



Environmental Education Grant Program

FY26 Request for Proposals



Chesapeake Bay Trust | 108 Severn Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21403
(410) 974 - 2941 | www.cbtrust.org

Introduction and Program Goals

The [Chesapeake Bay Trust](#) (Trust) is a nonprofit, grant-making organization dedicated to improving the bays, streams, rivers, forests, parks, and other natural resources of all our local systems, from the Chesapeake to the Coastal Bays to the Youghiogheny River. The Trust, supported in large part by Maryland's Chesapeake Bay License Plate, and partnerships with other regional funders, engages and empowers diverse groups to take actions that enrich natural resources and local communities of the Chesapeake Bay region. Since 1985, the Trust has awarded over \$190 million in grants to municipalities, nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Trust recognizes that the recovery of our local streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay – the future health of our environment, economy, and communities – depends on an environmentally literate and engaged populace. As the impacts of climate change continue to accelerate and are increasingly felt by residents, it is more important now than ever before that students are prepared to understand and address increasingly complex and urgent social and environmental challenges. The Trust also knows the power of environmental education to improve students' academic achievement, physical and mental health, and build skills needed for the 21st century. Through the [Environmental Education Grant Program](#) the Trust seeks to fund programs and initiatives that advance environmental literacy and result in students having the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation to take informed and responsible actions to protect and improve the environment.

The Trust is committed to the regional efforts of the [2014 Chesapeake Bay Agreement's Environmental Literacy Goal](#) of every student experiencing at least one Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) in elementary, middle, and high school. As a result, the Trust's Environmental Education initiatives focus on building the capacity of educators to implement comprehensive and sustainable environmental literacy programs for all Maryland students.

The Trust has a mission to empower all people to participate in the restoration and protection of our region's natural resources through its award-making. As a result, the Trust strongly encourages applications directly from or that engage communities underrepresented in the environmental space. For more about the Trust's commitment to engage underrepresented groups, see our strategic plan at www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan and <https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/>.

The Trust recognizes that application processes can be complicated and time-consuming; the Trust continues to work to simplify our application processes where possible. New applicants, younger organizations, small organizations, or any group that is experiencing capacity challenges or other barriers to applying, is eligible to receive guidance on the application process. Please contact Program Manager Emily Stransky at estransky@cbtrust.org or 410-974-2941 x101.

At A Glance

Program Summary

The Environmental Education Program is designed to support the advancement of environmental literacy ensuring every student in Maryland graduates with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation to take informed and responsible actions to protect and improve the environment.

Deadline

December 18, 2025, at 4:00 pm EDT

Eligible Project Locations

This grant program welcomes applications for projects throughout the *entire* state of Maryland.

Request Amounts

Applicants can request funds from one of the following tracks:

- Track 1: MWEE Implementation
Up to \$40,000 per year for up to 3 years
- Track 2: Environmental Literacy Capacity Building
Up to \$40,000 for the 2026 school year (March 2026 – August 2027)

Submit Your Application

Follow the instructions online at: <https://cbtrust.org/grants/environmental-education/>

Contact

Emily Stransky
(410) 974-2941 x101
estransky@cbtrust.org

Eligible Applicants

The Trust welcomes requests from the following organizations:

- Public and Independent Higher Educational Institutions
- 501(c)3 Private Nonprofit Organizations
- Municipal, County, Regional, State, Federal Public Agencies
- Community Associations
- Service, Youth, and Civic Groups
- Soil/Water Conservation Districts & Resource Conservation and Development Councils

If your organization type is not listed above, contact the Trust to verify eligibility prior to submitting your application. Applications submitted from organizations outside of these categories may not be eligible for funding.

Eligible Project Types

Track 1: MWW Implementation (up to \$40,000 per year for up to three years) - For projects that focus on piloting (one-year requests) or embedding systemic (multi-year requests) MWEEs into school district's curriculum.)

The MWEE model integrates best practices of environmental education pedagogy where students investigate local environmental issues through classroom and outdoor experiences, engage in problem solving, and take action to address their issue through projects and civic engagement. MWEEs increase student achievement and engagement, develop 21st century skills, and provide authentic experiences understanding and protecting their local environment and community. The MWEE model includes four Essential Elements (Issue Definition, Outdoor Field Experience, Synthesis & Conclusions, and Stewardship & Civic Action) and four Supporting Practices (Active Teacher Support, Classroom Integration, Local Context, and Sustained Activity).

