



# Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund

## 2025 Request for Proposal

### General Information

**Proposal ID:** 2025-274

**Proposal Title:** Microtargeting Recycling Messaging for Better Environmental Outcomes

### Project Manager Information

**Name:** Lori Nelson

**Organization:** Recycling Association of Minnesota

**Office Telephone:** (651) 338-3375

**Email:** ramrecycle@comcast.net

### Project Basic Information

**Project Summary:** With a substantial amount of recyclables going to disposal, RAM proposes to pilot data-driven messaging to select Minnesotans to drive higher recycling rates that can be spread statewide.

**ENRTF Funds Requested:** \$554,000

**Proposed Project Completion:** September 30, 2027

**LCCMR Funding Category:** Environmental Education (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?**

Statewide

**When will the work impact occur?**

During the Project

## Narrative

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

Minnesota could be conserving more natural resources through improved recycling. Despite robust infrastructure, Minnesotans (according to the MPCA) still are throwing away an estimated 1.2 million tons of recyclable material valued around \$285 million, at a disposal cost of more than \$200 million.

Recyclable material capture studies from The Recycling Partnership show that the average single-family household in the U.S. generates 750 lbs. of recyclables each year, approximately 350 lbs. of which are lost to landfills or incineration due to resident behavior stemming from confusion and lack of confidence in how to recycle.

Factors contributing to consumer confusion include: national and local news stories about reduced demand for American recyclables from China; the misconception that plastic recycling is a myth; misleading manufacturer claims about the recyclability of their packaging, and inconsistent recycling instructions.

If this pilot project were successful and scaled up in Minnesota, it would add to existing environmental benefits, which are already substantial. On climate (using MPCA data), in 2019 “Minnesota saved roughly 4.1 MMTCO<sub>2</sub>E using current waste management practices. This equates to removing annual emissions from 891,000 vehicles.”

### **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.**

To fill this confusion gap, RAM and The Recycling Partnership’s Center for Sustainable Behavior & Impact will import data driven strategies that have shown up to a 38 percent increase in curbside recycling in other pilot communities.

We will target two communities. In each community, RAM will work with local government and the agency or company that picks up curbside recycling. In each community, one truck route will be a control, while residents of three routes will receive a different set of messages using mailers and cart tags. Recycling tonnage data from each route in the months prior will be recorded in pounds per household. After messaging is used for six to ten weeks, the team will record recycling capture rates over the course of several months.

The three intervention approaches would be logical, emotional, and empathetic messaging. Logical messaging stresses how recycling makes logical sense. Emotional messaging points to recycling as the right thing to do. Empathetic messaging acknowledges consumer frustration that recycling is often confusing and proceeds to provide correct information. We wish to duplicate results from a similar project in Ohio that netted a 16 percent (emotional) and 38 percent (empathetic) increase.

### **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?**

Following the intervention, the research team will run a second capture rate study, analyze recycling and garbage route tons, and analyze household set-out rates to determine the impact of the intervention. By estimating the mix of recyclables in each truckload, the team will calculate resource conservation benefits (trees conserved, carbon emissions avoided, energy and water savings, etc.). This will be summarized in a public report for the LCCMR and any interested parties. The methodology for these calculations is common in the recycling field. The cost per ton and per household for the interventions will also be calculated.

## Activities and Milestones

### Activity 1: Recruit and select community partners; finalize project design

**Activity Budget:** \$277,000

**Activity Description:**

The team will recruit four communities with the following attributes:

- Universal weekly curbside recycling access with high participation (estimated or measured)
- Collecting 350-400 pounds of recyclables per household
- Similar demographics: ~\$50-\$100k median household income, at least 30% non-white population, predominately English speaking
- Large enough to allow for 4 measurable areas with a minimum of 20,000 households

RAM and The Recycling Partnership will use census data and reach out to municipal and county recycling officials as well as private haulers and Minnesota’s Recycling Education Committee.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Identify likely community partners and select four participants.	September 30, 2025
Conduct government/industry stakeholder interviews.	December 31, 2025
Survey residents of participating communities.	December 31, 2025
Develop pilot interventions.	March 31, 2026
Testing and refinement of messaging.	March 31, 2026

### Activity 2: Intervention Deployment and Evaluation

**Activity Budget:** \$277,000

**Activity Description:**

Prior to deployment, the research team will run capture rate studies to determine the baseline rate at which program recyclables are captured and the levels of contamination. Route tonnage data will also be collected from the hauler, municipality, or county. The team will then deploy the desired messaging using direct mail and cart hang tags during a six to ten week period. Partners that haul the recyclable material to a truck scale will report their tonnage for another two months. The project team will take several months to analyze and report the data. Deliverables, including a final report, will be offered for presentation at the annual RAM/SWANA conference, Association of Recycling Managers annual workshop, waste hauler meetings, Solid Waste Administrators Association annual retreat, and the Recycling Education Committee. Templates for artwork and messaging will be available to any community or recycling hauler in the state, and can be posted on RAM’s website.

