



Grant Application

Grant Name - Bridging Language and Culture in Conservation

Grant ID - C26-0195

Organization - Mille Lacs SWCD

Allocation	Bridging Conservation 2026	Grant Contact	Susan Shaw
Total Grant Amount Requested	\$45,000.00	County(s)	Mille Lacs
Grant Match Amount	\$0.00	12 Digit HUC(s)	
Required Match %	0%	Fiscal Agent	
Other Amount		Application Submitted Date	
Project Abstract	<p>The Mille Lacs Soil and Water Conservation District (MLSWCD) will improve how it shares conservation information with people who do not speak English as their first language. The project will focus on building relationships with trusted community members from groups such as Spanish-speaking workers, Asian farmers, Amish communities, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Instead of creating outreach on its own, MLSWCD will work directly with these communities to understand what information they need, what barriers they face, and the best ways to communicate. Together, we will develop conservation messages that are clear, culturally relevant, and shared in ways people can trust.</p> <p>The goal is to help more people learn about and use conservation practices that protect soil and water, such as improving soil health and managing runoff. By building trust and supporting local leaders, this project will create lasting connections and make it easier for these communities to stay involved in conservation over time.</p>		
Proposed Measurable Outcomes	<p>Mille Lacs SWCD will improve conservation outreach by working with trusted leaders in non-English-speaking communities. Together, we will identify needs and create culturally relevant messages. Outcomes will be measured by number of people reached, materials created, partnerships formed, and increased inquiries or participation in conservation programs. This work will build lasting relationships and improve access to conservation information.</p>		

✓ ****Required**** MN Statute 16B.981 Subd. 2 (6) requires that no current principals of a grantee have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years. A principal is defined as a public official, a board member, or staff (paid or volunteer) with the authority to access funds or determine how funds are used provided by this grant opportunity. By checking this box, I attest that no current principal of my organization with authority to access funds or determine how funds are used has been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last 10 years.

Narrative

How does your organization’s history, mission, and community engagement strategies align with the purpose of the Bridging Conservation Program in creating or expanding conservation outreach and education to non-native English-speaking communities?

MLSWCD identifies effective and inclusive outreach as core to our identity and is essential in meeting our purpose of effecting voluntary soil and water conservation. MLSWCD has an internal policy which states that “MLSWCD recognizes that fulfilling its statutory mission requires public trust build through transparent and inclusive decision-making...” this policy is integrated into how both staff and board work for the common good of community stakeholders, which includes non-native English-speakers. Staff and board members are testing strategies to talk to people that we have not talked to in the past, and to better communicate with those we’ve already connected with. We are actively testing our understanding of the impacts of programs and policies, to evaluate the social and economic impacts, not just the environmental impacts of our work.

Explain your organization’s capacity to effectively engage non-native English-speaking communities. Include any relevant partnerships, staff expertise, previous grants received, or training.

MLSWCD has strong outreach and engagement capacity that includes staff with decades of experience, as well as energetic and imaginative staff with 2-3 years of experience and a lot of enthusiasm for engaging people that the SWCD has not previously worked with. The district has a practice of civic organizing which prioritizes finding out the social, economic and environmental impacts of our program. This directs staff to find stakeholders we have not met and learn from them. MLSWCD has a decades-long, established relationship with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (MLBO) Natural Resources Department. We have experienced outreach and social cultural communication barriers between the MLBO and SWCD, if not direct language barriers. Because of this established relationship it will not be difficult to identify the right MLBO contacts work with. MLSWCD staff have attended BWSR Tribal Relations training and are aware BWSR has a Tribal Liaison that might be available to provide input. MLSWCD has existing staff currently focused on the ag community so it would be a natural step to expand outreach to the Asian, Hispanic and Amish communities in the area that are farming various crops and livestock. MLSWCD also has a strong working relationship with Isanti and Sherburne SWCDs in the Rum watershed and will plan to partner with those SWCDs because the non-English speaking communities live and work throughout the region.

Describe the non-native English-speaking communities your project serves. Describe the communities’ current needs and barriers to accessing conservation information

or resources, and how your project will address these gaps.

Spanish speakers are commonly hired as ag worker in this area at large dairy and crop farms. While some Spanish speakers are seasonal immigrants, many are citizens and this is their home. They are small business owners or are employed locally with contractors. Businesses like restaurants and construction contractors all have roles in conservation so MLSWCD will not overlook outreach to these stakeholders as well as to those involved in agriculture.

There are several small family farms of Asian-Pacific Islander heritage whose primary language is not English because we have had to communicate through younger generation relatives in the past. These families are growing local fruits and vegetables for farmers markets and could benefit from conservation initiatives, so we want to do a better job of outreach to them.