MWEEs are considered *systemic* when they are embedded into curriculum and target all students and teachers in a grade or course within a school district. Leadership and support from the school district is essential for systemic MWEEs to be successful and sustainable as they provide the permission, expertise, and funding to embed MWEEs into the curriculum, implement outdoor field experiences and action projects, and require teachers to participate in professional development opportunities. Professional development for teachers is also a key element for systemic MWEEs to be successful and sustainable as it ensures teachers have the content knowledge and pedagogical skills to facilitate a MWEE. Partnerships with nonprofits and public agencies are also highly recommended as they provide expertise and resources for teacher professional development, MWEE design, and MWEE implementation.

The Trust understands the amount of time, effort, and training it can take to develop, implement, and sustain a systemic MWEE program, especially at a large school district. As a result, multiyear proposals can include a year of planning, developing an environmental literacy team, recruiting the right

Track 1: Recommended Resources

To ensure strong alignment with the MWEE model, the Trust **highly recommends** using [An Educator's Guide to the Meaningful Watershed Education Experience](#) and other resources found on [Bay Backpack](#) before applying.

For an even deeper dive and greater understanding of the MWEE model check out the [MWEE Online Courses](#).

Project Timeline:

Track 1 Projects must be completed by:

- August 2027 if requesting up to \$40,000.
- August 2028 if requesting up to \$80,000.
- August 2029 if requesting up to \$120,000.

Track 2 Projects must be completed from March 2026 – August 2027

Requests to extend project completion period will be reviewed and considered on a case-by-case basis.

partners, and designing and embedding the MWEE into the curriculum. Proposals do not have to start reaching students, either systemically or through a pilot, until year two.

The Trust is prioritizing MWEEs that:

- **Serve an audience with high need** including but not limited to:
 - School districts who do not have an existing systemic MWEE in elementary, middle, or high school. See the [Trust's Systemic MWEE Map](#) as a reference
 - School districts who serve schools and communities that have indicators of need in academic performance (e.g. academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance), socioeconomic status (e.g. low-income, unemployment, high poverty, over 50% of Title 1 schools), and/or other areas that have shown to widen the disparities in access to environmental education.
 - School districts who center equity in the delivery of pilot and systemic MWEEs prioritizing the needs and delivery of resources to underserved schools.
- **Integrate youth voice.** Encouraging youth voice during a MWEE is important for fostering a lasting environmental stewardship ethic in students. Giving students the opportunity to make decisions throughout the MWEE helps them to foster a belief in their own abilities, realize that their voices matter in the community, and apply innovation and creativity to tackle real issues.
- **Integrate climate change.** The Trust strives to invest in projects and programs that will positively “move the needle” for the health of the environment and communities across Maryland which includes adaptation and mitigation of climate change. Today’s students are tomorrow’s decision-makers and promoting climate literacy is essential to ensuring that future policy decisions address climate change mitigation and adaptation needs. Students should not only learn about the impacts of climate change, but also the solutions necessary to ensure a sustainable and livable world for all. NOTE: Climate change does not have to necessarily be the focus but weaved throughout the learning experience.

Track 2: Environmental Literacy Capacity Building (up to \$40,000 for a year) – For district or state-wide environmental literacy capacity building and collaboration efforts that advance environmental literacy, especially MWEEs, within school district(s)

The Trust recognizes there are barriers to reaching the goal of every student in Maryland graduating environmentally literate and experiencing at least one MWEE in elementary, middle, and high school. To accelerate progress the Trust is offering funding support to efforts that address district and state-wide challenges to progress environmental literacy goals and sustaining MWEE programs.

Funds can be used to build capacity for district or statewide K-12 environmental literacy initiatives which support the policies and structures necessary to advance environmental literacy at the school district or state level. Increased capacity for environmental literacy efforts will create opportunities for more and higher quality MWEEs in school districts. Proposals should create district or state level frameworks, incentives, support systems, and/or drivers for environmental literacy to encourage or support systemic MWEE planning and implementation in school districts. Projects should also seek to connect to existing education initiatives like climate education, Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), Social and Emotional Learning, or other efforts/initiatives that already have momentum. The proposed project should also look for opportunities to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, directly supporting authentic representation of these voices.

