Climate Champions Grant Program: Call for Applications

Intent To Apply due Oct. 17, 2025 | Applications due Dec. 2, 2025

Overview

The Denver Public Schools (DPS) Sustainability Team partnered with Denver's Office of Climate Action, Sustainability & Resiliency (CASR) to fund projects that help DPS students implement climate action in their schools. This program intends to engage students in real-world problem solving, leadership development, and Project Based Learning for innovative and creative solutions to climate change.

The maximum amount of funds a school can apply for during this period is $20,000, and the minimum amount that can be applied for is $1,000. We invite DPS students to apply for funding by the deadline of Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025.

DPS' Climate Action Plan

The DPS Board of Education passed Ends Statement 1.6 in 2022 as a result of student activism. Ends Statement 1.6 reads:

> *DPS shall be a national leader in establishing an organizational culture anchored in sustainability, climate action, and environmental justice in both the conservation of natural resources and in minimizing the carbon footprint of DPS' practices.*

DPS published its first-ever Climate Action Plan in response to Ends Statement 1.6. The DPS Climate Action Plan can be found online in English and Spanish, and it has has three North Star goals:

- Reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions by at least 90% by 2050.
- Reduce natural resource consumption and waste year-over-year.
- All students and staff are engaged in sustainability by 2050.

❝Our futures depend on us taking action. *Maya Kitei, South High School*

VISION: DPS is recognized as a leader and steward of healthy, livable, and sustainable environments.

Eligibility

Students and staff from DPS schools are encouraged to apply, and action projects must be based at a school. All grade levels can apply. DPS charter schools *are* allowed to apply at this time.

Action projects are meant to be **student-led**, which means that youth share power and decision-making, and that actions are driven by youth interest and lived experiences. In addition, action projects *must* have a DPS staff champion who will support the project team, be accountable for project deadlines, and ensure funding is spent appropriately. (Stipends for staff champions can be included in the application's budget summary.)

Action projects *must* address at least one of the following **topics**:

1. **Green workforce development** such as workforce training and career development
2. **Clean energy** such as solar power, other renewable energy, or battery storage
3. **Environmental justice programs** that address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities
4. **Adaptation and resiliency programs** that help vulnerable communities prepare for a warming climate
5. **Transportation** options that are sustainable, clean, and safe
6. **Improved energy efficiency** of school buildings

Choosing a Topic, Problem and Action Project

Applicants can use the steps below to develop their action project and ideas.

Step 1: Choose your topic.
- Review the six topics provided in the Eligibility section.

Step 2: Identify a problem.
- Which problem does your group care most about?
- What problems impact your community (hint: use data like real-time energy data, EnviroScreen, surveys, and audits)?
- Talk to others that are affected or interested in the problem.

Step 3: Identify an action.
- Ask questions to understand current barriers to and opportunities for improvement.
- Involve community and decision-makers.
- Develop action steps to address the problem in specific and measurable ways.

Step 4: Refine the action.
- Does the action project adequately address the problem? How do you know?
- What resources does the action project need to be successful?
- Will the project positively affect the community?

Below are examples of questions that can help guide project teams in selecting a topic, problem and action project for their school.

1. *Green workforce development*
   - What knowledge or training would be meaningful for students to begin a career in clean energy or natural resources?

2. *Renewable energy*
   - How can my school incorporate renewable energy?
   - What stops our school from using renewable energy, and how could we help remove those barriers?

3. *Environmental justice*
   - How can we protect our vulnerable community members from worsening air quality?
   - What is unfair about how environmental problems affect certain people at our school?

4. *Adaptation and resiliency*
   - How can we help our vulnerable community members cope with increases in extreme heat or storms?
   - What could we do to help our school be better prepared and keep everyone safe?

5. *Transportation*
   - What problems do students or staff face when getting to and from school each day?
   - What could we do to make getting to school cleaner, safer, and easier?

6. *Energy efficiency*
   - How can we help our school buildings use energy more efficiently?
   - Where is our school wasting energy that we could help save?

Example Action Projects

Below are examples of action projects, but we encourage applicants to get creative and *use these examples simply as a springboard for their own ideas*. You can review [2023-24 projects](#) and [2024-25 projects](#) for inspiration.

Example 1

- *Topic:* Transportation
- *Problem:* Students rarely bike to school because the school lacks safe places to store bikes during the day.
- *Action Project:* Install secure bike racks and a bike maintenance station, and promote bike-to-school days.

Example 2

- *Topic*: Environmental justice
- *Problem:* Students lack access to quality food and knowledge around sustainable food production.
- *Action Project:* Have students attend a conference to learn job skills and knowledge in food justice, and have the students share and implement their learnings in the community.

Adapted from the Climate Action Venn Diagram by Dr. Ayana Elizabeth Johnson.

Application Requirements

1. Intent to Apply

The Intent to Apply provides applicants with necessary guidance and connections to ensure quality applications and successful action projects. Applicants are **required** to submit their general topic by **Friday, Oct. 17** at:
https://forms.gle/Fkfne9Ya2DdiSkS7A

2. Application

Applications **must** must be submitted with the three summaries below by **Tuesday, Dec. 2** at:
https://forms.gle/EK5p4Mwi77bNW2YJ8

1) Project Summary	2) Collaboration Summary with principal approval	3) Budget Summary	4) Photos (Optional)

a. Project Summary (500 words or less)

- Which topic, problem, and action project did you choose and why?
- What would be the impact of your action project, and how will you measure and maintain it over the short- and long-term?
- Who will the action project affect, and how will it be communicated to the community?
- Describe how the action project will work toward DPS' Climate Action Plan goals and environmental justice.
- Describe the action project's timeline.

b. Collaboration Summary (500 words or less)

- Describe how the action project is *student-led* and how student voice and choice were incorporated into decision-making. Consider having youth help write the application.
- Tell us who is involved and who else you've talked to about the action project. Describe the project team and staff champion. The staff champion *must* be someone who works at the school.
- Include the **principal's signature** with a statement of approval.
- Describe the collaboration done with relevant DPS departments and how the appropriate approvals were obtained. For example, the DPS teams in the table below should be collaborated with for the associated types of projects.

