



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-083

Proposal Title: Developing Leadership Pipeline for Minnesota's Natural Environment

Project Manager Information

Name: Sara Lemke

Organization: Camp Fire Minnesota

Office Telephone: (612) 540-3043

Email: giving@campfiremn.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Camp Fire Minnesota will provide comprehensive Environmental Education and self-development for 18,762 youth, reducing gaps in STEM education, access to nature; increasing the pipeline of Minnesotan land/water stewards.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$1,089,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2030

LCCMR Funding 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 and In the Future

Narrative

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

Minnesota has a chronic shortage of qualified stewards for our natural environment/land, impacting parks, tourism, and economy; youth face financial barriers, preventing access to our nature programs. Early exposure is critical in a child seeing a future for themselves in STEM careers. Per MN Compass, 55% of Minnesotan 5th graders meet state science standards; 35% of high schoolers are college ready in science; 55% of 8th graders keep working hard even when they feel like quitting. This data is alarming as relates to the future sustainability of Minnesotan land/water.

Students from under-resourced communities face higher STEM achievement gaps. We must teach youth to push through challenges/build courage/problem solve. 5% of Minnesotans visiting state parks are people of color, despite 25% of the state's population identifying as BIPOC. There is a shortage of interest, identity and achievement within environmental education from Minnesota youth, while youth rates of anxiety/depression/suicide continue to skyrocket. Increased depression, anxiety, and isolation are driven by negative impacts of social media, isolation, and violence.

Outdoor education is proven to increase youth engagement, improve mental health, but many youth face financial barriers. We do not have sufficient funds to meet the scholarship need.

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're uniquely qualified to increase environmental stewardship pipeline while improving youth mental health by increasing scholarships, without which we will continue to see dwindling interest, ability and identity in nature spaces directly disserving Minnesota's protection/conservation/preservation.

Scholarships will serve 18,762 Minnesota youth with financial barriers, ensuring youth experience nature-based learning building skills in STEM, environmental literacy, social-emotional development, regardless of financial means.

Scholarships will serve Environmental Education (EE), Summer/Break Camps, and Afterschool Explorers, reaching youth ages 5–18 in 61 zip codes, prioritizing schools with 60% or higher Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rates.

Delivered by skilled Naturalists, engaging 76 partners and 10 Minneapolis schools, programs engage youth through STEM/outdoor recreation at our 103-acre property/public parks/in classrooms. Camps include canoe trips, and leadership experiences.

Curriculum is developed with educators/youth, (15 STEM courses aligned with Minnesota State Education Standards), connected to Minnesota's natural environment, using outdoors to develop lifelong skills essential for effective land stewardship/leadership.

Donors/foundations funded past scholarships, NOT meeting increased demand. We received 2025LCCMR funds, creating pivotal impact in our ability to address scholarship demand. Continued support will directly invest in longevity and sustainability of Minnesota's natural environment.

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?

Deliver full or partial scholarships to 18,762 youth creating new and direct access to Camp Fire Minnesota programs.

85% will value nature and understand caring for the natural world around them, directly increasing Minnesota's pipeline of environmental stewards.

90% will feel a sense of belonging in the Camp Fire community, increasing confidence and inclusivity within nature spaces

91% will develop positive relationships with their peers, resulting in reduced isolation/improved mental health of Minnesotan youth.

84% will experience new opportunities, ideas and cultures enhancing environmental education initiatives by integrating diverse cultural perspectives that foster environmental stewardship in all communities.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Community Partnerships (Activity One)

Activity Budget: \$1,000

Activity Description:

Through continued investing in long-standing partnerships, we have built strong relationships with BIPOC and low-income communities. We serve 84% of BIPOC youth through Afterschool Explorers in 10 Minneapolis Public Schools and 66% of BIPOC youth through Environmental Education programs. We also prioritize partnerships with organizations that support high Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) populations. For example, our Afterschool program has an average FRL of 84%. These partnerships create a pipeline of youth to attend STEM programs, including field trips, camps, and afterschool at no-cost, with transportation provided. Regular community outreach efforts including tabling and participation in local events support our goal to be a trusted partner in local communities.