Example deliverables include but are not limited to:

- Building the capacity of key environmental education audiences to support MWEEs at a district or state-wide scale including but not limited to environmental education providers, community-based organizations, district administration, principals, facilities, and teachers.
- Developing a school district environmental literacy strategy, plan, or framework. Environmental literacy plans include policies, practices, and metrics that support a system-wide approach to environmental literacy for all students within a school district(s). Environmental literacy plans should also include a financial sustainability component, including strategies for sustaining programs including MWEEs long-term.

- Building relationships and communication between school districts and/or local environmental and community organizations to implement systemic environmental literacy programs including MWEEs and teacher professional development.
- Engaging decision-makers (examples include but not limited to superintendents, school boards, district administration, principals, parents) to promote and support environmental literacy including MWEEs and teacher professional development.
- Developing a collaboration of stakeholders focused on advancing environmental literacy including MWEEs at the district or state level.
- Establishing a district or state-wide community of practice for environmental literacy professional development that operationalizes continued learning for educators.
- Developing solutions and infrastructure to address barriers for MWEE program implementation (e.g. getting students outdoors and/or offsite, securing substitutes, preventing teacher turnover).

The Trust welcomes new and innovative ideas! Please contact Emily Stransky, estransky@cbtrust.org, to discuss.

Online Application Submission Instructions

The Trust uses an online system for the application process, and if awarded, project management. To apply for an award, go to <https://cbtrust.org/grants/environmental-education/> and click on “Get Started” to begin a new application. This will open a new window asking you to log in or create an account in our online system. If you have applied in the past, sign in with your email address and password. If you have forgotten your password, click on “Forgot Password” to reset your password. If you have not used our online system before, click on “New Applicant” and follow the instructions.

By submitting an application, applicants acknowledge that: 1) they are compliant with federal employment and non-discrimination laws and 2) they have not been debarred, convicted, charged or had a civil judgment rendered against them for fraud or a related offense by any government agency or been terminated for cause or default by any government agency (federal, state, or local). In addition, all final products will be provided to the funding partners for use and distribution at the sole discretion of the funding partners.

Deadline

Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 PM EDT on Thursday, December 18, 2025**. Late applications will not be accepted, and the online funding opportunity will close automatically and promptly at 4:00 PM EDT. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit at least a few days prior to the deadline given the potential for high website traffic on the due date. The Trust cannot guarantee availability of technical assistance for our online system on the deadline date.

Online Application Form

You will be asked to provide the following information in the online application form. Refer to the online application for details.

Eligibility Quiz: This three-question quiz is meant to assist you in determining if your project meets the requirements of this award program and that your staff/organizational structure best supports a successful application.

Applicant Information Tab: Provide the organization’s name, mailing address, phone number, organization type, mission, EIN number, and UEI number. Provide the Executive Officer and Project Leader’s name, title, address, phone, and email address.

- Both an Executive Officer and a Project Leader, two separate individuals, must be identified for all applications.

- The Executive Officer and Project Leader must both be able to make decisions on behalf of the organization either as a board member, an employee, or other approved position recognized by the organization but not a contractor of the application.
- To avoid conflict of interest issues, individuals associated with for-profit entities to be engaged in the project cannot serve in either role.

Project Information Tab: Provide a project track; project title; project abstract; the watershed, county, and legislative district in which the project is located; and the latitude and longitude coordinates of the project location.

Timeline Tab: Provide a project start date, project end date, and project timeline that includes major tasks and their associated start and end dates.

Deliverables Tab: Provide estimated metrics for your proposed project such as project participants and outreach and restoration outputs.

Volunteers Tab: Provide a description of volunteer activities, the number of volunteers, and total number of volunteer hours.

Project Partnerships Tab: Provide a list of project partner organizations or contractors, individuals, their areas of expertise, and their role(s) in your project.

Applicants are encouraged to upload a letter of commitment for the project from each partner describing in detail the partner's role or contribution to the project. Applications including strong letter(s) of commitment often receive higher scores. If not submitted with the application, letter(s) of commitment may be required prior to the release of any awarded funding. For guidance on this, see the Trust's [Letter of Commitment and Guidance Policy](#).

