



Advancing Evidence.
Improving Lives.

Healthy Students Learn Better

A clean, safe, and healthy school environment is vital for all students and staff to learn and work effectively. It is an important factor in student success and retention of school staff.^{1,2,3} Schools may require funding support to create this kind of environment.

This **Healthy Students Learn Better Practice Guide** series gives you resources, tips, and tools to create a healthy physical environment at your school.



PRACTICE GUIDE 3

Find Funding to Support School Environmental Health

PRACTICE GUIDE 3 provides ideas and tips for finding and winning funding from both informal sources (e.g., crowdfunding) and formal sources (e.g., grants). The examples of funded environmental health projects show what various schools and districts have done with different sources of funding.

Other Practice Guides in This Series



PRACTICE GUIDE 1 provides practical strategies and resources to measure, improve, and track school environmental health.



PRACTICE GUIDE 2 gets students involved in citizen science projects for school environmental health.



PRACTICE GUIDE 4 gives tips to engage partners and your community in your effort.

How can I fund my project?

Funding can come from many sources—both public and private—such as donations, service transactions, and grants.

You can search online for different funding opportunities. Do a general search using your preferred search engine or go to websites or portals for specific funding sources. Use the keyword “Madlib” (see textbox) to help you find funding opportunities that match your goals and your capacity for school environmental health initiatives or programs.

Here are three ways to raise money for school environmental health and citizen science projects and programs:

- ◆ **Crowdfunding and fundraisers**
- ◆ **Grants from private foundations**
- ◆ **Grants from state or federal sources**

Crowdfunding and Fundraisers

School leaders and advocates can use crowdfunding to collect money and resources. They do this by requesting small donations from many different people. Prosocial projects, or projects that benefit others, tell a compelling story and are likely to receive donations through crowdfunding or social media platforms.⁴

Use the “Places to Find Possible Funders” textbox to find education-focused and noneducation-focused sites that can help you reach possible donors outside your community. It is important to identify, understand, and follow school board or district regulations on crowdfunding. It may not be allowed, or it may need to meet certain requirements.

School fundraisers are another way to collect funds for student citizen science projects. These fundraisers can help pay for different parts of an environmental health program. For example, the funds raised may be used to buy and install equipment. Car washes, bake sales, talent shows, and school fairs can get the community involved. Fundraisers can showcase the school community’s talent and offer fun opportunities that raise money for resources. Combine your school fundraiser with a crowdfunding platform to reach a broader donor audience.

KEYWORD “MADLIB”

[focus area] + [geographical region name] + [funding source] + “school environmental health”

KEYWORD SUGGESTIONS

Focus area: Heat exposure, indoor air quality, pollution prevention, temperature regulation, pest control, water quality, water infrastructure, building materials, or another area of the environment

Geography: Northeast / Mid-Atlantic / Southeast / South / Midwest / Southwest / Northwest / Western United States or a specific state or county name

Funding source: crowdfunding, fundraiser, grant, public grant, private grant, or another funding source

PLACES TO FIND POSSIBLE FUNDERS

Education focused:

BetterWorld	Classy
Chuffed	DonorsChoose
ClassWish	schoolfundr

Noneducation focused:

Facebook	Indiegogo
Fundly	Instagram
Givebutter	Kickstarter
GoFundMe	StartSomeGood

CROWDFUNDING

- ◆ The Academy for Global Citizenship on Chicago's Southwest side raised 107% of its \$50,000 goal for a net-positive energy campus using Indiegogo.
- ◆ Cleveland Elementary School in Cleveland, North Carolina, won \$25,000 from the "Green Your School Fund" created by [Tom's of Maine in partnership with Donorschoose.org](#).
- ◆ School communities can register with [Project Green Schools](#) and host a "Race for the Planet" fundraiser.

FUNDRAISING

Use artificial intelligence (AI) tools available to you (e.g., ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot) to come up with fundraising ideas. For instance, Copilot produced the following ideas when given the prompt "school fundraising ideas for environmental health":

- ◆ **Walkathon for Clean Air:** Organize a walkathon to raise funds for your initiative and promote the importance of clean air and reducing your carbon footprint. Participants can collect pledges for each mile they walk. The event can feature information booths on air pollution and the steps that people can take to reduce it.
- ◆ **Earth Day Carnival:** At an Earth Day Event, have a fundraising game like "Pin the Item on the Recycling or Trash Bin" or "Guess the Carbon Footprint of This Item." Players buy tickets to play, and winners get prizes. Local businesses donate the prizes. The funds support environmental education or facilities projects for the school.



