



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-566

Proposal Title: Pathways to Environmental Careers

Project Manager Information

Name: May Yang-Lee

Organization: MN DNR - Operational Services Division

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Project Basic Information

Project Summary: This collaborative project creates a college-to-workforce pathway for underrepresented students interested in pursuing careers in environmental and natural resources by reducing barriers to successful educational attainment.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$981,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2032

LCCMR Funding 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?

In the Future

Narrative

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

Minnesota's population is becoming increasingly diverse, yet this change is not reflected across many STEM-based professions, including environmental and natural resource careers. Despite this demographic shift, representation in many STEM fields has not kept pace, and persistent educational and workforce gaps continue to limit participation in these careers.

At the same time, Minnesota's economy increasingly relies on STEM talent to support innovation, environmental stewardship, and natural resource management. Ensuring that all Minnesotans have access to education and career pathways in these fields is essential to maintaining a strong workforce and meeting the state's long-term environmental and economic needs.

The Pathways to Environmental Careers (PEC) (formerly Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC)) project addresses this opportunity by creating a college to workforce pathway for a diverse group of students who are pursuing STEM degrees at universities, colleges, and technical schools in Minnesota. Through a strategic partnership between MN Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR), and Conservation Corps Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI), the program aims to reduce barriers to degree completion, provides career-relevant experience, professional development, and helps connect students to environmental and natural resource careers across Minnesota.

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 propose building upon the existing program by adding 2 more cohorts to strengthen Minnesota's pipeline of skilled professionals entering environmental and natural resource careers. This funding will support two cohorts of 15 students, serving a total of 30 students. The program provides a college-to-career pathway that combines fellowships, paid internships, mentorship, professional development, and hands-on training to help students gain the skills and experience needed to enter environmental and natural resource careers across the state.

MNDNR will serve as the project lead, overseeing program administration and evaluation in collaboration with project partners. MNDNR will contract with CCMI to recruit and support student participants, administer fellowships and stipends, coordinate internships, and provide outreach and training.

Through this partnership, the program will provide up to 60 paid internships across conservation and environmental fields. 22 internships will be funded through ENRTF dollars to CCMI, while 38 will be supported through partner agency contributions and in-kind support, including staff mentorship and internship supervision. Students will gain hands-on experience in areas such as water resources, wildlife management, recreation, conservation practices, and surveying, preparing them for long-term careers in Minnesota's environmental and natural resource workforce.

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 program is about fostering the next generation of environmental and natural resources professionals and enthusiasts. As a result of this project, students are prepared for natural resources careers within Minnesota upon graduation. The long-term goal is to share these students' experiences within their communities in ways that further awareness of and interest in environmental careers. Students will seek experiential opportunities within state agencies, ultimately resulting in broader diversity among Minnesota citizens engaged in natural resources and environmental careers.

Pathways to Environmental Careers program is one strategy to develop and tap into the diverse labor market.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Fellowship Program Administration

Activity Budget: \$399,240

Activity Description:

The fellowship program helps students in the PEC program overcome barriers to academic success and equip them with professional skills that contribute to career success. PEC participants or “fellows” are provided with a supportive community, a yearly academic scholarship, and professional development. They work with the CCMI program manager, who coordinates resources and helps them navigate challenges during the journey. Fellows attend in-person cohort sessions every other month during the academic school year to stay connected to their peers and participate in professional development opportunities. They will also have experiential learning opportunities during the school year, interacting with staff from the three state environmental agencies and learn about the different environmental and natural resources careers before their first summer internship. Fellows receive a financial award each academic school year of the program. Fellows remain in the program until they graduate and obtain their STEM degrees.

CCMI’s program manager, in collaboration with the project manager, will coordinate and manage the outreach, fellowship payments, support services, cohort meetings, experiential learning opportunities, and professional development opportunities.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
15 fellows in cohort 6 will receive professional development and career training	May 31, 2029
15 fellows in cohort 7 will receive professional development and career training	May 31, 2030
15 fellows in cohort 6 will graduate and obtain their STEM degrees.	May 31, 2031
15 fellows in cohort 7 will graduate and obtain their STEM degrees	May 31, 2032

Activity 2: Internship Program Administration

Activity Budget: \$519,140

Activity Description:

The internship program, which runs from June to August each summer, allows fellows to learn more about career paths in environmental and natural resources through paid, on-the-job experience. The internship includes up to three summer agency internships for each student, depending on the year they enter the program.

During the first year in the program, fellows will learn about the different environmental and natural resources agencies. During their first summer, fellows choose one of the three agencies (MNDNR, MPCA, or BWSR) to intern. Through the second and third-year summer agency internships, fellows gain more work experience in their desired career fields before graduating from college.

In consultation with its partners, MNDNR will coordinate the summer agency internships' administration. The project funds will support up to 22 internships, while MNDNR, MPCA, and BWSR will provide in-kind funding for up to 38 summer agency internships.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
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15 fellows from cohort 6 complete first-summer internship (400 hours) and gain work skills	August 31, 2028
15 fellows from cohort 6 complete second-summer internship (400 hours) and gain work skills	August 31, 2029
15 fellows from cohort 7 complete first-summer internship (400 hours) and gain work skills	August 31, 2029
15 fellows from cohort 7 complete second-summer internship (400 hours) and gain work skills	August 31, 2030

Activity 3: Mentorship Program Administration

Activity Budget: \$62,620

Activity Description:

Fellows in cohort 6 and cohort 7 are paired with MNDNR, PCA, or BWSR employees who serve as their mentors. The mentorship program enhances college success, encourages personal and professional development, and promotes fellows' career advancement. Through regular interactions with their mentors, fellows gain knowledge, skills, and resources to achieve academic and career success. Mentors also benefit from the mentoring relationship by building mentoring skills, translating them back to their workplace and job. The program offers a structured framework to help ensure productive conversations between mentors and fellows. The program uses a one-on-one and group mentoring approach that includes in-person meetings, Teams meetings, email, and phone communication. All mentors receive ongoing training and regular support.

