



Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

2027 Request for Proposal

General Information

Proposal ID: 2027-582

Proposal Title: Building Climate-Resilient Conservation Leadership in Minnesota

Project Manager Information

Name: Geanella Ochoa

Organization: Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina

Office Telephone: (612) 478-2901

Email: geanellao@copalmn.org

Project Basic Information

Project Summary: Through outdoor events, Climate Stewardship Cohorts, College Tours, and educational media, COPAL will strengthen conservation literacy, climate adaptation, ecosystem awareness, and recreational practices among communities historically underrepresented in outdoor experiences.

ENRTF Funds Requested: \$564,000

Proposed Project Completion: June 30, 2029

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?

During the Project and In the Future

Narrative

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

BIPOC communities are three times more likely to reside in areas with little to no natural habitat, and the health effects are striking.¹ According to a meta-analysis by Twohig-Bennett and Jones (2018), exposure to parks, undeveloped land, and natural vegetation can reduce blood pressure, the incidence of diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.² Yet Minnesota's 1.3 million BIPOC residents often lack access to these health saving spaces. According to the most recent report of visitor demographics to Minnesota's state parks, trails, and recreation areas, only 11% of the visitors were BIPOC, compared to 22% of the overall population.³

In addition to living in nature-deprived areas, BIPOC Minnesotans are more likely to lack the transportation, equipment, and income to afford visits to Minnesota's natural areas. These barriers are compounded for BIPOC Minnesotans who do not speak or read English. ENRTF funding will allow COPAL to expand programming to create culturally-relevant, accessible leadership and educational avenues to Minnesota's outdoor spaces for BIPOC communities.

1. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap-communities-of-color-and-those-with-low-incomes-are-bearing-the-brunt-of-americas-nature-loss/>
2. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0013935118303323>
3. <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/performance-and-accountability-report/vistor-demographics.html>

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.

COPAL partners with local organizations to host monthly outdoor environmental education events that expand access to Minnesota's parks, natural resources, and conservation spaces among Latine and BIPOC communities. We reduce barriers to participation by providing transportation, Spanish-language facilitation, and culturally relevant programming about Minnesota's ecosystems, conservation systems, and sustainable recreation practices.

Building upon prior ENRTF-supported efforts, this next phase will deepen long-term impact by integrating climate-resilient conservation leadership and higher education engagement into COPAL's model. In addition to outdoor events, COPAL will host an annual Environmental Justice Academy. Each cohort will participate in a 6–8 week structured environmental education curriculum led by community-based technical experts. Field-based learning experiences will allow participants to directly engage with natural resource systems and deepen their understanding of conservation practices and climate adaptation strategies specific to Minnesota.

To expand environmental education among younger generations and strengthen connections with higher education institutions, COPAL will also organize an annual College Tour. Through presentations and interactive dialogues, the College Tour will connect students with environmental stewardship efforts and encourage future leadership in protecting Minnesota's natural resources.

COPAL's digital communications platforms will reinforce environmental literacy and promote stewardship behaviors to over 10,000 people monthly.

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?

At least 600 participants will attend COPAL's outdoor environmental education events and at least 75% will report an increased understanding of Minnesota's natural resource systems.

At least 85% of the 20+ Environmental Justice Academy cohort participants will demonstrate measurable increases in conservation literacy.

COPAL's annual College Tour will engage at least 300 students through presentations and discussions focused on conservation, climate resilience, and community-based environmental stewardship.

To reinforce environmental literacy and promote the protection and preservation of Minnesota's natural resources, COPAL will share educational conservation content with over 10,000 people monthly via social media, newsletters, and Spanish-language media outlets.

Activities and Milestones

Activity 1: Connect Latine and BIPOC communities with Minnesota’s natural resources and conservation efforts through inclusive outdoor activities and environmental education

Activity Budget: \$290,000

Activity Description:

COPAL will host bilingual (English/Spanish) outdoor environmental education events in Minnesota’s city and state parks. These events will focus on natural resource systems, ecosystem awareness, sustainable recreation practices (such as safe fishing, snowshoeing, and habitat protection), and climate adaptation strategies.

