Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-273

Proposal Title: Equitable Access to Renewable Energy Through Community Solar

Project Manager Information

Name: Keiko Miller

Organization: Minneapolis Climate Action

Office Telephone: (612) 360-6900

Email: keiko@mplsclimate.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This project enrolls 150–200 primarily income-eligible Metro households in 1 MW of community solar, advancing equitable renewable access while developing a replicable neighborhood-led clean energy ownership model and toolkit.

ENRTF Funds Requested: $295,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

LCCMR Funding Category: Small Projects (G)
    Secondary 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?
    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.

Minnesota's climate is changing, and increasingly frequent extreme weather events are placing growing stress on the state's natural resources, infrastructure, and communities. Many Minneapolis households, particularly those with low and moderate incomes, face disproportionately high energy burdens and limited access to renewable energy options that provide reliable savings and strong consumer protections.

Minnesota's Low- and Moderate-Income Accessible Community Solar Garden program creates a clear pathway for income-eligible households to participate in community solar with guaranteed savings, with provisions that subscription costs do not exceed 90 percent of the bill credit. However, on-the-ground barriers limit participation. Residents would benefit from trusted, neighborhood-based assistance to understand community solar and navigate enrollment, income verification, and contract terms. Neighborhood organizations are well positioned to provide this support, but often lack ready-to-use, compliant tools and scalable models. MCA would provide that much-needed expertise and partnership.

This small project increases Minnesota's climate resilience by reducing greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate impacts on air, water, and land, while also improving community resilience. Neighborhood-based enrollment support will result in household energy burden reduction through guaranteed community solar savings for LMI community members. Strengthening neighborhood organizations as trusted messengers builds durable local capacity to implement climate solutions.

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.

Minneapolis Climate Action will implement a neighborhood-led "enroll + replicate" pilot designed to measurably increase Minnesota's climate resilience while building durable local capacity.

1.) Enroll 150–200 households in community solar subscriptions totaling at least 1 MW, prioritizing income-eligible households (target ≥80% income eligible). Enrollment will follow all state consumer protections and income-verification pathways, documenting verified participation and guaranteed savings. This project increases Minnesota's climate resilience by reducing greenhouse gas emissions that drive climate impacts on air, water, and land. Neighborhood-based enrollment support improves community resilience by reducing household energy burden through guaranteed community solar savings.

2.) Develop an ownership readiness package for neighborhood organizations, including governance roles, financing pathways, risk and decision frameworks, and compliance checklists. Strengthening neighborhood organizations as trusted messengers builds durable local capacity to implement climate solutions and respond to climate stressors using non-ENRTF capital.

3.) Produce a public replication toolkit and evaluation to enable nonprofits and political subdivisions statewide to adapt and scale the model efficiently.

ENRTF funds will support eligible expenses only (direct staff time, evaluation, translation/design services, and limited educational materials) and will not be used for loans, grants, subsidies, or other prohibited costs.

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?

1.) Secure ≥1 MW of community solar subscriptions for 150–200 households (≥80% income eligible), reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing renewable electricity use—strengthening Minnesota's climate resilience and protecting air, water, and land.

2.) Deliver guaranteed bill savings (subscription costs ≤90% of bill credit), reducing household energy burden and improving community resilience to climate-related stressors.

3.) Host 30 neighborhood-based enrollment events and distribute multilingual materials to increase access, consumer protection awareness, and verified enrollment.

4.) Publish and disseminate an ownership readiness and replication toolkit statewide, building durable local capacity to implement climate solutions.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Neighborhood Solar Resilience Coalition + Ownership Readiness Package

Activity Budget: $105,000

Activity Description:
Convene a neighborhood working group to create an implementation-ready co-ownership “readiness package” that neighborhood organizations can use to pursue local co-ownership using non-ENRTF capital. Work includes: partner MOUs/roles; governance and decision-making structure; compliance and consumer-protection checklist; financing pathway options; and a documented plan for how neighborhood organizations support equitable enrollment and long-term community benefits.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Convene working group, execute MOUs (6+ neighborhood organizations); finalize neighborhood engagement plan and enrollment workflow	December 31, 2027
Complete and publish “Neighborhood Co-Ownership Readiness Package” (governance + financing pathways + compliance checklist + partner roles)	June 30, 2028

Activity 2: Equitable Enrollment + Community Education (Energy + Resilience)

