



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-562

Proposal Title: 10,000 Birdwatchers Project

Project Manager Information

Name: Phil Schwarz

Organization: Elpis Enterprises

Office Telephone: (651) 644-5080

Email: phil@elpisenterprises.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: The 10,000 Birdwatchers Project is a tuition-free workshop for 3rd grade and up, teaching bird identification, food chain connections, and how to create healthier backyard habitats for birds.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$243,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

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?

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

Narrative

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

Surveys of 550 fourth-grade students, primarily from inner-city school districts, found that 70% do not currently watch birds with their families and 53% cannot identify five common bird species. The 10,000 Birdwatchers Project aims to change that narrative by introducing youth to bird identification, bird habitats, and the role birds play in local food chains.

Elpis Enterprises has established partnerships with Minneapolis Public Schools, Saint Paul Public Schools, and other public and charter schools across the seven-county metro area. From 2022–2025, we successfully served 10,000 youth through smaller donations and private sponsors. To restore the program to that scale, we are seeking LCCMR support to fund staff delivering the workshops and the materials required.

The project prioritizes increasing birdwatching participation among BIPOC youth and ensures that students from low-income, inner-city schools can participate tuition-free. It will also divert more than 5,000 pieces of discarded cedar fencing from landfills by repurposing the wood into bird feeder kits. Additionally, the program supports workforce development for homeless and at-risk youth interns interested in careers in education and childcare.

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 solution is to partner primarily with school districts across the seven-county metro to provide this program to 10,000 participants at no cost. From November 2022 through December 2025, we hosted 131 collaborative Birdwatchers Project events that served more than 10,000 youth across the Twin Cities. Through this work, we learned that delivering ten months of impactful school-day programming requires a full-time program manager. This role is essential for coordinating with schools, building partnerships, marketing the program, delivering bird education lessons, and organizing volunteers to support the hands-on workshop components.

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?

- Outcome 1: education of how birds support our food chains.
- Outcome 2: education of how to identify the birds.
- Outcome 3: education of how we can create better bird habitats.
- Outcome 4: education of how to recycle to keep 5,000 pieces of discarded lumber out of landfills.
- Outcome 5: education of how to construct a bird feeder.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Program Marketing, Planning, and Workshop Coordination

Activity Budget: \$106,238

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to plan, promote, and coordinate Birdwatchers Project workshops with schools across the seven-county Twin Cities metro. Tasks include marketing the program, communicating with schools through email, phone, Zoom, and community tabling events, and maintaining a calendar of workshops. The program manager will work with teachers and administrators to set event dates and locations, confirm classroom participation, and coordinate program logistics.

Additional tasks include recruiting volunteers from police, fire, and sheriff departments, as well as state agencies, city agencies, school staff, and parents to support workshop activities. Administrative coordination will ensure each workshop has the necessary materials, volunteers, and scheduling support.

Expected outputs include the scheduling and coordination of 20–40 workshops during the 2027–2028 school year. These workshops will deliver bird identification lessons and hands-on bird feeder building activities to participating classrooms. The impact will be increased environmental education opportunities and expanded access to birdwatching for youth in underserved communities. Outcomes will be evaluated through teacher feedback and participation tracking.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
2027-2028 school year marketing, strategizing, coordinating, communicating each school year and it's calendar of events.	June 30, 2028
2028-2029 school year marketing, strategizing, coordinating, communicating each school year and it's calendar of events.	June 30, 2029
2029-2030 school year marketing, strategizing, coordinating, communicating each school year and it's calendar of events.	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Event execution (up to 40 events possible each school year) education outcomes September 2027–June of 2028

Activity Budget: \$106,238

Activity Description:

The objective of this activity is to deliver hands-on birdwatching education and bird feeder building workshops to students across the seven-county Twin Cities metro. Elpis Enterprises will conduct approximately 20–40 workshops each school year, serving classrooms through structured bird identification lessons and habitat-building activities.

