Acquiring Resources: Fundraising

Do Schoolyard Habitats projects require huge sums of money? No! With a little creativity, Schoolyard Habitats projects can be brought to life without major expenditures.

There are several ways to go about acquiring needed resources. Using a variety of approaches will reap the greatest rewards. Consider all of these possibilities:

Solicit Donations of Materials

- **From members of the school community:** Consider placing a wish list in the school newsletter or on a prominent bulletin board. Decorate a small tree in the school lobby with wish ornaments (papers on string, labeled with project needs); as people enter the school and see something they are able to donate, they remove the paper and return with their donation!

- **From local businesses:** Identify local stores which sell various needed items (child-sized garden tools, seeds, etc.). Write letters and/or have students write letters describing the project and requesting donations of a few items to help it get off the ground. Be clear about the value of the project, and where and how they will be publicly thanked if they donate—businesses often enjoy the public attention that acts of local goodwill bring.

Apply for Free Materials

Several non-profit organizations donate or award specific materials to schools and other organizations. To make sure their materials are used wisely, they often require a short application; otherwise the materials are free or very low-cost. Three examples include:

**National Tree Trust Community Tree Planting Program**
1120 G St. NW, Suite 770
Washington DC 20005
1-800-846-8733
www.nationaltreetrust.org

Schools can apply to receive free tree seedlings through NTT’s Community Tree Planting Program. Containers and money for soil are also available.
America the Beautiful Fund,  
1730 K Street NW, Suite 1002  
Washington DC 20006  
202-638-1649  

ABF provides seeds free-of-charge; schools pay only shipping and handling.

National Gardening Association  
Youth Garden Grants,  
1100 Dorset St., South Burlington, VT 05403  

Each year 400 schools and youth groups that are starting or continuing garden programs are awarded tools, seeds, garden products, and educational materials.

Organize a School Fundraiser

All of the standard school fundraisers (bake sales, aluminum can drives, car washes, penny collections) can raise money for Schoolyard Habitats projects as well. Many schools have also thought of creative alternatives including these:

- Students raise plants from seeds in the classroom. Once plants have sprouted, repot in plastic containers (donated by the local nursery) and conduct a plant sale!

- Is a stone or brick pathway included in the project plan? Create an “Adopt-a-Brick” or “Adopt-a-Tile” opportunity—each person who contributes a certain amount will have their name painted on a brick or tile in the path through the habitat area.

- Have students create schoolyard-inspired art. Create frames from posterboard; hold a raffle of student artwork.

Apply for Grants

Many national and regional organizations provide grants that support Schoolyard Habitats projects. Grants vary widely in terms of the amount of their awards, who is eligible to apply, and the types of projects they support. Because Schoolyard Habitats projects accomplish so many goals, they often are eligible for many types of grants. Consider these alternatives: A local watershed protection organization may support plantings of native species, while a violence

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We have received two matching fund grants from the Missoula County Park Board. The first was designated for two projects:

(1) construction of an open-air, covered shelter to be used as an outdoor classroom and for school or community recreational gatherings, and

(2) construction of a gravel walking trail. The second grant was to be used for native plant restoration including trees, shrubs, native grasses and flowers, construction of interpretive signs, benches and picnic tables.

Additional funds have been provided by the Frenchtown Parent Teacher Students Association and by the Frenchtown Stadium Committee, a civic group that has provided financial backing for a variety of school district projects. The building of the trail was organized and supervised by one of our high school students as his Eagle Scout project. Donations of gravel, equipment, and labor contributed to the completion of the trail. A local engineer donated his expertise and seal of approval on the building plans for the outdoor classroom. Our high school Community Service class has constructed two sturdy picnic tables and donated materials. A Cub Scout group has built and installed several bluebird boxes.