Opportunities funded by ENRTF will be shared with schools, partners, and individuals via email, phone, and our website to recruit new partners. We maintain a database of nearly 700 educators and schools expressing interest in Environmental Education, but lacking funding. Scholarship eligibility is based on need, determined by FRL status, and collected through an application. We prioritize awarding scholarships to organizations and youth with high percentages of BIPOC, FRL, and social-emotional learning needs. Expenses for Activity One are primarily built into Scholarships costs.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Milestone 1: Deepen partnerships with 76 schools/community organizations annually to deliver all programs.	June 30, 2030
Milestone 2: Engage partners/community members who are on the scholarship waitlist through other programming.	June 30, 2030
Milestone 3: Measure program impact through surveys, sharing outcomes with prospective audiences and broader community.	June 30, 2030

Activity 2: Scholarships (Activity Two)

Activity Budget: \$1,088,000

Activity Description:

With LCCMR funding for scholarships, we will serve 16,827 youth through Environmental Education, 1,215 youth through Camps, and 720 youth through Afterschool Explorers totaling 18,762 youth served through scholarships over the course of the 3-yr grant period.

Scholarships will be awarded to under-resourced youth across our three year-round programs: Environmental Education, Camps (Summer and School Break), and Afterschool Explorers. These programs serve youth ages 5–18 from 61 zip codes across the Twin Cities metro.

For Environmental Education and Afterschool Explorers, scholarships are determined by a school’s Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rate. Schools with 60% or higher FRL qualify all participating youth for free programs. For schools below 60%, scholarships are offered on a sliding scale prioritizing higher FRL levels. Camp (Summer and School Break) scholarships are awarded through an application process inviting families to share their needs.

All scholarship data will be tracked in our two databases, called Camp Brain and Active. Scholarship amounts reflect the full programming cost.

Camp Fire managers use the YPQA tool to observe programs for a supportive environment/ interaction/engagement. By continually assessing program quality, we hope to provide insights to partners who can have the highest impact on youth.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Milestone 1: Enable 18,762 Minnesotan youth direct access to Camp Fire environmental education programs	June 30, 2030
Milestone 2: 85% will report valuing nature and understand caring for the natural world aroundthem.	June 30, 2030
Milestone 3: 90% of program participants will feel a sense of belonging in nature.	June 30, 2030
Milestone 4: 91% will develop positive relationships with their peers, improving Minnesotan youth mental health.	June 30, 2030
Milestone 5: 84% will experience diversity of new opportunities/ideas/cultures supporting ENRTF inclusivity goals.	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.

To ensure the broad dissemination, effective presentation, and sustainable impact of our work, Camp Fire Minnesota will implement the following strategies:

Attribution and Recognition: In all project-related print and electronic media, publications, signage, and outreach, we will prominently acknowledge the ENRTF using the trust fund logo and attribution language as specified in the ENRTF Acknowledgment Guidelines. Social media posts will include relevant tags to ensure appropriate recognition. ENRTF presently featured on our website: <https://campfiremn.org/camps/scholarships/>

Partners: Opportunities funded by ENRTF will be shared with schools, partners, and individuals via email, phone, and our website, leveraging our database of nearly 700 educators and schools, 76 partner organizations and our broader network.

Outreach and Communication: We will create informative content, including blog posts, newsletters, and social media updates, highlighting the progress and impact of our work. These communications will be crafted to be easily understandable and engaging for a broad audience.

Dissemination of Results: To reach entities that can utilize our findings for resource management in Minnesota, we will document and share the results through a variety of digital and in-person conversations including those with local partners such as the City of Chanhassen, Carver County, City of Excelsior and University of Minnesota. Survey results shared through our digital channels will reach approximately 7,000 individuals.

Youth Reflection: We incorporate youth voice and youth choice in our programs. Our Naturalists are trained to check in regularly with youth to see how their interests evolve throughout the program and maintain flexibility. As those interests grow, we will share with partners relevant conservation issues and curiosities Minnesota youth would like to explore.

Promoting Behavioral Change: Our programs are designed to foster environmental stewardship and a deep appreciation for nature among participants. To encourage behavioral changes that protect, conserve, or enhance Minnesota's environment, our outcomes will be:

85% of program participants will report that they value nature and understand caring for the natural world around them, directly increasing Minnesota's pipeline of environmental stewards.

