



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

## 2025 Request for Proposal

### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2025-117

**Proposal Title:** Environmental Justice Concerns in Greater Minnesota

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Sachiko Graber

**Organization:** Waxwing Consulting LLC - Climate and Equity Consulting

**Office Telephone:** (267) 922-3653

**Email:** sachiko.graber@gmail.com

### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** The proposed project builds on a 2024 pilot to use qualitative and quantitative data to better understand the perspectives of residents of Greater Minnesota environmental justice areas towards natural resources.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$249,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** December 31, 2027

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Small Projects (H)

**Secondary Category:** Foundational Natural Resource Data and Information (A)

### 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.**

Environmental justice (EJ) and diversity, equity, and inclusion have emerged as prominent considerations in Minnesota's environmental decision-making. Recognizing the importance of addressing systemic inequalities, leaders have increasingly focused on incorporating these principles into their work—whether within companies, communities, conservation, or the Minnesota legislature. However, EJ communities often lack the capacity and access to advocate for themselves in situations where powerful meetings are convening. This results in reduced access to Minnesota's resources and increased exposure to polluted air, water, and other resources for EJ areas. Bridging this gap to influence decision-making is crucial to ensure that the voices of marginalized communities are heard and reflected in operations across our state.

A critical deficiency persists in the availability of both qualitative and quantitative data to manage increased equity of access to environmental resources and attributes and mitigate the disproportionate distribution of environmental harms. The lack of data hampers the formulation of effective strategies to uplift and empower EJ communities, and is driven by a number of intersectional systemic barriers. This study would focus on the most marginalized communities in Greater Minnesota and would seek to overcome geographic, hierarchical, and racial barriers to participating in decision-making to influence state resources.

### **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.**

This project proposes a qualitative study that engages residents in Greater Minnesota's designated environmental justice (EJ) areas. By facilitating discussions on local priorities, the study aims to uncover how rural denizens view environmental inequities and what communities are most interested in accomplishing over the next several years including topics like air quality, water quality, climate-forward technology like green ammonia, and access to natural resources and natural spaces.

This proposal would connect the priorities of least-represented EJ communities to decision-making spaces. Actively involving residents in discussion, the study would identify key environmental justice priorities and analyze how those priorities align with existing policies and regulations, including private governance of corporations and other entities. This serves as a crucial step towards building a foundation of knowledge that can inform and guide us in addressing the unique challenges faced by rural EJ communities, ultimately contributing to a more just and inclusive utilization of Minnesota's resources.

This study would use surveys, focus groups, and storytelling to better understand the perspectives of the Minnesota's EJ area residents towards air, water, land, climate technology, and other environmental concerns.

This study builds on a 2024 pilot with initial funding from U of M and CURE (via GAIA).

### **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?**

Greater understanding of EJ community priorities will help us move towards environmental solutions that are more equitable. While we know that many processes around natural and working land sustainability are contingent on participant land ownership, this process would provide broader context to inform decisions about how resources are allocated. It would also provide deep information about air and water quality in Greater Minnesota, including the identification of topics of concern for local residents, to inform future statewide decisions. This study would inform decision-makers to help them make more equitable decisions regarding the distribution of our natural resources across the state.



## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Team and Study Preparation

**Activity Budget:** \$54,250

**Activity Description:**

This activity will form the foundation for the project as a whole. In this activity, the project team will work together to form a cohesive team dynamic. The team will engage a variety of partnerships to build out a well-informed set of priorities and methodology for research, with intent to engage organizations such as Rainbow Research, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), EJ Coordinating Council, Minnesota 350, Frontline Communities Protection coalition, Community Members for Environmental Justice, COPAL, Land Stewardship Project, Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, Tamarack Water Alliance, and the 1854 Treaty Authority. Partners will be compensated for their time and expertise. Rainbow Research, MPCA, EJCC, and 1854 Treaty Authority have already expressed their interest and willingness to engage.