PRACTICE GUIDE 4 can help you create a compelling message and spread the word about your "Healthy Students Learn Better" fundraiser. Find key messages, social media posts, and more to help you appeal to possible donors.

Private Funding

Private funding can come from foundations, businesses, and community-based organizations. For foundations, look at grant search portals, such as [Community Foundation Locator](#), [Grant Gopher](#), [Instrumentl](#), and [eePRO from the North American Association for Environmental Education](#). Use the keyword "Madlib" to do a browser search for private funding opportunities. Consider private clubs or other organizations that may support your initiative, such as the following:

- ◆ Local businesses or religious institutions
- ◆ Community-based organizations like service clubs

Large corporations, businesses, and foundations may provide grant opportunities as well. Examples include [Lowe's](#) and the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#).

Ask the school advocates you identify to work on the action plan in Element 2 of **PRACTICE GUIDE 1** to recommend local or regional organizations. The **GLOSSARY** of this guide defines common funding terms.



EXAMPLES

PRIVATE FUNDING

- ◆ **Bray Hollow Foundation, Inc.** (Grifton, North Carolina, 2023) received an [Environmental Stewardship Grant](#) for \$15,000 from Dominion Energy to implement the Bertie to Sea program for middle and high school students. The students examined water, soil, and ecosystem qualities through field trips, simulations, and research.
- ◆ **Encampment for Citizenship/Pesticide-Free Soil Project** (Aptos, California, 2023) received a [Sparkplug Foundation](#) grant for \$15,000 to train junior and high school students and parents on how to report pesticide drift and how to advocate to the school board, city and state representatives, and community members to eliminate toxic pesticide spraying near school sites.
- ◆ **Glen Hills Middle School** (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 2022) received a [Green Team Mini-Grant](#) for \$720 from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to buy Arduino kits and cameras. Students used these supplies to detect carbon dioxide and design sensors to measure carbon dioxide, oxygen, and hydrogen on Earth. Based on these findings, they submitted a proposal to NASA to learn how these gases affect space. NASA conducted their experiment in space in May 2023!
- ◆ **High School for Environmental Studies** (New York City, New York, 2020) received an [ecoTech Grant](#) for \$2,500 through the Captain Planet Foundation. The foundation awarded the funding for 300 students to develop and use refurbished cell phones with hand-held air quality sensors to broadcast data that monitor building emissions in their community.
- ◆ **Miami Dade County School Board** (Miami, Florida, 2020) received an [ecoTech Grant](#) for \$2,500 through the Captain Planet Foundation for seventh-grade students at Rockway Middle School. The grant enabled students to learn about the biology and benefits of coral reefs and the threats to their existence. The students also learned about the important aspects of good water quality and how to test the quality of ocean water. The grant continues to help these middle-schoolers learn about their environment and different fields of science.

State and Federal Funding Opportunities

Understanding the broader funding landscape can help you identify higher education or foundation partners who work on environmental health initiatives. You may find an existing environmental initiative that could combine with your efforts.

Your state's government departments (e.g., the department of education, the department of agriculture) may have grants for environmental topics. One example is the [California Regional Environmental Education Community Network Grant](#). Your state may have a website to identify grants, such as the [North Dakota GrantWatch](#). First, go to [USA.gov/state-governments](https://www.usa.gov/state-governments) to find your state government's website. Then look for a grants portal on your state's website. The portal will have notices about funding opportunities and how to apply.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) hosts several websites for federal grants specific to environmental health. Some grants have "set asides," or funding reserved for specific communities. They may offer the best funding opportunities for schools that meet the designated criteria.

- ◆ **[EPA Air Grants and Funding](#):** Provides information on grant and rebate opportunities for topics related to air quality. This includes tips on the EPA grant application process, developing a budget, and open and closed announcements of funding opportunities.

- ◆ **[EPA Environmental Education \(EE\) Grants](#)**: Provides resources and contacts for the 2023 competition. Review this website to learn from this recent grant opportunity. The site contains a link where you can subscribe to the Environmental Education (EE) Grants Listserv.
- ◆ **[EPA Pollution Prevention Grants and Resources](#)**: Gives information on grants for states and federally recognized Tribes to inform local advocacy and action at the state and Tribal levels. Local governments and nonprofit organizations are eligible for the Source Reduction Assistance Grant to prevent pollution at the source.
- ◆ **[EPA Identifying Funding Sources for Lead Service Line Replacement](#)**: Provides links to laws and policies and funding sources for schools; small, underserved, and disadvantaged communities; and other groups in response to requirements in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that requires lead testing and the removal of lead pipes in community water supply lines.
- ◆ **[EPA Research Grants](#)**: Provides information regarding current and past research grants. This information may help you identify partners or existing grant-produced resources that could be useful background for your initiative.