Each event will serve up to 100 students and follow a structured schedule. Staff will travel to the school and set up bird feeder materials and tools from approximately 7:30–9:00 a.m. The program begins with four 20-minute bird education lessons from 9:00–10:30 a.m., introducing students to bird identification, food chains, and backyard habitat creation. Students will then rotate through four hands-on bird feeder building sessions, each serving 20–30 students. Following the workshop rotations, staff will complete cleanup and travel back to Elpis.

Outputs include bird feeder kits built by students and environmental education lessons delivered. Outcomes will be evaluated through participation tracking and student pre- and post-program bird identification surveys

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
2027-2028 School Year Birdwatchers Workshop Execution	June 30, 2028
2028-2029 School Year Birdwatchers Workshop Execution	June 30, 2029
2029-2030 School Year Birdwatchers Workshop Execution	June 30, 2030

Activity 3: Bird Feeder Kit Production and Materials Preparation**Activity Budget:** \$30,524**Activity Description:**

The objective of this activity is to produce the materials needed for classroom birdwatching workshops. Elpis Enterprises staff and interns will manufacture bird feeder kits using reclaimed cedar fencing that would otherwise be discarded. Tasks include cutting and preparing wood components, fabricating and procuring iron rods, installing plexiglass viewing windows, and assembling and packaging seed materials for each kit.

Production will occur on an ongoing basis from July 2027 through June 2030 to ensure sufficient materials are available for scheduled workshops. Youth interns participating in Elpis Enterprises' workforce development program will assist with material preparation, gaining hands-on experience in woodworking, manufacturing, and project coordination.

Expected outputs include hundreds of bird feeder kits produced for participating classrooms and the diversion of thousands of pieces of cedar fencing from local landfills. These kits will be used during workshops to help students build bird feeders and create backyard bird habitats. The impact includes hands-on environmental learning opportunities for youth while supporting material reuse and workforce development. Production levels will be tracked to ensure sufficient materials are available for all scheduled workshops.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
2027-2028 School Year Production of 3,500 Bird Feeder Kits and Materials	June 30, 2028
2028-2029 School Year Production of 3,500 Bird Feeder Kits and Materials	June 30, 2029
2029-2030 School Year Production of 3,500 Bird Feeder Kits and Materials	June 30, 2030

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.

Elpis Enterprises will disseminate project results through direct engagement with schools, community partners, and public audiences across Minnesota. Program findings, including student learning outcomes and participation data, will be shared with Minneapolis Public Schools, Saint Paul Public Schools, and partner districts to support continued integration of environmental education into classrooms. Teachers will receive summary materials and curriculum tools to extend learning beyond the workshop.

We will present results through community events, tabling opportunities, and partner networks, ensuring awareness among organizations serving youth, particularly in underserved communities. Program impact and materials will also be shared through digital platforms, including Elpis Enterprises' website, email communications, and social media, to reach a broader public audience.

Physical products, including bird feeder kits and educational materials, will remain with participating classrooms to support ongoing birdwatching and habitat-building activities. Documentation of the program model will allow for replication by educators and partners.

These efforts aim to increase environmental stewardship, bird identification skills, and awareness of local ecosystems, encouraging long-term behavior change. All materials, communications, and outreach will include Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund acknowledgment language and branding 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?

This project builds on the momentum and trust Elpis Enterprises has developed with teachers and schools across the Twin Cities that have not previously had access to hands-on birdwatching education. Previously, 92% of teachers rated the 10,000 Birdwatchers Project as "awesome."

To measure impact, we will conduct pre- and post-program surveys asking students to identify five birds using multiple-choice images to gauge improvements in bird identification and knowledge.

If funded for three years, the program will serve 10,000 youth, reaching about 3,500 students annually. Following project completion, program delivery will be supported through private donations, foundation grants,

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Phil Schwarz

Job Title: Business Development Manager

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

The proposed initiative at Elpis Enterprises will be managed by Phil Schwarz, Business Development Manager, who brings extensive experience in workforce development, youth engagement, and social enterprise program management. In this role, Phil is responsible for coordinating program operations, developing partnerships, and ensuring that project

goals are achieved on time and within scope.

Phil has a strong background working with young people ages 16–24 who face barriers to employment, including housing instability, poverty, and limited access to career pathways. Through his leadership at Elpis Enterprises, he has helped develop and expand hands-on training programs in woodworking and screen printing that combine technical skill-building with workplace readiness. These programs emphasize punctuality, safety, communication, and accountability, skills essential for long-term employment success.