The team will define a more detailed, refined approach for the study including process, Institutional Review Board process and approval, and EJ community mapping. Geospatial mapping and other refinement techniques will be used to identify survey participants. 10 focus group areas will be identified through mapping and partner conversations, which will seek to identify a local partner to support each focus group. The surveys and focus group semi-structured interviews will be developed and iterated upon in collaboration with partners.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Initial Partner Engagement Completed	December 31, 2025
Research Approach Defined	December 31, 2025
Survey Protocol Developed	May 31, 2026
Focus Group/Interview Protocol Developed	May 31, 2026

### Activity 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Research

**Activity Budget:** \$65,000

**Activity Description:**

The second activity focuses on data collection. This activity will include travel throughout Minnesota to conduct about ten focus groups, which will be hosted along with a local partner and will follow the focus group interview protocol developed in activity 1.

The team will distribute surveys to identified participants in EJ areas across the state, with the vast majority mailed but noting exceptions for hand delivery to under-represented communities such as unhoused populations, and the possibility for some online surveys. Surveys will collect primarily quantitative data and will follow the survey protocol developed in activity 1. All surveys will be delivered with a return envelope and ability to collect a \$5 incentive if the participant completes the survey (as recommended by scientific literature).

Finally, we will identify, plan, and conduct ten interviews to collect stories from EJ area residents to add depth to the data being collected. These will be led by a subgrantee to be determined, but likely using a partner such as Jothsna Harris from Change Narrative or Drew Arrieta, a freelance storyteller and visual artist. Photos will be collected during in person interviews to supplement the stories as they are shared in our final products.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Distribute 5,000 surveys, primarily by mail	September 30, 2026
Conduct 10 focus groups	September 30, 2026
Collect 10 stories	December 31, 2026

### Activity 3: Research Analysis, Writing, and Presentation

**Activity Budget:** \$129,750

**Activity Description:**

Activity 3 will analyze the data collected in activity 2. Surveys will be primarily quantitatively analyzed using various forms of averages and distributions across all survey data, and including breakdown by demographics assuming sufficient survey results are received. Focus group discussions will be transcribed, coded, and analyzed using role-ordered matrix and other qualitative analysis techniques, including the identification of trends, themes, and quotes for use in the final report. Stories will be drafted.

Once key themes from the three data collection techniques are identified, we will meet to discuss and hone them with project partners, including willing participants from focus groups, compensating them for their time. We will summarize the data in a report, one pager(s), and at least one Powerpoint presentation to share with stakeholders. We will engage a design consultant to help polish and finalize these deliverables. We will print at least 100 copies of the final report and one pager(s) for distribution to partners and interested parties. The team will present at at least one conference and hope to present our results to other decision-makers as well. The final products will also be hosted on various websites of project partners and available for free download.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Analyze surveys	May 31, 2027
Analyze focus groups	May 31, 2027
Write stories	June 30, 2027
Draft report	September 30, 2027
Finalize report, presentation, one pagers	December 31, 2027
Make at least one presentation based on research findings	December 31, 2027
Print and distribute 100 copies of report and one-pagers	December 31, 2027

## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Maggie Schuppert	CURE	Campaigns Director	Yes
Elise Harrington	University of Minnesota	Assistant Professor, Humphrey School of Public Affairs, Center for Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy	Yes
Nazir Khan	Minnesota Environmental Justice Table	Founder	Yes

## 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?**

At least 100 reports will be distributed to key stakeholders and discussion of findings will be encouraged through one-pagers and stakeholder presentation(s). Deliverables will be made publicly available for free access on several websites, including project partners' web pages, hubs like the Climate Advocacy Lab, and social and local media. Findings will be absorbed into the priorities and approaches of project partners including Waxwing, CURE, the University of Minnesota (via Elise Harrington's team), Rainbow Research, and the Minnesota EJ Table. This will include building new partnerships and solidarities to address climate inequities and protect environmental health in Minnesota.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Sachiko Graber

**Job Title:** Climate & Equity Consultant

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

Sachiko (Sachi) Graber (she/they) is an experienced researcher, project manager, and community engagement lead in the environmental sector.