Frenchtown Elementary School, Missoula, MT
A prevention agency may award the work being done to build a sense of community through the project. A private foundation or business focused on improving science education may fund curriculum purchases or Schoolyard Habitats educator trainings, while a regional environmental group may fund your efforts to attract pollinators! Look carefully at the mission of the funding organization, and look for a meaningful connection between the Schoolyard Habitats project and their interests.

There are many national, state, and local donors that fund this type of work. A small amount of research into these possibilities will be well worth the effort. Types of organizations to consider include: school PTA/PTO, school board of education, cooperative extension service, soil and water conservation districts, resource management agencies, conservation and environmental groups, colleges and universities, garden clubs, foundations and businesses (see Sample Letter, p. 157 for an example of a letter to a local business).

Below is a preliminary list of organizations and companies that give grants to Schoolyard Habitats projects nationwide. (Visit the NWF website for updated listings, and for listings of grants available only in specific cities or regions: www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats).

National Wildlife Federation Schoolyard Habitats Program Wild Seed Fund Mini-Grants (800) 822-9199 www.nwf.org/schoolyardhabitats

Offers $250.00 grants to assist with the development, maintenance, and continued educational use of habitat-based learning sites on school grounds. Recipients commit to certifying their projects as official Schoolyard Habitats sites within one year of receiving their award. Applications become available from NWF and online in October; applications are due January 15th of each year.

The Arthur M. Blank Foundation, 3290 Northside Parkway, Suite 600 Atlanta, GA 30327 (404) 239-0600 www.BlankFoundation.org

Supports programs and organizations that create opportunity, enhance self-esteem and increase awareness about cultural and community issues among young people (geographic restrictions).

“Involving young people in service learning activities is increasingly seen by educators and community leaders as a powerful strategy for improving educational performance, supporting school improvement, and contributing to community renewal—simultaneously. In service learning, students are involved in experiential learning, long recognized by educational leaders as one of the most powerful learning contexts of all, in which students learn by doing. In service learning, students participate in an educational process that relates their service experience directly to the curriculum’s subject matter, while at the same time making a valued contribution to their neighborhoods and communities.”

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Bayer Corporation
100 Bayer Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15205-9741
www.bayerus.com/about/community/com_fproposal.html

Gives grants to programs that address science literacy or science education, or provide science-oriented vocational education.

The Dunn Foundation
333 Strawberry Field Road
Warwick, RI 02886
(401) 941-3009
www.dunnfoundation.org

Awards grants to foster communities that are visually distinctive, attractive, and have a strong sense of place.

The Environmental Protection Agency
www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants.htm/

Awards grants of $25,000 or less from each regional office and headquarters each year. Their website provides links to other sites and includes a grant-writing tutorial.

Home Depot
Community Affairs
2455 Paces Ferry Road
Atlanta, GA 30339
(800) 430-3376
www.homedepot.com

Offers grants to projects benefiting the environment, and to those working with at-risk youth. Applications are available online.

The Jordan Fundamentals Grant Program
Scholarship Management Services
1505 Riverview Road
PO Box 297
St. Peter, MN 56082
(507) 931-1682
http://nfie.org/grants.htm

Offers grants of up to $2,500 for public school teachers of grades 6-12. At least 40% of school’s student population must be covered by Title 1. Funds the development of original lesson plans or units.

Learn and Serve America
202-606-5000 x117
http://learnandserve.org

Supports service learning projects by funding state agencies and other organizations, which then select and fund local service learning programs.

The Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Fund
The Wild Ones, Natural Landscapers Ltd.
PO Box 1274
Appleton, WI 54912-1274
www.for-wild.org/seedmony.htm

Provides small grants to schools and other educational organizations that work towards creating natural landscapes using native plants.

Lowe’s Companies Inc.
Charitable and Educational Foundation
Mail Code RPS4
PO Box 1111
North Wilkesboro, NC 28656
(336) 658-5544
www.lowes.com

Local stores make charitable contributions of supplies and materials, and award grants to projects that enhance the natural environment and improve the local community. Grant applications are available online.
National Environmental Education and Training Foundation
1707 H St. NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20006-3915
(202) 833-2933
www.neetf.org

In partnership with the President’s Council on Environmental Quality, $1,000 grants and certificates of Merit are available to K-12 teachers who are environmental educators and/or use the environment as an integrating context for learning with their students.