90% of program participants will feel a sense of belonging in the Camp Fire community, increasing confidence and inclusivity within nature spaces, directly supporting LCCMR's goal to create learning experiences for a diversity of young people to explore and pursue careers in the environment and natural resources.

91% of program participants will report developing positive relationships with their peers, resulting in reduced isolation, and support of the mental health of Minnesotan young people.

84% of program participants will experience a diversity of new opportunities, ideas and cultures directly supporting LCCMR's goal to enhance environmental education initiatives by integrating diverse cultural perspectives that foster environmental stewardship in all communities.

By following these strategies, Camp Fire Minnesota is committed to ensuring that our findings, data and outcomes benefit those directly involved and contribute to the broader conservation efforts across Minnesota.

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?

Our project will be implemented in partnership with educators/youth through our 3 pillar programs EE, Afterschool and Camps. Funds provide strategic scholarship support to youth in under-resourced populations with financial barriers, supporting the deepening of our 76 partnerships, providing hands-on learning experiences for 18,762 Minnesota youth. We secure individual, private and government funding to meet as much scholarship demand as possible each year. Funding from LCCMR would help indicate to other funders that our work merits continued support, so that we can create impact for another hundred years. Project will continue after grant funding with ongoing fundraising efforts.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Advancing Equity in Environmental Education	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05b	\$700,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Sara Lemke

Job Title: Vice President of Development & Communications

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

For nearly 2 years, Sara Lemke has been the Vice President of Development and Communications at Camp Fire Minnesota. Lemke has served as a member of Camp Fire's leadership team for almost four years and brings a decade of experience in fundraising and grant management. Her professional background spans nonprofit and healthcare sectors, where she has consistently worked to connect community needs with funding, advocacy, and supportive resources. Lemke earned her bachelor's degree in Child, Adult, and Family Services from Iowa State University, grounding her work in youth development and family systems. As a former program participant herself and camp counselor, she brings ten years of lived experience within Camp Fire's programs. Lemke is deeply committed to advancing equity and inclusion so that every young person has access to the same confidence-building, community-centered camp experiences that shaped her own leadership journey.

Organization: Camp Fire Minnesota

Organization Description:

Camp Fire Minnesota's advances environmental education equity, allowing every child the opportunity to find their spark in the outdoors igniting a lifelong connection to nature. With a focus on accessibility and inclusion, we serve over 11,000 youth annually, with 50% of participants benefiting from our Scholarship program. Our programs actively introduce youth from diverse backgrounds to the significance of nature and the excitement of environmental and STEM education and careers, inspiring hope and a brighter future. We deliver three main programs: Environmental Education, Afterschool Explorers and Summer/School Break Camps. Programs take place on our wooded 103-acre property in Excelsior, in Metro area schools and in community outdoor spaces. Select camps take place in the Boundary Waters. Camp Fire Minnesota has been leading youth nature and environmental education for over 100 years.

Our mission is at the core of everything we do; with nature as our catalyst, we energize youth to discover their spark so their futures glow brighter.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
							Sub Total	-
Contracts and Services								
							Sub Total	-
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								