Activities may include hands-on demonstrations, recreational learning opportunities, and arts-based environmental education activities relevant to Minnesota’s air, water, land, and wildlife. Each event will be promoted through COPAL’s community partnerships and multilingual communications platforms in collaboration with park staff and local organizations to ensure cultural relevance and accessibility.

To deepen learning and leadership development, COPAL will also align an annual 6-8 week Environmental Justice Academy cohort with project activities. Academy participants will complete a structured environmental education curriculum that includes classroom instruction and field-based learning experiences in parks and conservation sites across Minnesota.

In addition, COPAL will organize an annual College Tour by visiting colleges and universities across the state. The tour will engage students in conversations about conservation, climate resilience, and environmental stewardship.

Post-event surveys and participant feedback will measure increases in conservation knowledge, confidence in accessing natural spaces, and intended stewardship behaviors. Survey results will be compiled and analyzed to document educational impact and inform future conservation.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engage 600 participants throughout Minnesota (Twin Cities metro, southern, western, and northern MN).	June 30, 2029
Engage at least 300 college students during the College Tours	June 30, 2029
75% of participants will report an increased understanding of Minnesota’s natural resource systems	June 30, 2029
Form 2 new partnerships annually with BIPOC organizations to reach more participants throughout Minnesota.	June 30, 2029
Provide a summary of survey results for all events supported by ENRTF funding.	June 30, 2029

Activity 2: Equip members to lead environmental conservation efforts, addressing the specific challenges of access to sustainable resources and education

Activity Budget: \$189,000

Activity Description:

COPAL will align an annual Environmental Justice Academy cohort with ENRTF project goals (minimum of 10 participants per year; at least 20 total over two years). Each cohort will complete a structured 6–8 week environmental education curriculum focused on conservation systems, ecosystem protection, and climate resilience strategies specific to Minnesota.

The curriculum will be led by community-based technical experts in environmental systems and conservation and will include both classroom instruction and in-situ field-based training conducted at parks, natural areas, and conservation sites. Field-based learning will provide hands-on education in ecosystem dynamics, stewardship practices, and climate adaptation approaches relevant to Minnesota’s natural resources.

The Environmental Justice Academy will strengthen pathways from community engagement to leadership development. Participants will demonstrate measurable increases in conservation literacy, and at least 50% of cohort participants will participate in stewardship-related activities during or after completion of the program.

All activities funded under this proposal are educational in nature and comply fully with ENRTF guidelines.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Engage at least 20 participants in the Environmental Justice Academy	June 30, 2029
At least three environmental justice community members will serve as technical experts in the Academy	June 30, 2029
At least 50% of cohort participants will participate in stewardship-related activities during or after completion	June 30, 2029
At least 85% of cohort participants will demonstrate measurable increases in conservation literacy	June 30, 2029

Activity 3: Educate Spanish-speaking Minnesota residents and BIPOC community on conservation efforts and sustainable practices to protect the state’s natural resources

Activity Budget: \$85,000

Activity Description:

COPAL will use communications platforms such as social media, radio, videos, and newsletters to reach at least 10,000 predominantly Spanish-speaking Minnesotans each month. Educational content will cover sustainable living, conservation practices, and simple steps people can take to reduce environmental harm. Materials will be culturally relevant, accessible, and tailored to community needs. Outreach will be supported through local radio partnerships and digital campaigns to maximize reach and engagement.

Impact will be measured through analytics such as reach, engagement, views, and open rates. COPAL will also track how the network of people engaged in conservation grows over time. Evaluation will focus on reviewing data and community feedback to adjust approaches as needed. Communications will focus on ecosystem protection, sustainable practices, and climate resilience strategies aligned with the protection, conservation, preservation, and enhancement of Minnesota’s natural resources.

ENRTF funds will be used for educational purposes only. Funding will not be used to encourage the public to contact members or employees of the legislature or a state agency for the purpose of proposing, supporting, or opposing legislation or policy, or for directly advocating the adoption or rejection of legislation or policy.

