



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-615

Proposal Title: Building Implementation Capacity for Natural Systems, Hennepin County

Project Manager Information

Name: Kristine Maurer

Organization: Hennepin County

Office Telephone: (612) 235-1251

Email: Kristine.Maurer@hennepin.us

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Hennepin County will develop customized resources and intelligent tools that build local capacity to prioritize projects, find partnerships, and communicate natural systems strategies to smoothly transition from planning to implementation.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$976,000

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): 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.

Natural systems, which include our land, air, water, wildlife and their connections to society, are essential to community vitality. In the past 25 years, Hennepin County has lost 12,360 acres of open space to development. The Metropolitan Council estimates an additional 14,000 acres of county land will be developed by 2040.

2028 comprehensive planning requirements, which set land use, transportation, housing, and natural systems policies for decades, present a critical opportunity for local governments to protect and preserve remaining open space within the county. Through engagement with over 100 practitioners representing 50 local governments and nonprofits, the Natural Resources Partner Coalition has learned of common challenges that need to be addressed to effectively plan and implement our shared natural systems goals:

- Organizations, especially those facing the most development pressure, do not have the staff capacity and resources to protect and preserve our natural systems,
- Practitioners find it difficult to communicate the co-benefits of natural systems strategies to elected officials and the public,
- Organizations have difficulty writing and administering competitive grant applications to implement projects and need assistance finding partners,
- The impacts of restoration and enhancement projects are difficult to monitor and report on.

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.

We seek funding to build the momentum of the Hennepin Natural Resources Partner Coalition, which was supported through the LCCMR 2025 small projects funding. Our solution is to develop tools, resources, technologies, and opportunities for local organizations to collaborate. We will:

- Foster efficiencies with intelligent tools to match partners based on geospatial data, organizational characteristics, and institutional goals.
- Create a publicly available funding database, powered by AI, to illuminate less well-known funding sources and leverage private dollars for public benefit.
- Develop tools to prioritize projects, identify suitable natural systems strategies, and communicate co-benefits to elected officials and the public.
- Empower partners with resources to implement and manage projects, track outcomes, and engage the public.
- Provide direct technical assistance and consulting capacity where it is needed most to drive positive natural systems outcomes.

Our approach will help communities integrate natural systems in comprehensive planning processes, build efficiency through collaboration, and address gaps in our region's capacity to move from planning to action. This phase of work has been informed by extensive engagement with coalition partners and calibrated to meet the needs of all organizations, regardless of size or expertise level.

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 builds local capacity in natural systems planning and implementation, increasing resilience to staff changes and fluctuations in funding. With access to user-friendly and accessible tools, organizations will be able to make decisions on projects that align with their comprehensive planning goals, are competitive to funders, and reflect the priorities of partners and the public. These outcomes will lead to proactive natural systems protection, particularly in

communities facing development pressure. We will help strengthen the region's ability to respond to complex challenges and improve access to clean water, healthy tree canopy, and diverse habitat.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Foster cross-partner efficiencies and leverage funding opportunities through intelligent tools that build partners capacity in meeting their natural systems goals

Activity Budget: \$263,750

Activity Description:

Our coalition has worked extensively to understand the key challenges faced by local governments. Organizations find it difficult to identify partners but view successful partnerships as critical for meeting their natural systems goals given limited staff capacity and resources. Our coalition has started to make these connections, but it takes extensive staff time and a deep awareness of internal goals, priorities, and assets to achieve this.

Leveraging our existing locally sourced interactive map, we will develop an AI-powered match-making application to identify partnership opportunities. The tool will visualize geospatial data, institutional goals, and natural systems protection opportunities to understand where decision-making momentum and implementation is aligned.

We will also develop a funding database, updated and maintained by AI. The database and match-making app will integrate to create a ranked list of collaboration opportunities tied to suitable funding sources. It will also include a calendar output with upcoming grant deadlines. This will help drive competitive proposals to popular state funding and shine a light on lesser-known sources, like private foundations. The funding database will be publicly available on our website. These tools will create efficiency through partnerships, reduce the burden on tax dollars, and leverage private dollars for public benefit.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Design application to match partners using geospatial data and characteristics (ex: goals) identified by organizations	October 31, 2027
Test match-making application and seek feedback on where decision-making and implementation align with application outputs	February 28, 2028
Develop funding database that is updated and maintained with AI and solicit feedback from partners	June 30, 2028
Launch the match-making application to coalition members, with documentation and feedback forms for improvement.	July 31, 2028
Launch the funding database on our publicly available website, with documentation and feedback forms.	October 31, 2028

Activity 2: Build intelligent tools to help enhance efficiency and prioritize projects

Activity Budget: \$444,750

Activity Description:

We will build and test AI powered tools to help partners plan and prioritize projects, make data-informed decisions, and reduce staff time spent on tedious tasks like data entry. The tools in this activity are developed from extensive conversations with practitioners representing many local organizations. They are intentionally designed to address emerging needs of coalition partners and other interested parties. The tools include:

- Expanding our AI-driven GIS quality assurance and control (QA/QC) tool that evaluates partner datasets for smooth data integration across the partnership to include stormwater datasets and sub-watershed plans. These datasets are currently fragmented across watersheds and cities in the region, which hinders collaboration across organizations and makes for an incomplete picture of stormwater in the region.