**Climate and Environmental Justice (EJ) Experience:** Sachi worked for four years with The Nature Conservancy in Minnesota and the Dakotas, where they conducted a 9-month environmental justice scoping process to assess the landscape, led the formation of an environmental justice project, steered the organization's national environmental justice learning network, and coordinated the organization's climate mitigation work. Sachi is a member of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's Environmental Justice Advisory Group and collaborates with relevant organizations in Minnesota such as the EJ Table, Midwest Farmers of Color Collective, Land Stewardship Project, Rainbow Research, CURE, and more. Sachi was the recipient of The Nature Conservancy's global Trailblazer Award in 2023 for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice and holds a certificate in Inclusive Leadership and the Power of Workplace Diversity. Sachi's prior work with the Peace Corps and RMI also included a significant focus on community voice, equity, and inclusion.

**Financial and Project Management Experience:** Sachi led the development and implementation of several projects at their prior jobs at RMI and The Nature Conservancy. At The Nature Conservancy, Sachi led the climate mitigation program, was responsible for the climate team's budget, and researched and authored reports. They founded their new organization, Waxwing Consulting, in 2023 and have seen it grow into a profitable enterprise with multiple contractual relationships since its outset. Sachi is an experienced finance manager, having previously overseen program and project budgets as well as building financial models for community-scale solar energy projects. They have supervised peers on

projects as well as managed staff through their positions. They received project management training at clean energy nonprofit RMI while in Colorado and were a Harvard Mentor program graduate at The Nature Conservancy.

**Organization:** Waxwing Consulting LLC - Climate and Equity Consulting

**Organization Description:**

Waxwing Consulting LLC provides climate and equity services to organizations aligned with a vision of climate and environmental justice. In addition to supporting organizational transitions to Waxwing provides modeling, analysis, policy, and facilitation services. Waxwing Consulting was developed as an alternative to the nonprofit industrial complex, addressing climate and equity issues through a transparent structure without the bias of donor influence. Waxwing Consulting is guided by a three-part vision: 1) Equitable support for all Minnesotans to thrive despite the changing climate; 2) Emissions mitigation as recommended by the best climate science, including the knowledge all of us have to share; and 3) Those with power to shape climate action understand why it is important, and actively work to include all perspectives with a focus on those from under-represented and vulnerable communities.

Waxwing Consulting LLC is incorporated in Minnesota and holds the following certifications: Small, Woman-owned, Minority-owned, and Emerging Small Business Enterprise with the CERT Program; Target Market program participant with the City of Minneapolis; Disadvantaged Business Enterprise through MNUCP; and Targeted Group Small Business with the State of Minnesota.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Sachiko Graber		Project Manager			10%	0.15		\$42,000
Research Associate		Focus group lead and general research oversight; hired under Waxwing Consulting			10%	0.35		\$77,500
Research fellow/intern		Survey lead and research assistant; hired under Waxwing Consulting			0%	0.31		\$38,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$157,500</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
University of Minnesota	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Research oversight, advice, data collection structuring, and content expertise				0.03		\$10,000
CURE	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Research oversight, stakeholder engagement, and content expertise				0.03		\$5,000
Storyteller	Sub award	Storytelling process - interview development, interviews, and story writing				0.03		\$6,000
Report Designer	Sub award	Report editing & design				0.03		\$5,000
Rainbow Research	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Technical advisor on EJ community engagement and research structure; relationship development; Tribal engagement lead. Regular touch bases to ensure we are pushing EJ research and knowledge.				0.03		\$7,500
N/A	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Honoraria for partners to provide input on planned survey/focus group process and protocol development, \$250/h				0		\$5,000
N/A	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Honoraria for local focus group interviewer/partners, \$500*4				0		\$2,000
N/A	Professional or Technical	Honoraria for focus group participants, 80 participants * \$200 each				0		\$16,000



	Service Contract							
N/A	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Honoraria for partners providing feedback on key findings before finalizing report - \$150 * 10 partners				0		\$1,500
Minnesota Environmental Justice Table	Professional or Technical Service Contract	Research oversight, stakeholder connection and engagement, content expertise, and thought partner for how findings can influence the state's environmental space.				0.05		\$10,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$68,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
	Equipment	equipment and software	for interview and survey transcription, coding					\$500
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$500</b>
<b>Capital Expenditures</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Acquisitions and Stewardship</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Travel In Minnesota</b>								
	Conference Registration Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	1 conference to present findings to maximize impact	1 conference to present findings to maximize impact					\$1,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	12 trips around the State of Minnesota, estimate 100 miles round trip from Minneapolis. \$0.67/mi and \$100/h for traveler	To engage Greater MN communities and collect data					\$6,000
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Hotel for travel, assume 12 nights at \$150/night	To engage Greater MN communities and collect data					\$1,800
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	per diem for meals on travel days - \$50/day, 2 days per overnight	To engage Greater MN communities and collect data					\$1,200