EXAMPLES

STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING

- ◆ **Leipsic Local School District** (Ohio, 2024) received the [Recycle Ohio Grant](#) program award from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to help the district buy water bottle refilling stations.
- ◆ **Lower Merion Conservancy** (Pennsylvania, 2024) received an [Environmental Education Grant](#) from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. The grant is to help conduct public workshops and implement planting events. It seeks to engage students and teachers in nonpoint source water pollution lessons and real-time stream data collection.
- ◆ **Little Rock School District** (Arkansas, 2024) received a [Renew America's School Prize and Grant](#) award from the U.S. Department of Energy. The District will partner with Energia and ProtectIED to improve energy use and air quality at 17 schools in low-income communities. The aim is to improve student academic achievement by reducing student and staff absences.
- ◆ **The Go Green Initiative** (United States, 2024) received [grant funding to address indoor air pollution at schools](#) from the EPA. The grant provides education and training for school staff and administrators and school board officials involved in improving school indoor air quality and reducing climate pollution across all 50 states.
- ◆ **The University of Utah** (Utah, 2024) received grant funding to address indoor air pollution at schools from the EPA. The grant supports the development of indoor air quality management and greenhouse gas reduction plans for schools in both rural and urban areas of Utah and Nevada, as well as within the Northern Arapaho Tribe in Wyoming.



These examples are not only great for funding ideas but also showcase funding specific to citizen science. For more examples of citizen science in action, check out **PRACTICE GUIDE 2**.

Grant Writing Tips



Step 1: PREPARE

While you are searching for the right funding opportunity, you and your school advocate champions may find resources to help you learn about grant writing and prepare to write an application. For example, the federal government offers the [Grants Learning Center](#) and [Grants 101](#), which include detailed resources and a community blog.

There are many state-specific resources. One example is the California Grants Portal, which provides [Grant Search Tools and Writing Resources](#). Another example is the Texas Department of State Health Services, which has a [Grant Writing 101](#) page on its website. [Candid](#) is a private organization that offers free online courses and sample documents. Your local library may also provide grant writing resources.



Follow these steps to set yourself up for grant writing success:

1. Once you have identified a grant competition that fits with your idea, carefully review the details again.

Determine if it is feasible for you to apply and to conduct the work if you win funding. Next, think about partners and develop a timeline.

2. Think about partnering with people who can be part of your proposal writing team. In Element 2 of [PRACTICE GUIDE 1](#), the first step was to identify school advocates who could champion your environmental health initiative. These champions may have specific skills or experience that are useful when applying for a grant. Use [PRACTICE GUIDE 4](#) to get input on your school environment findings and solutions. Ask for suggestions on the most pressing concerns. Also ask for feedback on whether your ideas are feasible.

3. Build new relationships or strengthen existing ones to collaborate on funding applications. Neighboring schools or districts with similar needs can work together to develop a successful grant application. Other partners may include community-based organizations, local colleges, and local environmental advocacy groups.

4. Create a timeline for preparation. Start with the grant deadline and work backward to figure out due dates for each task. Think about who should review the application, who needs to approve it, and how much time they need. Check if any additional forms or attachments are required or optional. Some of these may involve activities that you need to start before writing the main proposal.

Step 2: WRITE

Once you identify a possible grant, draft a grant proposal that explains your project and how it will meet the grant's requirements. Use the tips and tricks highlighted in the grant writing resources you reviewed in Step 1. Focus on how your project aligns with the funder's goals and show the funder that your team has the skills to do the work.



Use these tips to increase your chances of success:

Understand the elements of your proposal. Grant funders usually require both a technical narrative and a budget.

- ◆ The **technical component** is where you provide background and explain why you need the program (based on your investigations), how you will do it (action plan), who will benefit (target audience), why it will be successful (who will support the program and how they will support it), and how you will measure success (evaluation).
- ◆ The **budget** is where you list in detail how you will spend the funds on staff, travel, materials, infrastructure, and other needs. You may have to write a narrative that justifies the expenses. The grant typically will have a funding limitation. The funder also may have restrictions on certain types of expenses.
- ◆ You may have different people working on these two sections. They will need to communicate throughout the process for efficiency and to ensure the two components are aligned.