Narrative & Supporting Documents Tab: Use the link below to download the **required** narrative questions template for the track you are applying to. Complete all questions and upload the completed document into the online application as a Microsoft Word or PDF file. **Narrative Questions Template:** <https://cbtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/FY26-Environmental-Education-Grant-Program-Narrative-Question-Template.docx>

Budget Tab:

1. **Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Upload**
 - a. You will be asked to upload your budget using the "Application Budget" worksheet of the Chesapeake Bay Trust's **Financial Management Spreadsheet (FMS)**, an excel file template. The template can be found by visiting <https://cbtrust.org/forms-policies/> where you can watch a video with instructions on how to complete the FMS.
2. **Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Information**

Watch our video on how to apply and how to submit an application using our online system at <https://cbtrust.org/grants/>.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact Trust staff to discuss applications *at least two weeks prior to the deadline*. The Trust cannot guarantee availability of site visits or project development assistance within two weeks of the deadline.

Definitions

The Executive Officer is the individual that oversees the organization (e.g., Executive Director, Chief Executive Officer, Mayor, President or Vice President, Principal (for schools), etc.) and has the authority to sign/execute award agreements on behalf of the organization. The Executive Officer information is tied directly to all the organization's applications and should not vary from application to application. If the Executive Officer could be listed as the Project Leader in a future proposal, we recommend listing a Board Member or other higher-ranking position of the organization as the Executive Officer in order to reduce the variation in the Executive Officer across applications.

The Program Leader is the individual will be responsible for all project coordination and correspondence with the Trust for the duration of the project. The email address entered here **MUST** be the same as the email address you used to log in to the online system. The Project Leader is the primary point of contact for the application, and the email address used to submit the application via the online system must be that of the Project Leader. Applications in which the email address associated with the Project Leader in the applicant information tab of the online opportunity does not match the email address used to submit the application will not be considered for funding. The Trust cannot conduct any official correspondence with contractors or other project partners. If at any time the Project Leader cannot continue in the position, the organization must contact the Trust and assign a new qualified Project Leader.

- a. This online application component will ask you to enter budget category and request totals. These totals will be automatically calculated in the FMS Application Budget, so you will only need to copy and paste the values from the FMS to the Online Application.

3. Additional Budget Justification

- a. This online application component will ask you to provide a descriptive budget narrative to justify and explain costs. If the success of the work is contingent upon award of other funds, make this clear in your budget justification section.

Terms and Conditions Tab: Agree to the specified terms and conditions for the program to which you are applying.

Demographics Tab (optional): Provide voluntary demographic information. Provide information about your organization's current diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) efforts and future goals.

Evaluation Criteria

The following criteria will be used by external technical expert reviewers to evaluate your proposal.

Scoring Criteria	Description and Scoring Guidance	Scoring
Consistency with Request for Proposals (RFP)	Is the proposed program or project consistent with the intent of the RFP track selected (MWEE Implementation or Environmental Literacy Capacity Building)?	Scale of 1 to 25
	If MWEE Implementation is being proposed: ➤ How strongly does the proposed program meet each of the four Essential Elements of the MWEE model (issue definition, outdoor field experiences, action project, synthesis and conclusion)? (Scale of 1 to 8) ➤ How strongly does the proposed program meet each of the four Supporting Practices of the MWEE model (classroom integration, local context, active teacher support, sustained activity)? (Scale of 1 to 7) ➤ How strongly does the proposed program integrate youth voice? (Scale of 1 to 5) ➤ How strongly does the proposed program integrate climate change education? (Scale of 1 to 5)	
	If Environmental Literacy Capacity Building is being proposed: ➤ Does the proposal clearly define the barriers to advancing environmental literacy including MWEEs at either the district or state level? (Scale of 1 to 10) ➤ To what degree will overcoming the identified barriers advance environmental literacy including MWEEs at either the district or state level? (Scale of 1 to 15)	
Professional Development	Is professional development for educators being proposed? If it is not being proposed because it is not necessary or already exists, then give a score of 10. If it is not being proposed but should be, score accordingly. If it is being proposed: ➤ Does it model environmental education pedagogy? Facilitators should utilize the same techniques and experiences in trainings that teachers are expected to use with their students. ➤ Does it allow for adequate instructional time? Trainings should be multi-day, occurring consecutively or over the course of several months. ➤ Does it provide ongoing teacher support and appropriate incentives? It is essential that professional development providers have a structure in place for ongoing teacher support and enrichment. ➤ What is the likelihood that professional development training will be successful in accomplishing its objectives?	Scale of 1 to 10