National 4-H Council
7100 Connecticut Avenue
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
(301) 961-2800
www.fourhcouncil.edu/ycc/grantinfo.htm

Community Tree Planting Grants of $200 to $1,000 available to be used in community tree planting and/or restoration projects.

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Conservation Education Grants
1120 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 900
Washington, DC 20036
www.nfwf.org

Provides challenge grants to projects that promote fish and wildlife habitat conservation. Their website includes several links to other available grants.

The Orion Society, Stories in the Land Teaching Fellowships
195 Main Street, Great Barrington, MA 01230
(413) 528-4422
www.oriononline.org/pages/ os/education/sil.html

Designed to help teachers foster an education of place through study of local landscapes and histories. Year-long fellowships to elementary and secondary school teachers in the U.S. and Canada. A $1,000 stipend goes towards activities and teaching resources.

Toshiba America Foundation
1251 Sixth Avenue, 41st Floor,
New York, NY 10020
(212) 569-0600
www.toshiba.com

Provides grants to K-12 teachers to contribute to quality science and mathematics education in the U.S. Larger grants awarded for grades 7-12.

The Wal-Mart Foundation
www.walmartfoundation.org

Encourages community action by supporting environmental efforts and education.
GENERAL TIPS FOR WRITING GRANTS

- Look closely at the criteria provided by the funder. They are generally very specific about exactly which types of projects they wish to fund, the causes they wish to support, and the people and places which they hope to affect. Use language that matches theirs. If it becomes too much of a stretch to fit the Schoolyard Habitats project into their guidelines, don’t apply—find another grant which is a closer match.

- Be clear and concise. Remember, funders may be reading through hundreds if not thousands of applications. Applications that clearly communicate project goals, rationale, and plans will rise to the top. Circulate grant proposals among several colleagues with strong writing skills for editing prior to submission to the foundation.

- Be sure to complete every question and include all requested attachments with the application. Many funders will completely disregard an application which arrives incomplete. Do not apply for a grant unless prepared to submit each and every piece the funders require.

- Submit applications on time. Again, some funders may not even read those applications which arrive a day or two past the deadline. Make the time spent on the application worthwhile; send the application in plenty of time to meet funders’ deadlines.

- Demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment. Give a human voice to the proposal; some funders admit that a short quote from a child, a story illustrating the school’s desperate need for the grant, or an inspiring pair of photos can help distinguish one application from the rest.

- If possible, demonstrate the long-term vision or long-term plan for the project. Provide the wider context for the grant: who will benefit and how? What would the next steps be? Generally, if given the choice, funders would rather award grants to projects with longer-term positive effects. They have a limited pool of funds, and understandably want to see their money spent wisely. Take this into consideration in choosing the items which you request the grant cover, and in the language you use in the application. Consider this: if you have budgeted $50.00 for food for schoolyard celebrations, and $50.00 for interpretive signs for the habitat, which item do you think an educational foundation would rather fund?

APPLY FOR AWARDS

Several programs honor the innovative curriculum and instruction of individual teachers. Like traditional grants, many award programs have a special focus, whether they are acknowledging the work of a teacher in engaging students in environmental issues, or improving the quality of math instruction through an innovative series of activities. The monies these award programs pay out are generally intended towards reinvestment in the school, students, and/or professional development opportunities for the teacher or staff.

Sea World/ Busch Gardens Environmental Education Awards

Education Department
7007 Sea World Dr.
Orlando, FL 32832
(877) 792-4332
www.seaworld.org
Each year, eight schools are chosen to receive $10,000, and one teacher is awarded $5000. K-12 teachers in the U.S. and Canada are eligible to apply.