Use artificial intelligence (AI) to help with writing.

- ◆ Use AI to help you brainstorm ideas, find ways to reword awkward sentences, or provide the first copyedit.
- ◆ Avoid using AI to write your proposal draft. AI tools can add incorrect details. AI gets its information publicly available material (e.g., websites, news articles, databases, and social media), so plagiarism is a risk. Therefore, a human needs to write most of the proposal draft.

Make it easy for the grant reviewer to find things in your proposal.

- ◆ Be brief, clear, and concise.
- ◆ Write in the active voice instead of the passive voice.
- ◆ Use the structure of the notice of funding opportunity for headings and numbering.

ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VOICE

In the active voice, the subject of the sentence carries out the action of the verb. In the passive voice, the subject of the sentence receives the action of the verb.

The active voice clearly communicates to grant reviewers who will be responsible for an action.

EXAMPLES

ACTIVE VOICE: The Blue Water Team will test the district's water weekly to determine trends in contaminants.

PASSIVE VOICE: The school district's water will be tested weekly to determine trends in contaminants.

(Writing tips continued on next page.)

Get input from experienced colleagues.

- ◆ Ask parents or other school community members to review your grant application. Seek people with experience in grant writing or general writing and editing.
- ◆ Ask them to pay attention to your description of the problem(s) and solution(s).
 - ◆ *Are they logical?*
 - ◆ *Are they feasible?*
- ◆ Ask them to pay attention to grammar, punctuation, spelling, and writing style.
 - ◆ *Are there any errors?*
 - ◆ *Are things clear?*

Double-check that you have addressed all the requirements of the competition. This includes completing all required forms.

AVOIDING COMMON PITFALLS

Writing a successful grant begins with careful preparation and planning. Here are some common pitfalls to keep in mind during planning and writing.

Make sure that all goals and activities listed in the proposal are feasible, acceptable, relevant, and effective (FARE).

- ◆ Can you achieve the goals in the time frame set by the grant funder? **(Feasible)**
- ◆ Are the activities and tasks something that your school community would do? **(Acceptable)**
- ◆ Do the activities or goals in the grant proposal align with your school and community needs? **(Relevant)**
- ◆ Do the goals address or solve a concern in the school's physical environment? **(Effective)**

Confirm that the proposal meets all requirements.

- ◆ Look carefully at the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to make sure you meet the eligibility criteria and can address all the grant program requirements.
- ◆ Note important deadlines. These include the due date, whether a public information session will take place to ask questions, or whether you must submit a letter of intent before you can apply for the grant.



Step 3: SUBMIT

Submit Early to Submit on Time



Grant deadlines are inflexible, so, you must **submit the application on time for it to be considered**. It is best to submit the grant application a day or two before the deadline. This gives you time to problem solve if something happens during submission. For example, the online application portal crashes or a delay occurs with a mailed application.

After Submission

Be prepared for possible follow-up actions after submission and before the grant funder makes a decision. These include responding to reviewer comments and questions, negotiating contract details, or conducting a presentation to summarize your proposal.

Review feedback from the grant reviewers. This is important whether or not you win the funding. You may have an opportunity to resubmit your proposal to the same competition or a similar one. You can use the feedback to improve your next grant proposal.

Celebrate your efforts! If you receive an award, you have a plan of action. If you did not receive an award, revise the proposal and apply again. You still have an idea that sets the stage for applying elsewhere and being able to implement the program when you do receive the resources you need.



Summary

Students and staff need a healthy school environment to succeed. Creating a healthy learning environment often requires finding and bringing in funding for an initiative that a school budget may not cover.

This practice guide provides starting places to search for and find possible funding sources. It also provides tips on how to write a winning grant proposal.

Use the other practice guides in the series to learn about your school's environmental health issues and make a feasible plan to address them (**PRACTICE GUIDE 1**); gather evidence for school environmental health improvement as citizen scientists (**PRACTICE GUIDE 2**); and communicate with your school community to create and sustain feasible programs that benefit students' educational experiences and academic outcomes (**PRACTICE GUIDE 4**).

Glossary of Common Grant Terms

Allowable Costs: Costs that grant funding can be used to pay for.

Amendment: A modification or change to the grant.

Bid: The application for a funding opportunity.

Bidder: The applicant for a funding opportunity.

Budget Justification or Narrative: An explanation of why you are including the categories or individual line items (for example, staff, equipment and materials, travel) in the budget and how you estimated the costs (for example, published tables, data from prior experience, assumptions). The budget justification/narrative ties line-item categories or individual entries to the project plan, which the technical narrative describes in detail.