Activity Milestones:

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Social media: Environmental justice posts will average 5,000 impressions per month	June 30, 2029
Newsletters: 2 newsletters (English and Spanish) will reach at least 5,650 people monthly	June 30, 2029
2 environmental justice videos will reach at least 500 people per year	June 30, 2029

Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Luisana Mendez	Huellas Latinas	Outdoor Events	Yes
Raymundo Ruiz	Baztec MN	Outdoor Events	Yes
Vanessa Berrueta	Greater River Greening	Outdoor Events	Yes
Rodolfo Gutierrez	HACER	Evaluation & Survey Expertise	Yes
International Expert	N/A	International expert for the yearly College Tour	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.

To assess impact and inform continuous improvement, COPAL uses AirTable and EveryAction CRM (constituent relationship management) software to track participant demographic information, the number of participants served, the number of outdoor events, leadership sessions, and educational activities held, and data related to educational outcomes achieved. This allows COPAL to understand community needs, identify areas of strong engagement, and refine programming as needed.

For this project, COPAL will continue evaluating services through post-event surveys and structured participant conversations. These tools will measure changes in conservation knowledge, confidence in accessing natural spaces, and understanding of stewardship and climate resilience practices. Participation in the Environmental Justice Academy cohort and engagement in the annual College Tour will also be tracked through existing participation logs and feedback processes already used by COPAL.

Project updates, conservation education content, and highlights from outdoor events, Academy activities, and College Tour engagements will be shared through COPAL's established communication platforms, including social media, newsletters, YouTube, and Spanish-language media. These platforms reach over 10,000 individuals monthly and will be used to reinforce environmental literacy and promote awareness of Minnesota's natural resources.

Results and insights will be shared with key partners such as the Environmental Justice Committee, Academy participants, higher education partners, local environmental organizations, park staff, and community groups through existing meetings, presentations, and collaborative events. These exchanges support inclusive conservation outreach and strengthen partnerships without creating additional reporting requirements.

COPAL will acknowledge the Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund in accordance with ENRTF Acknowledgement Requirements and Guidelines through use of the trust fund logo or required attribution language on project print and electronic media, publications, signage, and outreach materials.

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?

Through outdoor environmental education events, the Environmental Justice Academy cohort, and the annual College Tour, COPAL will strengthen long-term conservation literacy, climate awareness, and stewardship engagement among community members and students. Project results will be evaluated through COPAL’s Environmental Justice Committee, Academy cohort feedback, post-event surveys, and existing data tracking systems. Findings will inform ongoing improvements to outdoor environmental education, conservation leadership, and student engagement efforts.

After project completion, COPAL will continue environmental education and leadership activities through its established Environmental Justice Committee, Academy structure, and partnerships with organizations and educational institutions, supported by existing collaborations and future grant funding.

Other ENRTF Appropriations Awarded in the Last Six Years

Name	Appropriation	Amount Awarded
Engaging Latine Communities in Conservation and Preservation	M.L. 2025, First Special Session, Chp. 1, Art. 2, Sec. 2, Subd. 05o	\$400,000

Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

Project Manager Name: Geanella Ochoa

Job Title: Environmental Justice Director

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

Geanella Ochoa brings more than a decade of professional experience in international relations, community engagement, and program implementation related to environmental sustainability, social equity, and community education. She is a career Foreign Service Officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility of Ecuador (currently on extended leave), where she represented her country in international negotiations on climate change, environmental governance, and sustainable development. Her work included participation in United Nations climate negotiations and other multilateral environmental processes, strengthening her experience in policy analysis, stakeholder coordination, and international collaboration.

Ochoa has extensive experience managing community-focused educational initiatives and facilitating partnerships among academic institutions, community organizations, and public stakeholders. She has led programs that expand access to environmental information, strengthen community leadership, and promote culturally responsive engagement with historically underrepresented communities. Her work emphasizes inclusive outreach strategies, community participation, and educational activities that support environmental stewardship.

