CAFES Ottawa
Community Action for Environmental Sustainability

Walk the Pathway

Nature, Learning and Belonging on Ottawa's Poets' Pathway

CAFES application to The Commonwell L.E.A.F. program | October 30, 2026

About CAFES

Community Action for Environmental Sustainability (CAFES) is a local non-profit organization that builds environmental leadership through our growing membership-based network of over 250 community groups, environmental organizations, key stakeholders and individuals - representing more than 50 neighbourhoods across all 24 wards in Ottawa, including rural, suburban and urban communities. Our mandate is to promote local action to create healthier, greener and more participatory communities; to be an effective advocacy network enabling environmentally sound decision-making by citizens, leaders and policymakers; and to build community by connecting like-minded individuals to work together on local issues, fostering discussion, problem solving, collective action and best practices.

Our active programs and outreach serve to educate and inspire citizens on important issues, such as conservation and restoration, tree canopy, invasive species, biodiversity, climate resiliency, renewable energy transitions, active/public transportation, sustainable waste management practices, extreme weather preparedness, and more. We work closely with our network members to form policy positions and recommendations and to advocate for progressive environmental legislation at the municipal level.

CAFES has extensive experience running community-based projects and events.
This includes annual tree planting, tree giveaways, nature walks, 'Green Drinks' monthly eco-networking, university-based youth engagement, an annual sustainability showcase, public lectures, educational workshops, caucus meetings and community dialogues. We maintain regular social media and website content and produce a monthly e-newsletter to over 3,000 subscribers. Our programming serves an average of 100,000 citizens per year.





Images: CAFES co-hosting a fungi nature walk in September 2026; CAFES' community tree planting in October 2026; CAFES at a community eco-fair August 2026

Our Project Team

Our “Walk the Pathway” project will be led by CAFES. Erica Shardlow, the Trees and Greenspace Coordinator, will be the project manager, with oversight from Angela Keller Herzog, the Executive Director, and the CAFES Board of Directors. An advisory team will guide project delivery: with representatives from the Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital, the Poet's Pathway, and the Algonquin Youth Collective (confirmed partnerships).

With respect to our organization as a whole, CAFES is governed by a volunteer-run Board of Directors, with our current slate comprising of 11 individuals. We have a paid staff team of six employees, including our Executive Director. The staff roles include an Operations Manager; Trees and Greenspace Coordinator; Energy Program Lead; Events Coordinator; and Communications Coordinator. Our team includes three senior-level volunteers who fill the roles of Energy Program Strategist; Graphic Designer; and Science Communications.

Accompanying our staff team and Board, CAFES is made up of our 250+ organizational and individual paid memberships. Members include community associations, environmental organizations, grassroots groups and individual residents. Our community association representatives are often environment committee chairs or green point-persons in their local associations. Our individual members are citizens active in their communities and committed to ecological balance.

Our members are a key part of our team at CAFES as we actively work together to take collective action in Ottawa. We maintain regular communication with our members on project developments and may utilize our extensive connections to amplify project promotion and implementation.

Project Outline

The project

CAFES will run a two-year series of 20 free guided nature walks on Poets' Pathway, a 35 km public trail on National Capital Commission and City of Ottawa land. We may extend the series to the Chief Pinesi portage trail. Walks will cover nature identification, birding, mushrooms, invasive species and seasonal ecology. Local naturalists will lead them, together with Algonquin youth leaders sharing Indigenous ways of knowing the land. Our project will begin in January 2027 and end by December 31, 2028.

Why it matters

In 2025 and 2026, CAFES's guided walks consistently drew more interest than we could accommodate. We also experienced an uptick of Newcomers approaching CAFES asking how

they can get involved in outdoor nature programming. It is evident that people are looking for ways to connect to land but not sure how to access opportunities.

The health benefits of time in nature are well documented, but access is uneven. Newcomers, Indigenous community members and families without cars are the least likely to find their way onto a trail like this. That gap just got wider: CCI Ottawa, the city's leading settlement organization, lost most of its community connections staff to federal cuts in 2026, and its outdoor walks were cut.

Who we will reach

Our focus is newcomers to Ottawa and families.

Many recent immigrants come from various cultures and racial backgrounds, and like many folks with Indigenous ancestries, often experience socio-economic barriers such as low-incomes, job insecurity and housing insecurity (whether in home countries or now in Canada). Many Newcomers come from countries with unstable political climates, poverty and gender inequality. Because of these barriers, immigrants often face difficulties connecting with the land in their new community. Public transportation to natural areas is unaffordable or simply unavailable for many people.

For newcomers, walking alongside Canadian families builds the social connections that are so hard to make in a new city, and a first-hand feel for the ecology of their new home: the trees, birds and seasons that will shape life here. We will provide bus transportation to trailheads and adapt walks for mixed ages and language levels.