		<p>Scholarships - Environmental Education Y1: \$65,897 in scholarships to serve 5,069 youth [$\\$13 \times 5,069 \text{ youth} = \\$65,897$] Y2: \$70,066 in scholarships to serve 5,069 youth [$\\$14 \times 5,069 \text{ youth} = \\$70,966$] Y3: \$76,035 in scholarships to serve 5,069 youth [$\\$15 \times 5,069 \text{ youth} = \\$76,035$]</p> <p>*Includes EE/Partner Overnights</p> <p>*Scholarship calculations are determined by the cost that goes into serving each participant for the given program. Expenses factored into costs of serving each youth include but are not limited to staff time, food, camp site supplies, curriculum consumables, first aid/emergency response, mental health support, weather appropriate gear, and transportation to and from base camp. Scholarships are determined by a school's Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rate. Schools with 60% or higher FRL qualify all participating youth for free programs. For schools below 60%, scholarships are offered on a sliding scale based on FRL level. Camp scholarships are awarded through an application process that invites families to share their needs. Removed \$8 to round number to nearest thousandth as required by LCCMR portal.</p>	<p>Scholarships will enable Camp Fire Minnesota to serve 16,827 youth (ages 5-18 across the Twin Cities Metro) with trauma-informed, social emotional, and culturally affirming environmental education programs over the three-year grant period. These scholarships will help close the gap in access to our programs for youth with the highest need.</p>					\$212,890
		<p>Scholarships - Out of School Time/Afterschool Explorers Y1: \$98,880 in scholarships to serve 240 youth [$\\$412 \times 240 \text{ youth} = \\$98,880$] Y2: \$101,760 in scholarships to serve 240 youth [$\\$424 \times 240 \text{ youth} = \\$101,760$] Y3: \$102,240 in scholarships to serve 240 youth [$\\$426 \times 240 \text{ youth} = \\$102,760$]</p> <p>*Scholarship calculations are determined by the cost that goes into serving each participant for the given program. Expenses factored into costs of serving each youth include but are not limited to staff time, food, camp site supplies, curriculum consumables, first aid/emergency response, mental health support, weather appropriate gear, and transportation to and</p>	<p>Scholarships will enable Camp Fire Minnesota to serve 720 (ages 5-18 across the Twin Cities Metro) with trauma-informed, social emotional, and culturally affirming Out of School Time/Afterschool Explorers programs over the two-year grant period. These scholarships will help close the gap in access to our programs for youth with the highest need.</p>					\$302,880

		from base camp. Scholarships are determined by a school's Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) rate. Schools with 60% or higher FRL qualify all participating youth for free programs. For schools below 60%, scholarships are offered on a sliding scale based on FRL level. Camp scholarships are awarded through an application process that invites families to share their needs.						
		<p>Scholarships - Summer & School Break Camp</p> <p>Y1: \$185,220 in scholarships to serve 405 youth [\$622 x 275 youth = \$171,050] [\$109 x 130 youth = \$14,170]</p> <p>Y2: \$190,560 in scholarships to serve 405 youth [\$640 x 275 youth = \$176,000] [\$112 x 130 youth = \$14,560]</p> <p>Y3: \$196,450 in scholarships to serve 405 youth [\$660 x 275 youth = \$181,500] [\$115 x 130 youth = \$14,950]</p> <p>*Scholarship calculations are determined by the cost that goes into serving each participant for the given program. Expenses factored into costs of serving each youth include but are not limited to staff time, food, camp site supplies, curriculum consumables, first aid/emergency response, mental health support, weather appropriate gear, and transportation to and from base camp. Camp scholarships are awarded through an application process that invites families to share their needs.</p>	Scholarships will enable Camp Fire Minnesota to serve 1,215 (ages 5-18 across the Twin Cities Metro) with trauma-informed, social emotional, and culturally affirming Summer and School Break Camp programs over the two-year grant period. These scholarships will help close the gap in access to our programs for youth with the highest need.					\$572,230
		Activity One Related Expenses for Building Community Partnerships	Miscellaneous (eligible) costs associated with managing 76 partnerships with schools and community organizations for Y1- Y3.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,089,000
							Grand Total	\$1,089,000

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				
Cash	Community Crime Intervention & Prevention Grant, OJP	Support of program staff to operate programs and program supplies.	Secured	\$500,000
			State Sub Total	\$500,000
Non-State				
Cash	Opus Foundation	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies.	Pending	\$100,000
Cash	Otto Bremer Foundation	Support for program staff to operate programs and supplies.	Pending	\$100,000
Cash	Program Fees	Fees from summer camp programs for 3 years	Pending	\$6,000,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$6,200,000
			Funds Total	\$6,700,000

Total Project Cost: \$7,789,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [d494b54e-cb7.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Images of youth in Camp Fire Minnesota programs, outdoors with their hands up, smiling and posing in winter gear on a frozen lake next to an ice fishing hut....

Financial Capacity

Title	File
IRS Letter	3836aa31-2c2.pdf
Good standing with Secretary of State	61106cea-586.pdf
2024 Audit	d9197dde-f1c.pdf
990	fae2f57c-d2c.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Board Resolution and letter	22aba6d6-e8d.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Partnership list	8e02209d-1a5.pdf
2025 Summer Camp Yearbook	524e837c-526.pdf
Environmental Education Curriculum	2ff1ea01-8f5.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?

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:

Developing Leadership Pipeline for Minnesota's Natural Environment

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