She is completing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership, with expected completion in May 2026. Her research examines sociolinguistic barriers affecting immigrant students and explores how inclusive education systems can expand access and opportunity. She also holds advanced degrees in Global Affairs, Sociology, and Environmental Engineering, providing an interdisciplinary perspective connecting environmental issues, social equity, and community development.

Ochoa’s multilingual abilities (Spanish, English, and Italian), along with her experience coordinating international and community-based initiatives, position her to effectively oversee project implementation, coordinate partners, manage timelines and deliverables, and ensure transparent reporting and accountability throughout the project.

Organization: Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Accion Latina

Organization Description:

COPAL (Comunidades Organizando el Poder y la Acción Latina) is a member-based organization that works to improve

the quality of life for Latine families in Minnesota through building collective power, transforming systems and creating opportunities. COPAL's environmental justice (EJ) program protects, conserves, preserves, and enhances Minnesota's air, water, land, fish, wildlife, and other natural resources by strengthening the power and influence of Minnesota's Latine and BIPOC communities. The program engages in coalitional and non-partisan 501c3 work and organizes monthly outdoor events to raise awareness about EJ issues impacting our BIPOC families.

COPAL serves Latine communities across Minnesota; 98% of those COPAL supports identify as Latine and 94% speak Spanish. The organization's 1,011 active members are decision-makers who lead through six committees—Environmental Justice, Health for All, Twin Cities, Southeast MN, Southcentral MN, and Youth. These committees set priorities, guide campaigns, and ensure COPAL's work reflects community needs. Since 2018, the organization has built systems to track engagement, now recording over 65,000 contacts across programs, including 10,800 through direct services.

Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
Personnel								
Environmental Justice Coordinator		Coordinating lead acting as a liaison for families and communities to ensure effective implementation of environmental justice initiatives.			20%	1.4		\$101,300
Environmental Justice Director		Project lead overseeing strategic direction and implementation of environmental justice projects, with a focus on community engagement and empowerment.			20%	1.2		\$120,000
Communications Manager		Managing and publishing communications content on conservation and preservation efforts for predominantly Spanish-speaking community members.			20%	0.3		\$22,500
Videographer & Photographer		Capturing visuals and testimonials during events, creating compelling videos to showcase community involvement and impact.			20%	0.8		\$56,000
Podcast/Radio Tech		Hosting a weekly environmental justice show and producing post-event audio materials for podcasts and radio broadcasts aimed at increasing community participation and engagement.			20%	0.6		\$39,100
Outdoor Specialist		Planning and executing outdoor activities and programs, fostering a connection between communities and the environment.			20%	1.4		\$96,200
Environmental Justice Coalition Builder		Building the next round of environmental justice leaders through coalitions and community partnerships			20%	0.4		\$32,400
							Sub Total	\$467,500
Contracts and Services								
Baztec Fishing	Subaward	Engage Baztec Fishing for sustainable fishing practices and knowledge sharing. The subaward will cover personnel, supplies, and travel costs for conducting sustainable fishing demonstrations and workshops. All expenses align with project goals and ENRTF guidelines, with no capital or ineligible costs included.				1		\$11,000

Huellas Latinas	Subaward	The subaward will cover personnel, supplies, and travel costs for facilitating workshops, sharing cultural insights, and supporting events that promote environmental stewardship. This collaboration will further engage Latine and BIPOC communities in environmental conservation. No capital or ineligible expenses are included.				1		\$13,000
Survey Design and Analysis Contractor	Subaward	Contract with an evaluation firm to design surveys, collect data, and analyze results to assess the project's impact on the community and conservation efforts.				0.8		\$22,000
Cultural Performers	Subaward	Partner with a BIPOC-led organization to host an annual cultural performance highlighting Indigenous and Latine practices of environmental stewardship. Through traditional dance, music, and storytelling, participants will deepen their connection to land, water, and wildlife, fostering long-term conservation mindsets rooted in cultural identity and respect for the environment.				0.4		\$7,500
International Expert	Subaward	EJ International Expert to present at each stop as part of the College Tour (2 years)				0.6		\$12,000
							Sub Total	\$65,500
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies								
	Tools and Supplies	360 reusable water bottles (15 per event)	Distribute reusable water bottles as giveaways at events, workshops, or community gatherings, promoting sustainability.					\$8,000
	Tools and Supplies	Art supplies: Paint, chalk, paper, pencils, extra supplies	Invest in arts and crafts supplies for creative expression workshops that integrate art with nature, fostering personal connections with the environment through activities like painting, sculpture, and photography.					\$500
	Equipment	20 bikes, fishing gear, or similar natural-resource-based outdoor recreation equipment	Purchase or rent equipment like bicycles or fishing gear that support direct, outdoor engagement with Minnesota's natural resources. Equipment will be used during events					\$8,000