**Activity Milestones:**

Description	Approximate Completion Date
Baseline community measurement	March 31, 2026
Scaled deployment	June 30, 2026
Post-intervention measurement	August 31, 2026
Data analysis	December 31, 2026
Synthesis and deliverables	March 31, 2027
Share deliverables with the recycling community at large through conferences, webinars, and publications.	September 30, 2027



## Project Partners and Collaborators

Name	Organization	Role	Receiving Funds
Mark Rust	Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	The MPCA's solid waste section oversees the Recycling Education Committee described in the proposal.	No
Louise Bruce	The Recycling Partnership's Center for Sustainable Behavior and Impact	Managing Director	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?**

The team expects to share findings with the following: First, RAM hosts an annual conference for 400 recycling and solid waste professionals and occasional webinars. Second, the state's Recycling Education Committee coordinated by the MPCA meets regularly to share ideas for use in member communities. Third, we would present the findings to the Solid Waste Administrators Association, which includes county staff throughout Minnesota, and the Association of Recycling Managers, a group of metro-area recycling coordinators. A report and artwork would be available on RAM's website. If Minnesota passes extended producer responsibility for packaging, we would share with packaging producers.

## Project Manager and Organization Qualifications

**Project Manager Name:** Lori Nelson

**Job Title:** Executive Director

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

Lori brings a diverse background to the Recycling Association of Minnesota. She is a licensed attorney who has over 25 years of experience as an executive leader in the nonprofit sector, most recently as the Executive Director for the Woodbury Community Foundation. Lori has worked extensively with conservation organizations, foundations and philanthropic organizations, business interests, and political advocacy groups. She has served as President of the Richfield Chamber of Commerce, CEO of the Richfield Tourism Promotion Board, Executive Director of Friends of the Minnesota Valley, and as the Heartland Regional Director of the National Parks Conservation Association. Lori also has her own nonprofit consulting business.

Throughout her career, Lori has provided leadership in the areas of fundraising and donor development, strategic planning, marketing and branding, board development, membership growth, program evaluation, implementing best management practices, and ensuring compliance. She has worked in start-up situations as well as working with growing organizations and those in crisis.

Lori has a Juris Doctorate from Hamline University School of Law, a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science (summa cum laude) from St. Cloud State University, and a Mini-MBA from the University of St. Thomas School of Executive Education.

**Organization:** Recycling Association of Minnesota

**Organization Description:**

The Recycling Association of Minnesota provides leadership, advocacy, and education to encourage the responsible use of resources through recycling and supporting modes of waste reduction.

## Budget Summary

Category / Name	Subcategory or Type	Description	Purpose	Gen. Ineligible	% Benefits	# FTE	Classified Staff?	\$ Amount
<b>Personnel</b>								
Executive Director		Provides strategic direction and oversight of the project			20%	0.34		\$32,000
Program Director		Implements the project and works with contractor, partners			20%	1.13		\$94,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$126,000</b>
<b>Contracts and Services</b>								
The Recycling Partnership's Center for Sustainable Behavior and Impact	Sub award	The Center developed the methodology for this project in another state and will be the primary program designer and advisor.				1.13		\$375,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$375,000</b>
<b>Equipment, Tools, and Supplies</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</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	RAM/SWANA Conference	Two registrations and travel for 2026 and 2027 conferences					\$2,000

	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging							
	Miles/ Meals/ Lodging	Subawardee air travel/hotel to MN (6 trips x 2 x \$1000); 20 in-state trips at 100 miles each for two staff plus 10 overnight stays at \$125/night x 2 nights x 2 staff in Greater MN if needed	In state travel to oversee project in four communities					\$19,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$21,000</b>
<b>Travel Outside Minnesota</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
<b>Printing and Publication</b>								
	Printing	Recycling flyers, hang-tags, mailers	40,000 households receiving mailers and hangtags at \$8 household					\$32,000
							<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>\$32,000</b>
<b>Other Expenses</b>								
							<b>Sub Total</b>	-
							<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>\$554,000</b>



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
<b>State</b>				
Cash	Industry Trade Associations (including possible EPR Producer Responsibility Organization if EPR legislation is passed) and individual companies that produce or use recycled commodities (paper, steel, aluminum, plastic, glass, etc.)	Support of printed material, technical services	Potential	\$100,000
Cash	County governments responsible for solid waste and recycling	Printed material and technical services	Potential	\$100,000
			<b>State Sub Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>
<b>Non-State</b>				
			<b>Non State Sub Total</b>	-
			<b>Funds Total</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

**Total Project Cost: \$754,000**

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

Yes

## Attachments

### Required Attachments

#### *Visual Component*

File: [a631d2c7-9fd.pdf](#)

#### *Alternate Text for Visual Component*

Examples of Different Motivational Messaging from The Recycling Partnership...

#### *Financial Capacity*

Title	File
RAM 2022 990 Tax Return	<a href="#">df3bf275-d00.pdf</a>

#### *Board Resolution or Letter*

Title	File
Board Resolution for Recycling Association of Minnesota	<a href="#">bb5b0233-904.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?**

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:**

Paul Gardner, Chair, Recycling Association of Minnesota; Louise Bruce, Managing Director, Center for Sustainable Behavior & Impact, The Recycling Partnership