Contract: A legally binding agreement between the funder and the recipient of funds to perform a specified service(s) or deliver a specified product(s) for a specified amount over a specified period.

Cooperative Agreement: Funding resources provided to support a partnership with the funder, who is actively involved in and responsible for the execution and quality of the project.

Cost Share/Cost Sharing and Matching Funds: Cost sharing occurs when a grant awardee contributes resources to a project beyond the amount funded by the sponsor. There may be a specific match requirement, such as 100% (the same amount as the sponsor), 50% (half as much as the sponsor), or 200% (twice as much as the sponsor).

Cost Reimbursement: An award in which the grant awardee is “reimbursed” when actual costs are incurred in carrying out the project.

Direct Costs: Costs that can be identified with a specific activity or cost objective.

Discretionary Grant: A grant in which an agency selects the grant awardee based on specific criteria.

Fixed Price: A price that does not change in response to external factors.

Forecasted: A funding opportunity that is planned but is not yet officially open. Large funding agencies may release forecasts to give possible bidders time to prepare to submit an application.

Grant: Funding resources used by the grantee to carry out the project with minimal involvement of the funder.

Indirect Costs: Costs with the purpose of benefiting multiple activities or cost objectives.

Letter of Intent (LOI): A letter describing your school’s or district’s intent to apply for a funding opportunity and outlining primary strategies, activities, and responsibilities. It may be required or optional, and it assists the funder in allocating resources for reviewing applications.

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA): A deal between an organization and a federal agency that sets the percentage of indirect costs the organization can charge to its federal awards.

No-Cost Extension (NCE): The extension of a grant project beyond the performance period at no additional cost.

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)/Request for Application (RFA)/Request for Proposals (RFP): Different terms for what is essentially the same thing: a funding opportunity that differs based on whether the opportunity is a grant, cooperative agreement, or contract.

- ◆ **NOFO** is the general term for any type of funding announcement, including RFAs and RFPs.
- ◆ **RFA** is a formal statement for grant or cooperative agreement applications.
- ◆ **RFP** is a formal statement of request for proposals from qualifying organizations for a contract.

Glossary (cont.)

Overhead: Costs that cannot be traced to a specific business activity.

Posted/Posted Date: Posted means the funding opportunity has been announced publicly and is officially open. Posted date is the official opening date.

Prime: Shorthand for the primary organization that will be receiving funds. The “prime” has primary responsibility for the execution and quality of the project and the appropriate use of funds.

Set Aside: Opportunities that limit competition to specific communities.

Sub: Shorthand for a subcontractor, subaward, or subrecipient. All three terms indicate an individual or company that enters into a formal contractual agreement with the primary organization that receives the funds. The “sub” is responsible for carrying out a specified portion of the project plan for a specified amount over a specified period.

Technical Narrative: The details of the project goals, the approach to achieving them, and the specific activities, objectives, inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the project.

Unallowable Costs: Costs that grant funding cannot be used to pay for.

Endnotes

¹ Simons, E., Hwang, S. A., Fitzgerald, E. F., Kielb, C., Lin S. (2010). The impact of school building conditions on student absenteeism in Upstate New York. *American Journal of Public Health*, 100(9), 1679–1686. <https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2009.165324>

² Mohai, P., Kweon, B. S., Lee, S., & Ard, K. (2011). Air pollution around schools is linked to poorer student health and academic performance. *Health Affairs*, 30(5), 852–862. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2011.0077>

³ Loraas, D. M. (2024). Can buildings make teachers leave? The complex relationship between teachers and their school building: From an interior designer’s perspective. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.24339881>

⁴ Nakagawa, K., & Kosaka, G. (2022). What social issues do people invest in? An examination based on the empathy–altruism hypothesis of prosocial crowdfunding platforms, *Technovation*, 114, 102508. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.technovation.2022.102508>



Learn more about Healthy Students Learn Better and other projects made possible by the AIR Opportunity Fund.



1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202-3289
+1.202.403.5000 | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit institution that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance both domestically and internationally in the areas of education, health, and the workforce. AIR’s work is driven by its mission to generate and use rigorous evidence that contributes to a better, more equitable world. With headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, AIR has offices across the U.S. and abroad. For more information, visit [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).

Copyright © 2025 American Institutes for Research®. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, website display, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the American Institutes for Research. For permission requests, please use the Contact Us form on [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).

Notice of Trademark: “American Institutes for Research” and “AIR” are registered trademarks. All other brand, product, or company names are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective owners.