In addition to program development, Phil has significant experience managing multi-stakeholder collaborations with community organizations, schools, workforce agencies, and local businesses. His work includes coordinating training logistics, aligning programming with partner needs, and creating pathways for youth participants to access employment and career opportunities.

Phil also brings experience in project planning, procurement coordination, budgeting, and reporting. He regularly supports equipment sourcing, inventory planning, and vendor relationships that sustain Elpis Enterprises' social enterprises. His role includes tracking program outputs and outcomes, supporting grant-funded initiatives, and ensuring alignment with organizational goals.

A core strength Phil brings is the ability to integrate workforce training with mission-driven social impact. By combining practical job training with supportive mentorship, he ensures participants gain both technical and professional skills necessary for long-term success.

This combination of operational leadership, youth workforce expertise, and partnership development positions Phil Schwarz to effectively manage and deliver the proposed project while advancing Elpis Enterprises' mission.

Organization: Elpis Enterprises

Organization Description:

Elpis Enterprises is a Saint Paul–based nonprofit social enterprise that provides transitional employment and workforce development for young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability. Through hands-on job training in woodworking and screen printing, participants gain practical skills while earning income in a supportive, structured environment.

The organization emphasizes consistency, accountability, and clear communication, helping young people build the habits and confidence needed for long-term employment. Participants are involved in the full production process, from material sourcing and fabrication to customer service and order fulfillment, while receiving individualized support and coaching.

Elpis also partners with schools, community organizations, and local businesses to deliver educational workshops and create mission-driven products using reclaimed and sustainable materials. These partnerships extend the organization's impact beyond its shop and connect youth to broader community networks and opportunities.

By combining social services with real-world work experience, Elpis Enterprises creates pathways to stability, skill development, and long-term career growth for youth who have faced systemic barriers to employment.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Business Development Manager		Grant Manager			9%	0.15		\$12,524
Woodworking Coordinator		Fabrication and Procurement			9%	0.3		\$18,000
Project Manager		Coordinator			9%	3		\$196,110
							Sub Total	\$226,634
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	3D Nails	Building materials for birdfeeders: x180 boxes of nails @ \$4 per box					\$720
	Tools and Supplies	Plexi Glass	Windows for birdfeeders: x10,000 @ \$.50 per pair					\$5,000
	Tools and Supplies	Iron Rods	Hanging rods/hooks: x30 bundles @ \$28 per bundle					\$840
	Tools and Supplies	Birdseed	Starter seed for feeder kits: x105 bags @ \$27 per bag					\$2,835
	Equipment	8 oz Hammers	Supplemental hammers for workshops: x140 @ \$5 each					\$700
							Sub Total	\$10,095
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								

							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	60 miles per week	Travel to/from schools and materials pickup					\$6,271
							Sub Total	\$6,271
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$243,000

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				
In-Kind	Department of Employment and Economic Development	Internship wages for fabrication of materials and workshop support.	Potential	\$257,400
			State Sub Total	\$257,400
Non-State				
In-Kind	Volunteer hours from schools	3000 volunteer hours provided by schools @ \$30 an hour	Potential	\$90,000
In-Kind	Materials	Donated lumber of 15,000 boards,	Potential	\$60,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$150,000
			Funds Total	\$407,400

Total Project Cost: \$650,400

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [42eda12e-b50.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

10,000 Birdwatchers Project

Tuition-Free Environmental Education Program

-What Students Learn

-Hands-On Learning

-Who We Serve

-Program Impact

-Our Mission...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
Elpis Enterprises 990	501a7912-ade.pdf
Elpis Enterprises 2024 Audit with Governance Letter	2f8b3de7-e4e.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Elpis Board Letter	7fa54674-950.pdf
Elpis Board Resolution	3773d3f3-66c.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Media Kit To 10,000 Birdwatchers Project 2022-2025	dfa07a89-772.docx

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:

Paul Ramsour, Executive Director

Karl Erickson, Project Manager

Phil Schwarz, Business Development Manager

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