- Integrating AI-support into habitat management templates that are flexible to a wide variety of natural systems and desired future conditions. The AI component reduces staff time spent on repetitive tasks like writing up standard practices and calculating cost estimates, freeing up capacity to implement more projects.
- Testing a nature-based climate solutions calculator that accurately accounts for land-based greenhouse gas emissions and sequestration and evaluates conservation projects against one another to inform decisions and investments.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Solicit feedback from partners on nature-based climate solutions calculator	December 31, 2027
Integrate AI support into habitat management plan templates and solicit feedback from coalition partners	October 31, 2028
Collect stormwater data from partners and develop countywide data layer using established QA/QC methods	April 30, 2029
Launch AI-supported habitat management plan tools to publicly accessible website	May 31, 2029
Release stormwater data layer to coalition via interactive map	March 31, 2030

Activity 3: Build tools that support our partners in communicating with stakeholders and transitioning from planning to implementation

Activity Budget: \$267,500

Activity Description:

With limited natural systems funding available, our partners face time and resource constraints when implementing projects. While there is often consensus for broad goals to protect, enhance, and preserve natural systems, it can be difficult for practitioners to secure support for specific projects and innovative policies. We will develop tools and provide financial support that equip practitioners with what they need to make the case for their ideas and achieve the goals of their organization, including:

- Direct financial support to local governments to hire consultants. The consultants will provide implementation capacity to the smallest and least resourced organizations who have little to no full-time natural systems staff.
- Biological monitoring guides that help partners build public support through hands-on engagement and track project impacts.
- Factsheets and webinars to help practitioners communicate with elected officials on the economic benefits of natural systems policies and their alignment with city planning obligations and financial goals.
- Model ordinance language that aligns planning and natural systems goals, including ordinances on open space and tree preservation.
- Continued development of the coalition’s network through facilitated engagement. This will also identify new ideas for tools and resources that reflect the on-the-ground needs of practitioners.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Build engagement plan for countywide events, regular email communication, and coalition member meetings	September 30, 2027
Design equitable process and policy for providing consultant support to organizations in Hennepin County	November 30, 2027
Launch consultant program for organizations with limited capacity to improve natural systems planning and implementation	May 31, 2028
Complete model ordinance factsheets on topics like open space and tree preservation	May 31, 2028
Draft biomonitoring tools to track impact of restoration and enhancement in meeting project goals	December 31, 2028

Develop a long-term source of funding for coalition and seek feedback from partners	October 31, 2029
Create additional planning and policy tools derived from engagement with practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders	May 31, 2030

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Jami Markle	Three Rivers Park District	Visioning, planning, oversight, and engagement	No
Karen Galles	Hennepin County	Visioning, planning, oversight, and engagement	No
Kelly Grissman	Three Rivers Park District	Visioning, planning, and feedback	No
Bryan Runck	University of Minnesota	Planning, oversight, technology execution management, and engagement	Yes
Audrey Robeson	Hennepin County	Planning, oversight, engagement and facilitation, technology execution management, contracting, and other project management	Yes
Research Assistant 1	University of Minnesota	Technology execution management and engagement	Yes
Research Assistant 2	University of Minnesota	Technology execution management and engagement	Yes
Mike Greco	University of Minnesota	Oversight, project management, tool development, planning expertise, and engagement facilitation	Yes
Research Assistant 3	University of Minnesota	Tool development and engagement facilitation	Yes
Research Assistant 4	University of Minnesota	Tool development and engagement facilitation	Yes

Dissemination

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

As noted in Activity 3, dissemination is a core goal of the project. We will build on existing engagement efforts to support partners' communication with elected officials and the public. We will continue to grow the coalition, which is currently free to organizations working in Hennepin County, and engage all interested parties, whether they are members or not. Due to the cost of every query, AI-powered tools will only be available to coalition members, but outputs can be made available to the public. All other tools developed with this grant funding will be publicly available on our website. All materials will include the ENTRF logo, and attribution language will be featured on our website. To ensure the longevity of this effort, we will make regular updates to the tools and resources, organize and maintain the website, and dedicate staff to assisting local stakeholders with integrating tools into their ongoing work.

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?