Through our partnership with the Algonquin Youth Collective, our walks will also be promoted to Indigenous youth and their families and the educational components of our walks will heavily focus on the histories of the land, and traditional ways of knowing and caring for the land. We will provide bus transportation to trailheads and adapt walks for mixed ages and language levels. We will provide healthy snacks during programming.

Objectives and implementation

1. We will organize 20 guided walks over two years (10 per year), with Indigenous youth leaders and local naturalists each guiding half. Charter bus transport as well as public transit fares will be provided to walk attendees to support accessibility needs and limit barriers for project participation.
2. Four full-trail monitoring rounds will be conducted by the Project Manager at 15 hours each, including assessments of trail conditions including tree hazards, flooding, and observations with direct reporting to the NCC and City for follow-up action.
3. The project manager will engage in 40 hours of partner coordination and pre-walk orientations and 20 hours of training for partner walk leaders (capacity building for external partners).

Learning and engagement

Participants learn about local ecosystems, seasonal change, how to recognize and report invasive species, and the land's Indigenous history, and gain the confidence to return on their own. Partner organizations build their own capacity to lead walks. Honorariums for Indigenous youth leaders make knowledge-sharing a concrete practice of reconciliation.

Supporting these vulnerable populations to learn in nature undoubtedly holds significant benefits for human health, wellbeing and belonging, and also will likely result in more residents becoming actively involved in caring for the environment in Ottawa and developing increased awareness of the city's valued greenspaces and biodiversity.

Improving the landscape

The Poets' Pathway is a scenic, 35-kilometre walking and biking trail in Ottawa. It serves as a living memorial to preserve urban greenspace while commemorating Canada's early national poets, particularly the Confederation Poets and writers of the *Mouvement littéraire.*

The trail starts at Britannia Beach in the west, snakes south along Pinecrest Creek and east along Nepean Creek, crosses the Rideau River, and heads north toward the Ottawa River before ending at Beechwood Cemetery.

Ottawa's urban forest has been repeatedly hit by the derecho, tornadoes and severe thunderstorms. CAFES will walk the full trail quarterly. We will report storm-damaged trees posing a hazard, flooded sections needing walkways, and other maintenance needs to the NCC and City. We will also work with the City and NCC to install interpretive panels and/or a bench, following their guidance, plus signage recognizing The Commonwell.



Image: Poet Pathway Trail Map, source: https://www.poetspathway.ca/map.htm

Support

Mayor Mark Sutcliffe's 2026 platform commits to stronger protection for Poets' Pathway. The Greenspace Alliance of Canada's Capital and the Algonquin Youth Collective strongly support the project. CAFES has longstanding working relationships with the NCC, the City of Ottawa, CCI and the Poets' Pathway stewardship group.

Project budget (2 years)

Item	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Project manager (Erica Shardlow): 200 hrs/yr × $30	$6,000	$6,000	$12,000
ED supervision: 24 hrs/yr × $50	$1,200	$1,200	$2,400
Employer costs (MERCs, ~8%)	$576	$576	$1,152
Charter bus: 5 trips/yr × ~$700	$3,500	$3,500	$7,000
OC Transpo fares for participants	$400	$400	$800
Indigenous youth leader honoraria (incl. transportation): 5 walks/yr × 2 youth × $200	$2,000	$2,000	$4,000
Guest naturalist honoraria: 5 walks/yr × $200	$1,000	$1,000	$2,000
Interpretive panels and/or bench (scope set with City/NCC)	—	$6,000	$6,000
Commonwell recognition signage	$500	—	$500
Loaner kit: binoculars, field guides	$1,000	—	$1,000
Safety: first aid, hi-vis vests	$400	—	$400
Promotion and translation of materials	$800	$400	$1,200
Refreshments	$400	$400	$800
Admin/overhead (bookkeeping, insurance)	$1,250	$1,250	$2,500
Total	**$19,026**	**$22,726**	**$41,752**

Detailed cost descriptions:

- 20 guided walks over two years (10 per year), with charter bus transport on half of them and Indigenous youth leaders and guest naturalists each on half.
- Project manager time per year: 10 walks at about 8 hours each (planning, promotion, delivery, follow-up); 4 full-trail monitoring rounds at about 15 hours each, including reporting; about 40 hours for partner coordination, CCI orientation workshops and Commonwell reporting; and about 20 hours for training partner walk leaders (capacity building).
- Indigenous youth honoraria of $200 per walk include the youth leaders' own transportation costs. Rate to be confirmed with the Algonquin Youth Collective.
- The interpretive panel/bench allocation will be scoped with the City and NCC after project confirmation.
- Employer costs estimated at 8% of wages.