Audience Need	➤ Using the Trust's Systemic MWEE Map, is there a high level of need based on the number of existing systemic MWEEs in the school district(s)? (Scale of 1 to 10) ➤ Does the school district(s) targeted in the proposal serve schools and communities that have indicators of need in academic performance (e.g. academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance), socioeconomic status (e.g. low-income, unemployment, high poverty, over 50% of Title 1 schools), and/or other areas that have shown to widen disparities in access to environmental education. (Scale of 1 to 5)	Scale of 1 to 20
	If MWEE Implementation is being proposed: ➤ Does the proposal center equity in the delivery of the MWEE, prioritizing needs and providing resources for underserved schools? (Scale of 1 to 5)	
	If Environmental Literacy Capacity Building is being proposed: ➤ Does the applicant justify the need for focusing on the audience targeted by their proposed program or project? (Scale of 1 to 5)	
Likelihood of Project Success	What is the likelihood of success if this project is funded? Success should be defined as the accomplishment of outcomes proposed. Are methodologies sound and consistent with best practices?	Scale of 1 to 15
	If MWEE Implementation is being proposed: ➤ Is there a strong letter of commitment from the school district's leadership if the school district is not the applicant? ➤ Is it clear how the proposed MWEE is being integrated into the curricular scope and sequence of an academic program? ➤ If a multiyear request will the proposed MWEE be systemic by the end of the grant term? MWEEs are considered <i>systemic</i> when they target all students and teachers in a given grade level or course across a school district.	
	If Environmental Literacy Capacity Building is being proposed: ➤ Will the proposed strategy (deliverables and actions) successfully address the defined barriers? Are methodologies sound and consistent with best practices? ➤ Are the right people and organizations involved or targeted to make a significant impact? Are the key partners committed with contacts designated to lead coordination?	
Long-term Vision & Plan	If MWEE Implementation is being proposed: ➤ Does the proposal provide a realistic long-term vision and plan for ensuring the program will continue after the grant period? ➤ Is there commitment to support and sustain the work beyond the grant period from all essential partners? ➤ Does the applicant address what ongoing resources would be needed to maintain the program or project?	Scale of 1 to 15
	If Environmental Literacy Capacity Building is being proposed: ➤ Will the impacts of the work be felt after the grant period has ended?	
Evaluation	Has the applicant proposed an evaluation plan that will demonstrate if the proposed outcomes have been achieved and what changes are needed to improve?	Scale of 1 to 5
Partnerships	Are partners appropriate and/or qualified? Are the partnerships necessary to accomplish the goals, and are any partners missing?	Scale of 1 to 5
Cost Effectiveness/ Budget	Is the budget detailed, appropriate, and cost effective? Are the line items budgeted (for example, personnel costs) justified? In-kind and cash match is not required but will be viewed favorably.	Scale of 1 to 5
Total Score Possible		100

Application Review Process

Each application is reviewed by a Technical Review Committee (TRC), composed of individuals who are subject matter experts in the fields supported by this RFP and represent communities engaged by projects funded by this RFP. The TRC ranks and scores all applications based on the criteria listed in the “Evaluation Criteria” section and meets to discuss the application merits. The TRC then recommends a suite of applications for awards and declines to the Trust’s Board of Trustees.

To allow applicants to set expectations prior to investing time in applying, the Trust provides historical application approval rates for the same or similar programs. The average approval rate from the last four rounds in this grant program is 43%, including both fully and partially funded applications.

Awards and Notifications

The FY26 Environmental Education Grant Program awards will be announced in March 2026.

All applicants will receive a letter via email stating the funding decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. If approved, the Trust will send an award agreement with award conditions and due dates of status, progress, and final reports. The Trust will mail the first award payment to the requesting organization following satisfaction of any award contingencies, including upload of the signed award agreement. Ten percent of the total award will be held until the final report is submitted and approved. In cases where the awardee fails to submit a status report, progress report, or final report by the due date, the Trust reserves the right to terminate the award agreement and require a refund of funds already transferred to the awardee.

When the project is complete, awardees are required to complete final reports that may include, but are not limited to, submission of all receipts for supplies, invoices for subcontractors/contractors, and copies of timesheets for personnel time used (timesheets must include date, name, time worked per day, and coding to tie the time worked to the award). All financial back-up documentation from the awardee must be grouped and numbered to correspond to the budget line item reported as spent. Organizations with outstanding final, progress, or status reports will not be awarded additional grants.