Prior to this LCCMR request, we have committed over \$200,000 to support coalition development. The funding from LCCMR will support deeper engagement with local and regional governments, researchers, nonprofits, and private businesses. We anticipate a match of over \$500,000 from project partners, if awarded LCCMR support. This match, and ongoing resources, will fund project management staff, coalition oversight from County and Three Rivers leadership, and maintenance of existing tools and applications. We will explore alternative funding structures beyond this grant cycle to create stable and predictable funding sources for project management, tool development, and technology maintenance.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Planning for Long-Term Natural Resources Protection, Hennepin County	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 08c	\$250,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Kristine Maurer

Job Title: Land and Water Supervisor – Habitat Conservation

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

Kristine is a Land and Water Supervisor at Hennepin County and program manager of the Hennepin County Habitat Conservation Program which facilitates land and water protection through conservation easements and improves habitat on permanently protect natural areas. She also manages several grants, leads database and application development, oversees design and implementation of biological monitoring efforts, develops strategic plans and organizational structures, is active in cross-organizational collaboration groups, and participates in a variety of inter-agency working groups focused on data and application improvement. Kristine is also active in helping landowners meet their conservation goals through a variety of conservation programs and development of outreach and educational materials. Kristine holds Co-master’s degrees in Natural Resource Ecology and Environmental Science from Iowa State University and a Biology degree from the University of St. Thomas. Kristine has 13 years of experience in the natural resources sector across private, public, and nonprofit sectors. She is knowledgeable in terrestrial and aquatic plant and wildlife identification and natural history of the upper Midwest, is a published expert with skills in research design and implementation, local, state, and federal environmental compliance and permitting, GIS mapping and modeling, and data management and statistical analysis.

Organization: Hennepin County

Organization Description:

Hennepin County is home to nearly 1.3 million people (more than 22 percent of the state population), covering 45 cities and 611 square miles. It is the largest unit of government in the state of Minnesota.

The county, operating under the authority of the state of Minnesota, is responsible for such functions as social and health services, library services, road building and maintenance, registration of deeds and titles, tax collection, election supervision, licensing, and law enforcement.

Hennepin County also serves as the county Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD). As the SWCD, Hennepin County strives to protect and enhance the quality of natural habitats, soil, and water resources for current and future generations.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Project Manager		This position will coordinate across project staff and partner organizations, perform reporting functions, track progress on milestones, and manage the full lifecycle of the project.			60%	1.5		\$225,000
							Sub Total	\$225,000
Contracts and Services								
University of Minnesota	Subaward	Activity 3: 1 FTE for graduate students assistance with tool development over the course of the project, with stipend and tuition benefit. Overseen by 0.2 FTE UMN PI.				1.2		\$126,000
TBD	Service Contract	Activity 3: Direct financial support to organizations for hiring consultants that aid in providing capacity for project planning and implementation. Company will be selected using competitive bidding policies.				0.5		\$175,000
University of Minnesota	Subaward	Activities 1, 2, and 3: For duration of project, includes benefits: 50% FTE graduate student or postdoc to support application development and data integration. 50% FTE staff engineer to lead custom application development. \$25,000/year for computing and storage. Overseen by 2.5% FTE UMN PI				3.09		\$450,000
							Sub Total	\$751,000
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
							Sub Total	-
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-

Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
							Sub Total	-
Other Expenses								
							Sub Total	-
							Grand Total	\$976,000

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				
Cash	Hennepin County	0.5 FTE project manager for coalition, will match the 0.5 FTE requested in this grant cycle.	Potential	\$225,000
Cash	Hennepin County	Additional staff time for oversight and planning during grant application phase Equivalent to 0.3 FTE over 3 years of grant cycle	Potential	\$60,000
Cash	Hennepin County	Prior to this grant request - Staffing and cash since project start	Secured	\$120,000
Cash	Three Rivers Park District	Cash and staff time for oversight and planning during grant application phase	Secured	\$235,000
Cash	Three Rivers Park District	Prior to this grant request - Staffing and cash since project start	Secured	\$100,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$740,000
			Funds Total	\$740,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,716,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [14da0bcc-db1.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Graphic describes the scope of our project for LCCMR 2027, focused on building the momentum of a local coalition that provides tools, resources, and opportunities to collaborate so that organizations across Hennepin County can proactively achieve our shared natural systems goals...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
HennepinCounty_2024Audit	f8d43dd0-017.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
BoardApprovalLetter	54745c17-0f1.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support from Minnehaha Creek	2cd3e579-64a.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_EdenPrairie	f37d65bb-c77.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_ThreeRivers	b37a22bb-8b2.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_MWMO	8fb9120f-2b8.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_GRG	b867cb23-a4e.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_Champlin	7f90ea05-c1c.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_Wayzata	60327981-233.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_NMCWD	1c11095f-02a.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_Minnetonka	2535e492-00f.pdf
LetterOfSupport_2027-615_MetC	9ffbf5c7-6f9.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?

N/A

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?

No

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:

Audrey Robeson (Hennepin County)

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