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○ Contact [First Call Communications](#) for an initial review of any building or grounds modifications.

DPS Collaborators	For any projects affecting
Career and Technical Education	career development and project based learning guidance
Custodial	cleaning processes, recycling, or composting
Facility Managers	the school building or grounds
Food and Nutrition Services	school cafeterias or food choices
Grounds Department	outdoor landscapes
HVAC Shop	heating and cooling systems
Instructional Coaches	for project support and alignment to content standards
Planning, Design & Construction	building or landscaping changes
Plumbing Shop	water-using fixtures
Sustainability Team	renewable energy generation

c. *Budget Summary (500 words or less)*

- Explain the requested funding amount and provide any relevant vendor quotes.
  - Keep in mind quality, safety, and sustainability considerations for materials and work. For infrastructure projects or physical equipment, we recommend getting at least two quotes. To talk through these considerations, reach out to the Sustainability Team.
- A **Budget Template** is provided at the end of this document and is highly encouraged for clearly communicating this summary.
- Funding is available for purchasing equipment, supplies, outreach, stipends, and career development. Funding *can* be used to provide stipends to staff who are supporting projects. Funding *cannot* be used for hiring DPS staff.

d. *Photos (optional but highly encouraged, 3 photos maximum)*

- Share up to three photos that help show the context and scope of the project.

Evaluation

This program has an evaluation process to ensure fair selection of the most-qualified applications. Applications will be reviewed for completeness and scored by DPS and Denver CASR staff with subject matter expertise.

Applications will be scored based on the evaluation criteria below. *Applicants are encouraged to tailor their application to address the evaluation criteria.*
- Student Voice (4 points max)
- Environmental Justice (4 points max)
- Feasibility (4 points max)
- Project Summary (2 points max)
- Collaboration Summary (2 points max)
- Budget Summary (2 points max)
- Project Impact (2 points max)
- Innovation (2 points max)
- First-Time Awardee (2 points max)

Timeline

Task	Timeline
Intent to Apply due	Friday, Oct. 17, 2025, 5 p.m. MST
Application due	Tuesday, Dec. 2, 2025, 5 p.m. MST
Awardees notified and funding made available	Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2026
Project status provided to DPS Sustainability Team	Wednesday, April 15, 2026
Project teams to attend either the DPS STEAM Expo or DPS Climate Summit to share their projects with the community (optional but highly encouraged)	TBD, Spring 2026
Action projects completed and funding spent	Friday, June 5, 2026
Project summary reported to Sustainability Team	Friday, June 5, 2026

Resources for Action Projects

To help applicants contact DPS departments at the right time with the right questions, please review the resources to these frequently asked questions.

1. What are DPS standards for planting trees or gardens?
    > The Process for Planting and Maintaining a Tree in DPS
    > DPS Plantings Guidelines

2. If my project requires modifications to the building or grounds, what steps do I need to take?
    - If a project that requires *minor* modifications to the building is awarded grant funding, schools will need to follow the Facility Modification Process so that the proposed work can be reviewed by the appropriate DPS department and connections to the appropriate points of contacts can be made. Students should lead this process and the submission of required paperwork, with the staff champion providing guidance and support as needed.
    - If a project that requires *larger* modifications to the building or grounds is awarded grant funding, the project will need to be reviewed by DPS Planning, Design & Construction and follow the Facility Modification Process. Review relevant facility standards.

3. If my project involves biking to school, what should I think about for a strong application?
    - Biking projects are highly encouraged to address: quality products and equipment including bikes, helmets, locks, and more; safety training and programming to ensure safe riding; safe and secure bike storage to prevent bike thefts; and home support of the equipment and program.

4. If my project is on a shared campus, what additional approvals do I need?
    - If your project affects a shared campus, approvals from *all* the principals on the shared campus are required in the Collaboration Summary.

5. If my project involves portable solar arrays, what do I need to consider?
    - Solar components, such as the solar modules and any battery system, should be "UL Listed" for electrical safety. If you have questions about whether a piece of equipment or system is listed, contact the Sustainability Team.
    - For any portable system with batteries that will not be permanently installed, applicants and school sponsors will need a plan to manage and store the system approved by the Sustainability Team and DPS.

Questions

Email any questions to the Sustainability Team at: dept_sustainability@dpsk12.net. We're here to support project teams throughout the entire process!

Climate Champions Grant Program: Budget Template

Template Summary

- This template can be used as a guide to organize and communicate the budget summary.
- Budget categories can be updated and removed as appropriate for the application.

Budget Category Examples	Description	Requested $ Amount
Equipment Purchases		
Materials/Supplies		
Communication/Outreach		
Labor		
Fees		
Transportation		
Tuition		
Stipends / Extra Duty Pay		
Other		

Let's do something real, together!

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We look forward to reviewing all the creative ideas from DPS students.

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