Activity Budget: $140,000

Activity Description:
Deliver neighborhood-led community solar education and enrollment assistance to ensure equitable access to renewable energy and guaranteed savings. Enrollment support includes: one-on-one application assistance; clear education on subscriber rights and contract terms; support for income eligibility documentation; and referrals to existing energy efficiency programs (no ENRTF-funded rebates). Enrollment will prioritize historically overburdened neighborhoods and income-eligible households.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Deliver 12+ community education/enrollment events; enroll at least 75 households (target ≥80% income-eligible)	June 30, 2028
Deliver 30 total community education/enrollment events; enroll 150–200 total households	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Evaluation + Public Replication Toolkit

Activity Budget: $50,000

Activity Description:
Evaluate environmental and resilience outcomes and create a public replication toolkit to enable adoption statewide. Evaluation will report: verified enrollment counts; subscriber mix (aggregated); documented savings consistent with program requirements; estimated environmental benefits using subscription production/credit data; lessons learned and recommended policy/practice improvements. Dissemination includes at least two webinars and direct sharing with peer organizations.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Draft evaluation plan and reporting framework; publish draft “metrics + data” guide for partners.	December 31, 2027
Finalize evaluation plan and reporting framework; publish a brief “metrics + data” guide for partners.	June 30, 2028
Publish replication toolkit (templates, step-by-step guide, lessons learned) ,deliver 2 webinars/trainings; submit final report	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Minneapolis Neighborhood Organizations (TBD)	various 501c3 neighborhood organizations within Minneapolis	Partner with MCA in outreach, engagement, and education of community members around community solar; Provide organizational resources for equity stake in co-ownership coalition	No
Robert Cooper	City of Minneapolis, NRP and Community Participation Manager	Advise and coordinate with Minneapolis community organizations; Advise and coordinate availability of and appropriate use of funding sources supporting broader project development (beyond the scope of ENTRF funds)	No
Mmakgantsi Mafojane	Peoples Solar Energy Fund	Provide technical assistance in community solar project development, as well as connections to potential addtional funding/financing sources for project development activities beyond the scope of ENRTF funding	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.
MCA will work with nonprofits and political subdivisions to distribute the public replication toolkit and evaluation to other Minnesota communities. MCA will work with cross-cutting convening organizations to be a featured case-study, highlighted success story, and/or speaker at events, conferences, etc... to highlight the results, successes, and lessons learned.

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 relationships and collaboration between MCA and co-owning neighborhood organizations will continue for education, outreach, and engagement to communities. Ongoing management and administration of subscribers will be provided by MCA, supported through a portion of pay-as-you-go subscription fees paid by subscribers. MCA Community Solar program costs beyond subscriber administration, including ongoing subscriber engagement and education, will be supported by additional external funding sources. A portion of subscription fees are also set-aside for operation and maintenance costs to ensure efficient production of renewable energy and benefits to subscribers.

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Keiko Miller

Job Title: Community Solar Program Director

Provide description of the project manager's qualifications to manage the proposed project.
Keiko Miller is highly qualified to manage the proposed project and grant award, bringing extensive experience in program development, project management, and stakeholder engagement within the renewable energy sector. As Director of the Community Solar Program at Minneapolis Climate Action, she oversees all aspects of community solar initiatives, including financial modeling, compliance, utility coordination, and community engagement. Her expertise in developing and managing renewable energy projects ensures the effective execution of complex, multi-faceted

programs.

With a Master of Public Policy in Environmental Policy and extensive leadership experience, Keiko has successfully led strategic initiatives in nonprofit, public, and private sectors. Her previous role as Associate Director of Program Strategy and Development at another local renewable energy focused non-profit organization involved leading operational priorities, funding strategies, and public-private partnerships in workforce development and renewable energy —critical skills for managing large-scale grants.

Keiko's background in consulting further solidifies her ability to oversee financial management, stakeholder collaboration, and regulatory compliance. She has advised organizations on sustainability practices, strategic planning, and public policy, demonstrating a strong ability to translate vision into action. Additionally, her experience as a Senior Consultant at a local strategic consulting firm involved managing budgets, workplans, and strategic execution for diverse clients, from Fortune 100 corporations to nonprofits.

Keiko's deep commitment to community engagement is evident through her leadership roles, including serving as chair and vice-chair on boards of directors for multiple non-profit organizations, where she provided oversight and management of multi-faceted budgets and community projects.

Her proven ability to secure funding, manage large-scale initiatives, and foster collaboration across sectors makes her exceptionally qualified to lead the successful implementation of this proposal.