MNDNR, CCMI, MNPCA, and BWSR will continue to work collaboratively to administer the overall mentorship program. The project manager and CCMI's program manager will continue to provide leadership and support services to the mentors for the program's duration. Funding will ensure students in cohort 6 and cohort 7 receive the full mentorship experience.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Mentors are recruited, trained, and paired with fellows in cohort 6	June 30, 2028
Mentors are recruited, trained, and paired with fellows in cohort 7	June 30, 2029
15 cohort 6 fellows will develop and increase ability to navigate their education and careers	May 31, 2031
15 cohort 7 fellows will develop and increase ability to navigate their education and careers	May 31, 2032

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Nalani McCutcheon	Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa	Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa will receive ENRTF funding for this project via contract for program administration to include the fellowship program and on-going student support.	Yes
Katrina Kessler	MN Pollution Control Agency (MPCA)	MPCA provides mentors and intern supervisors funds for internships	No
John Jaschke	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)	BWSR provides mentors and intern supervisors funds for internships	No
Sarah Strommen	MN Department of Natural Resources	MNDNR will receive funding through the appropriation to coordinate the inter-agency mentorships and internships and overall project administration and evaluation.	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 ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines.

The MNDNR, MPCA, BWSR, and CCMI will disseminate program information and provide links on their websites. The partners have experience recruiting STEM students through existing relationships with environmental and engineering departments at several universities. CCMI has been successful at attracting student interest in similar programs, such as the Minnesota Conservation Apprentice Academy. MNDNR, MPCA and BWSR's websites will offer descriptions of the program and links to CCMI's website for more information. This project will also build on the foundation, work, and achievements of the ENRTF-funded project, Bridges to Diversifying Involvement in the Natural Resources Community. At project end, a report will be provided that summarizes the project, including its successes and challenges, so that others may benefit from any lessons learned.

The Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund will be acknowledged through use of the trust fund logo or attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and other communications per the ENRTF Acknowledgment 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 breaks down barriers that inhibit underrepresented students from pursuing post-secondary STEM education and careers. The project's results and data will be used to identify how to refine our recruitment efforts using the experience-based college-to-careers pathways model. In the years to come, we hope that this becomes our standard model for how we do business and not just a "program." The ultimate objective is that this program's results serve as a model that continues to attract students from under-represented communities to natural resources careers in greater numbers and provides sustainable and meaningful long-term careers.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers	M.L. 2022, , Chp. 94, Art. , Sec. 2, Subd. 05h	\$500,000
Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers	M.L. 2023, , Chp. 60, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05c	\$763,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: May Yang-Lee

Job Title: Project Manager

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

May Yang-Lee has served on the project for 6 years, starting at CCMI as their program manager of the IDEC program and then as the project manager of the IDEC program with the DNR for the last three years. She holds a bachelor's degree in Environmental and Sustainability from the University of Minnesota, Duluth. May has also served in roles with Washington County as their Parks Equity Program Coordinator and Community Outreach Coordinator for Great River Greening.

Organization: MN DNR - Operational Services Division

Organization Description:

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) works to integrate and sustain the interdependent values of a healthy environment, a sustainable economy, and livable communities. DNR’s integrated resource management strategy shares stewardship responsibility with citizens and partners to manage for multiple interests. The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.

MNDNR is committed to providing equitable access to outdoor spaces so all Minnesotans can enjoy the benefits afforded by a healthy and thriving environment. We are also committed to attracting and retaining a workforce that reflects Minnesota’s population.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
1 Project Manager		To manage overall project including administration and evaluation			30%	2.8		\$280,000
							Sub Total	\$280,000
Contracts and Services								
Conservation Corps Minnesota & Iowa	Subaward	1FTE Program Manager to administer the project with the following components: Yearly fellowship; Contracted internships, Training & Professional development; Outreach; Wrap-around services and Support.				4		\$667,900
							Sub Total	\$667,900
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								
		Direct and Necessary	Direct and Necessary for MNDNR's costs to administer the program					\$33,100
							Sub Total	\$33,100
							Grand Total	\$981,000

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	MN DNR, MPCA, BWSR	Award 36 summer agency-internships, mentors	Secured	\$500,000
			State Sub Total	\$500,000
Non-State				
			Non State Sub Total	-
			Funds Total	\$500,000

Total Project Cost: \$1,481,000

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [b6574da2-46d.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

A graphic showing a brief overview of the Pathways in Environmental Careers (PEC) program. The graphic says "Working Together on the Pathways to Environmental Careers: The Pathways to Environmental Careers program provides a unique college-to-careers pathway for under-represented STEM college students who want to pursue careers in the environmental and..."

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")?

No

Provide the name(s) and organization(s) of additional individuals assisting in the completion of this proposal:

Mimi Daniel, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

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