kyle Smith

Job Title: Research Scientist

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

Kyle Smith is a social scientist with a research focus in social and behavioral psychology. As part of their research, Kyle conducts interdisciplinary research that investigates how individual-level factors, institutions, and cultural contexts shape behavior and examines the underlying drivers that influence individual and social level outcomes. Kyle's work integrates insights from social psychology, political science, and ecology to conduct innovative research that help promote positive outcomes. Their work is informed by a One Health approach to understanding human, non-human, and environmental health. Their research applies both quantitative and qualitative tools in this research, including surveys, focus groups research, and policy analysis.

Kyle has successfully investigated a variety of topics related to outdoor recreation and human-nature interactions. These topics include understanding barriers to reactivation of lapsed deer hunters, constituents' preference for wildlife reintroduction projects, and factors that influence angler motivation, among others. They have published findings peer-reviewed journals, including *Environment and Behavior*, *Leisure Sciences*, and *Society & Natural Resources*.

Organization: U of MN - College of Biological Sciences

Organization Description:

The Department of Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior (EEB), University of Minnesota) is part of the College of Biological Sciences at the University of Minnesota and is one of the University's most highly ranked units. The department includes a multidisciplinary group of scholars that conduct research on a broad range of topics, ranging from ecosystem health to understanding disease spillover between humans and wildlife. Their research helps increase human understanding of biodiversity, its origins, and maintenance, leading to an improved understanding of ourselves and how we may live sustainably. In the process, EEB researchers make discoveries that reveal fundamental ecological, evolutionary, and behavioral processes at work in natural systems.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Research Scientist		Lead researcher for implementing and reporting interviews, focus groups, and surveys, and organizing and hosting outreach workshops			36.6%	2		\$219,000
							Sub Total	\$219,000
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	Sample of respondents in target communities (n = 6400)	The sample is necessary to contact respondents to participate in the survey. The supplies include the purchase of commercially available panels and samples of potential survey participants to ensure a representative sample of respondents for the study.					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	This will involve a total of 20 trips within the Twin Cities averaging 25 miles each and 5 trips outside the Twin Cities averaging 100 miles/trip.	Travel for focus groups across state of Minnesota					\$1,000

							Sub Total	\$1,000
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Survey materials	Used to contact survey participants					\$10,000
							Sub Total	\$10,000
Other Expenses								
		Mailing services	Mailout contact to recruit survey participants. Survey and mailing materials refers to printing of surveys, envelopes, and contact letters. Mailing services refers to charges for processing and mailing these materials. They are separate line item charges within the University system					\$10,000
		Honoraria for interviewees and focus group participants (100 @\$50)	Honoraria will be used to encourage and reimburse time for participation of focus group					\$5,000
		Honoraria for survey participants (~1000@\$5)	Honoraria will be used to encourage and reimburse time for participation in survey					\$5,000
							Sub Total	\$20,000
							Grand Total	\$260,000

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				
In-Kind	University of Minnesota	The waived overhead from University of Minnesota.	Potential	\$140,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$140,000
			Funds Total	\$140,000

Total Project Cost: \$400,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [bdf4a956-abe.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Image of queer people in outdoor activities, advertisement for LGBT outdoor program, and regional map of Minnesota...

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
UMN Approval Letter	26c3e5c8-ce1.pdf
Support Letter UMN-GSC	22d4aecf-a69.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 UMN Policy on travel 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:

University of Minnesota

Do you understand that a named service contract does not constitute a funder-designated subrecipient or approval of a sole-source contract? In other words, a service contract entity is only approved if it has been selected according to the contracting rules identified in state law and policy for organizations that receive ENRTF funds through direct appropriations, or in the DNR's reimbursement manual for non-state organizations. These rules may include competitive bidding and prevailing wage requirements

N/A