			to encourage active lifestyles and connection to nature.					
	Equipment	25-person translation system with interpreter monitor	Acquire equipment like portable translation devices or headsets to facilitate language interpretation at events, enhancing accessibility and inclusivity.	X				\$3,500
							Sub Total	\$20,000
Capital Equipment								
							Sub Total	-
Acquisitions and Stewardship								
							Sub Total	-
Travel In Minnesota								
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	1 outdoor event per month to different areas in MN. Rate: Federal IRS mileage reimbursement rate	Cover expenses for staff members to lead outdoor events or to report findings at events					\$500
							Sub Total	\$500
Travel Outside Minnesota								
							Sub Total	-
Printing and Publication								
	Printing	600 event flyers, 300 brochures, and 50 posters	Printing event flyers, brochures, posters, and educational materials in both English and Spanish					\$2,500
	Printing	30 environmentally illustrated materials	Create illustrated comics targeting children and families to raise awareness about conservation and outdoor stewardship, fostering a sense of responsibility towards nature.					\$4,500
	Publication	Social media posting	To increase participation at events					\$2,500
							Sub Total	\$9,500

Other Expenses								
		Parking and entrance fees for 200 participants	To remove financial barriers that may prevent Latine and BIPOC community members from attending outdoor events held at Minnesota state and regional parks. Covering parking and entrance fees ensures events are accessible, inclusive, and reflective of the communities COPAL serves.					\$1,000
							Sub Total	\$1,000
							Grand Total	\$564,000

Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
Equipment, Tools, and Supplies		25-person translation system with interpreter monitor	Interpretation equipment will allow COPAL to offer activities and events in both English and Spanish, increasing access to the outdoors across language, race, and ethnicity

Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
State				
			State Sub Total	-
Non-State				
Cash	Climate & Clean Energy Equity Fund	Covers COPAL's environmental justice work, including outdoor events, the Environmental Justice Academy, and College Tours. \$220,000 grant from 5/1/2026 to 4/30/2028.	Pending	\$91,667
Cash	Mortenson Family Foundation	Covers part of COPAL's environmental justice work, including outdoor events, the Environmental Justice Academy, and College Tours. \$32,000 per year for 3 years.	Secured	\$64,000
			Non State Sub Total	\$155,667
			Funds Total	\$155,667

Total Project Cost: \$719,667

This amount accurately reflects total project cost?

Yes

Attachments

Required Attachments

Visual Component

File: [838bdb14-d38.pdf](#)

Alternate Text for Visual Component

Pictures showing participants in action at various outdoor events throughout Minnesota...

Financial Capacity

Title	File
COPAL Audit 2024	2d897545-3ad.pdf
COPAL Evidence of Good Standing	4f008631-7c9.pdf
IRS Form 990 for 2024 c3	5ef04e5a-9dc.pdf

Board Resolution or Letter

Title	File
Non-State Entity Resolution Letter	85df71e3-426.pdf

Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Baztec Fishing Letter of Recommendation	bb8e1276-a87.pdf
HACER Letter of Support	7e59a44a-95c.pdf
Huellas Latinas Letter of Support	7442889d-992.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?

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:

Maria Carter-Bertrand (COPAL) , Geanella Ochoa (COPAL)

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