							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$10,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Survey printing, translation, and distribution fees	To mail surveys to EJ area communities to collect broader data about environmental concerns	X				\$11,000
	Publication	Print final report and 1-pagers	To create hard resources that can be shared with participants as well as with partners					\$2,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$13,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$249,000</b>

## Classified Staff or Generally Ineligible Expenses

Category/Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Justification Ineligible Expense or Classified Staff Request
<b>Printing and Publication</b>	Printing	Survey printing, translation, and distribution fees	<p>Includes printing surveys, translation, paying for a service to distribute them, and providing \$5 per completed survey as scientifically proven incentive for people to fill them out. Payment for survey completion is a scientifically backed mechanism that increases survey response rates and will allow us to acquire greater detail about EJ area perspectives.</p> <p>Sources: Jeannine M. James and Richard Bolstein, "Large Monetary Incentives and Their Effect on Mail Survey Response Rates" <a href="https://www.jstor.org/stable/2749201">https://www.jstor.org/stable/2749201</a>; Eleanor Singer and Richard A. Kulka, "Paying Respondents for Survey Participation," National Academies <a href="https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/10206/chapter/6">https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/10206/chapter/6</a>; Susan Mitchell, Colette Lamothe-Galette, and Frank Potter, "Survey Response Incentives for a Low-Income Population: What Works?" Mathematica Policy Research, November 2003 <a href="https://www.mathematica.org/-/media/publications/pdfs/surveyresponse.pdf">https://www.mathematica.org/-/media/publications/pdfs/surveyresponse.pdf</a>; Floyd, I. (October 24, 2023), "How much research participants want to be paid," <a href="https://www.tremendous.com/blog/how-much-research-incentives-pay-participants/">https://www.tremendous.com/blog/how-much-research-incentives-pay-participants/</a>; Rey-Biel, P. (2014), On the relative efficiency of performance pay and noncontingent incentives, Journal of the European Economic Association 12(1), DOI:10.1111/jeea.12062.</p>

## Non ENRTF Funds

Category	Specific Source	Use	Status	Amount
<b>State</b>				
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Non-State</b>				
Cash	GAIA	CURE funding from GAIA to investigate rural MN perspectives on trash incinerators	Secured	\$5,000
In-Kind	Waxwing Consulting LLC staff time for 2024 summer pilot project	Pilot project in Red Wing in 2024 will inform this broader research project in 2025.	Secured	\$8,500
Cash	TBD	To support researcher time in summer 2024 pilot that will inform the 2025 study	Potential	\$20,000
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$33,500</b>
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$33,500</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$282,500**

**This amount accurately reflects total project cost?**

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [d10caddb-8d0.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Map of Minnesota's Environmental Justice Areas of Concern provided by the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency on the ArcGIS platform...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
Financial Capacity Note	<a href="#">0b067d60-024.pdf</a>

### Supplemental Attachments

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

Title	File
Letter of Support - LSP	<a href="#">c6a92953-d85.pdf</a>
Letter of Support - CURE	<a href="#">a142cc13-869.pdf</a>
Letter of Support - Elise Harrington - U of M	<a href="#">408b1609-8d8.pdf</a>
Budget and Justification for U of M contract	<a href="#">2dc31ced-7fd.pdf</a>
Scope of Work for U of M contract	<a href="#">99554977-942.pdf</a>
Letter of Support - Rainbow Research	<a href="#">e2efd54d-79e.pdf</a>
Comprehensive project budget	<a href="#">aabf0fa1-bed.xlsx</a>
Letter of Support - MN EJ Table	<a href="#">22a72a9b-d82.pdf</a>

## Administrative Use

**Does your project include restoration or acquisition of land rights?**

No

**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?**

Yes

**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:**

Sachiko Graber, Waxwing Consulting LLC; Elise Harrington, University of Minnesota; Maggie Schuppert, CURE;  
Nazir Khan, Minnesota Environmental Justice Table