We do not want to overlook the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe first language speakers, and the two large Amish communities in the Milaca area. While most both communities do speak English, it may be of importance to those communities to see information provided in the language that they culturally identify with. Amish have limited access to the internet but do have very effective means of communication within their community.

Additionally, Milaca is only a 45-minute quick commute from St. Cloud where there is a large Samali community. We believe there are local goat and sheep farmers supplying those communities with culturally important goat and sheep meat. There is likely an opportunity here to tailor some outreach.

And finally, a language or cultural barrier leads to simply having less community connection, and therefore less opportunities to get information passed to them through “the grapevine”. Some of our most successful outreach happens through word-of-mouth means. For example, we’ve helped to facilitate “farmer-led” meetings, as we continue this effort, we may want to facilitate a separate experience for them with topics discussed in their language.

Describe your organization's proposed activities and explain how these activities will achieve anticipated outcomes in promoting conservation awareness, education, or behavior change among non-native English-speaking communities.

MLSWCD will work with trusted community members to meet non-native English-speaking community leaders. We will identify people who are trusted within their own networks, and who indicate knowledge of a conservation need or interest in conjunction with a language or cultural barrier. We will ask them to play a role that they would be comfortable with. By partnering directly with those local leaders, we will be able to target the best means for translating a conservation message and best method to disseminate that information. We will be careful to ensure that the solution strategy is developed by the input of those people invested in the non-native English -speaking communities.

We will be careful to get input on the conservation message needed before committing to a particular message. Our starting assumption is that non-native English speakers are not finding out about the technical assistance and cost assistance available through established NRCS and SWCD programs. We assume non-native English-speaking farmers would benefit from cover crops and livestock conservation water quality info. The Amish community appears to use many deep tillage practices, and we already know they are concerned about safe drinking water. The Hispanic speaking community is diversely employed so we will need to connect with farm workers who do field and dairy work, but also restaurant business owners who can play a role in stormwater management in town. The MLBO has a small, busy, natural resources department, much like a small SWCD. If we receive the funding, we will offer time and/or funds to produce non-English language conservation messaging for one of their many

conservation program areas. They will be able to advise us on what conservation message to target.

With any outreach, we want to start conversations and introduce new ideas without coming across as telling people they are doing something wrong. This challenge is compounded when a language or cultural barrier is in play.

How will your organization's proposed activities ensure that conservation information, training, and programs are linguistically and culturally accessible to the communities you serve?

MLSWCD will work directly with people who are trusted in each non-native English-speaking community for linguistic and cultural advice. We will use the grant to get input from each community on what sources they already trust for translation. But MLSWCD can get additional input from NRCS, the county attorney's office or other non-native English-speaking service organizations in the St. Cloud area.

While the MLSWCD's civic organizing method of work will go much deeper into evaluating the social, economic and environmental impacts of programs and practices in each community, we will be measuring the input we receive as a form of community survey.

Goals will include confirming communication needs in the area, finding key people/leaders, and figuring out the key barriers through those leaders. This means we plan to be able to produce tangible, visual representations to document and track what we learn using tools such as Venn diagrams or bar charts.

How will your education and outreach efforts create lasting conservation impacts within the community? Describe how your project will build community knowledge, leadership, or self-sustaining conservation practices. This could include sharing resources and information with other partners.

MLSWCD will ensure lasting conservation impacts by building relationships with trusted community members and involving them directly in developing outreach strategies. By working with people who are already connected within non-native English-speaking communities, we will build local knowledge and leadership around conservation topics.

These community partners will help share information in ways that are culturally relevant and trusted, increasing the likelihood that conservation practices are understood and adopted. Over time, this approach supports peer-to-peer learning and reduces reliance on SWCD staff as the only source of information.

By creating an ongoing network of community leaders, MLSWCD will be able to adapt outreach as needs change, ensuring communication remains relevant and effective.

We will also share what we learn with partner organizations and neighboring SWCDs to strengthen regional outreach efforts.

This relationship-based approach builds a foundation for long-term engagement, helping communities stay informed, involved, and active in conservation beyond the life of the grant.

Application Budget

<i>Activity Name</i>	<i>Activity Description</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>State Grant \$ Requested</i>
Materials development &	Developing and publishing materials to bridge language and	Education/Information	\$9,500.00

<i>Activity Name</i>	<i>Activity Description</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>State Grant \$ Requested</i>
marketing	cultural barriers to conservation messaging.		
community organizing & engagement	Targeted civic organizing & engagement, making initial contacts, exploring and understanding language and cultural barriers to conservation marketing.	Project Development	\$35,500.00