Organization: Minneapolis Climate Action

Organization Description:
Minneapolis Climate Action (MCA) is a 501(c) non-profit and Justice 40 Accelerator participant dedicated to advancing equitable opportunities and building resilient communities through climate solutions. Our mission is to foster inclusive collaboration, empower underserved populations, and drive sustainable innovation. We achieve this by providing access to resources, knowledge, and technologies for all communities, particularly those disproportionately affected by climate change, through action, outreach, education, advocacy, and strategic partnerships.

Since 2007, MCA has worked with neighborhoods to provide civic engagement and advocacy around climate solutions and renewable energy. In 2021, MCA partnered with Renewable Energy Partners (REP), a minority-owned solar development firm in Minneapolis, to develop its first community solar gardens. Building on this success, MCA partners again with REP to manage the Regional Apprenticeship Training Center (RATC) facility located in North Minneapolis. RATC serves as a vital hub for comprehensive skills training and job placement in the clean energy and climate economy, fostering local workforce development and contributing to a just transition. In 2023, MCA partnered with with the City of Minneapolis' Health Department on impactful community engagement work focused on resiliency, resiliency hubs, and emergency preparedness.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineli gible	% Bene fits	# FTE	Class ified Staff?	$ Amount
Personnel								
Community Solar Program Coordinator		direct enrollment + partner coordination			15%	1		$90,000
Community Solar Engagement Specialist		neighborhood outreach + enrollment support			15%	1		$70,000
Community Solar Program Lead		project management, compliance, reporting			15%	0.4		$40,000
Data/Reporting Support		aggregation, metrics tracking, progress report support			15%	0.05		$7,000
							Sub Total	**$207,000**
Contracts and Services								
Independent evaluation + toolkit development support	Service Contract	Development of publicly-facing toolkit of resources and templates, for project replicability. Independent project evaluation. All activities will abide by funding restrictions. No generally ineligible expenses will be part of the service contract.				-		$55,000
Translation/interpretation + accessible design	Service Contract	multi-language materials & events support				-		$23,000
							Sub Total	**$78,000**
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	**-**
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	**-**
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	**-**
Travel In Minnesota								

	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	mileage support employees only to 30 enrollment events	Staff mileage/local travel for neighborhood meetings and enrollment events					$5,000
							Sub Total	**$5,000**
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	**-**
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	Educational fact sheets (2000)	Education and outreach to community members					$3,000
	Printing	Enrollment documents (250)	Official disclosures, agreements, etc... required for subscriber enrollment					$1,000
	Printing	Limited multi-lingual fact sheets. (200)	Consumer Education					$500
	Printing	Limited printing of replication toolkit and resources (20)	Project Reproducibility					$500
							Sub Total	**$5,000**
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	**-**
							Grand Total	**$295,000**

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	TBD	Financing and funding for development of Community Solar Garden development. ENTRF funds will be used ONLY for staffing and support costs to ensure equitable access to renewable energy made possible by non-ENRTF funded community solar garden..	Potential	$1,000,000
			Non State Sub Total	**$1,000,000**
			Funds Total	**$1,000,000**

Total Project Cost: $1,295,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: d07ad432-53c.pdf

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Illustration of project benefits, including 150+ households served, 1MW solar capacity, 900 tons CO2 avoided, $10K savings per household ; And program components including neighborhood outreach, community solar subscription, bill savings, climate impacts...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
MCA Certificate of Good Standing	55039909-ce7.pdf
MCA 990	e83b7179-208.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
MCA Board Resolution LCCMR 2027	b58bd279-3b1.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Ltr of Support: MN Dpt of Commerce Dep Commission Wyckoff	a03f3084-291.pdf
Ltr of Support: Audubon Neighborhood Association	37847a58-3bc.pdf
Ltr of Support: Mpls Council Member Palmisano	f0f1c042-603.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?

Yes

Do you understand and acknowledge IP and revenue-return and sharing requirements in 116P.10?

Yes

Do you wish to request reinvestment of any revenues into your project instead of returning revenue to the ENRTF? If so, describe here (1) the source and estimated amounts of any revenue and (2) how you propose to use those revenues:

Yes, The broader community solar project of which this proposal for ENRTF-supported activities are but a part, will generate revenue through ongoing subscription fees paid by community solar subscribers. This revenue will be applied to debt service first and any additional net revenue distributed amongst community organizations that comprise the co-ownership collaborative. ENRTF funds will not be used for loans, grants, subsidies, rebates, or equity buy-downs; and no paid advertising/marketing will be charged to ENRTF. ENRTF funds will not be used for any construction of building infrastructure related expenses.

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:

Akisha Everett, MCA Executive Director; Jeff Stites, MCA Board Chair

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