**The Scott’s Company Give Back to Grow Awards**
c/o Weber Shandwick Worldwide
515 Olive St., Suite 1900,
St. Louis, Missouri 63101
(800) 551-5971
www.scotts.com/community/community.cfm

Honors individuals who give back to their communities through gardening. One winner and two finalists are awarded in each of four categories, winning $5000 and $2500 respectively. Awarded through a nomination procedure.

**Toyota Tapestry Grants for Teachers**
C/o National Science Teachers Association
1840 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201
http://nstaa.org/programs/tapestry/index.htm

Grants are awarded for innovative projects that enhance science education in the school and/or school district.

**TAP INTO ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

**The Foundation Center**
(212) 620-4230
www.fdncenter.org

This website offers weekly grant updates, a fundraising library, a searchable database of funding opportunities, and online grant-seeking trainings.

**Web sites listing additional possibilities:**

- [www.nea.org/grants](http://www.nea.org/grants) National Education Association’s grant programs.
- [http://environmentalgrants.com](http://environmentalgrants.com) Ordering information for a directory of resources.
- [http://schoolgrants.org](http://schoolgrants.org) Good resource for all types of school grants.


**PRIORITIZE**

Before money is spent, be sure to consider other alternatives. Is there a lower-cost alternative? Is there a source (business or individual) that might be able to donate that item? Prioritize your purchases: which are essential? Which items would be a welcome addition but can wait a few months to be added?

Consider asking for donations of certain items (i.e. watering cans) in the school newsletter before heading to the store. Some schools save money on plants by starting them from seeds or starting with seedlings instead of planting mature (and more expensive) specimens. Resist the initial urge to purchase items which will only be used on rare occasions: for example, heavy-duty tools can often be borrowed from the maintenance department, or from other members of your school community.
Sample Fundraising Letter

Joe Murphy
Sample Middle School
135 Willow Rd.
Sample, VA 55555
(555) 555-5555

September 1, 2002

Ms. Edna Bryant
Community Affairs Manager
Virginia Garden Center
672 Smithfield Rd.
Arlington, VA 55555

Dear Ms. Bryant,

I am writing to you on behalf of Sample Middle School’s Habitat Team. As you may know, Sample Middle School has been struggling for many years to raise the level of achievement of our students, and to engage them more effectively in learning. At the same time, many of the students, faculty, staff and wider community have been complaining about the depressing state of the schoolgrounds: currently they consist of a small barren lot, which is mostly grass and dirt, with very little other vegetation.

I am proud to say that to address these issues, we are launching a National Wildlife Federation Schoolyard Habitats project. Through this project, the entire school community will be engaged in creating an outdoor classroom and wildlife habitat on our schoolgrounds. As we have learned from other schools with similar successful projects, we know that long-term, hands-on projects like these will really capture students’ interest and provide a low-cost living laboratory that can improve the quality of instruction at Sample School. At the same time, we will be doing our local wildlife—who are facing more and more threats to their habitat—a favor, and instill in Sample students an understanding and appreciation of local Virginia plants and animals. As a respected member of our community, and a major supplier of plants to landscapes in this region, I’m sure you will recognize the value of this project.

Students have already researched the native plants which would best attract wildlife local, and with the help of our Habitat Team, have created a list of plants they would like to add to our schoolyard (the list is attached). I have also attached our vision statement, a few related articles that further help to explain our interest in this project, and a few letters from students about their dreams for the schoolyard. Unfortunately, we have very limited funding for this project; we are now writing to several businesses to request their support in the form of donations of time, materials and/or expertise. Please consider donating some or all of the plants on the students’ list. All donations will be publicly acknowledged, and widely appreciated!

Your contribution would be an enormous help in getting this exciting project off the ground. If you would like more information about Sample Middle School’s project, please feel free to contact me at the phone number above. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Murphy, PTA Member, Sample Middle School