

Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant - Sample Application Six

The following text illustrates responses to some of the narrative questions on the *Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant* application form. These responses were provided by teachers whose application scored highly with all the reviewers. Please do not copy the responses into your own application form. Read them to see examples of some complete, high-quality responses to the questions. Please note that the application form is revised annually, and the narrative questions in the current application form may not match the narrative questions from the older application form that these responses represent.

Application Six

1a. In 50 words or less describe the proposed project (who, what, where, when, how).

Parents, teachers, staff and prekindergarten students at our school will establish a native pollinator garden, beginning with planting native prairie plants in the spring.

1b. What are your goals for this project (why do you want to implement the project)?

Our goals are to help awaken an interest in the natural world and create a strong connection at the earliest ages between students, their natural surroundings and plant, animal and insect communities. We will tie in the science curriculum through hands-on, experiential learning opportunities. This instruction will continue when kindergarten students move to the elementary school in the district, which already has a robust pollinator garden. We also want to create a new habitat to attract pollinators, birds and more.

1c. How will you measure the success of the project?

We will consider the project successful when: 1) the garden begins to attract insect and other animal pollinators; 2) the garden begins to draw in both students and community members – stimulating questions and positive interactions with both plants and pollinators; and 3) teachers actively use the garden as part of their science curriculum.

2a. What planning activities did the students perform for the project? Be specific.

Students will be involved in planning in age-appropriate ways with support from teachers and classroom assistants. This may include investigating pollinators and the native plants they use, helping to choose plants from an established list, and helping with the layout of the garden, such as measuring out the space and using information like plant heights to decide where plants should be planted. Currently, instruction is fully remote. The hope is to move to a hybrid plan for in-person attendance in spring, but we will have to be creative and flexible in adapting our plans. Some ideas we have discussed include online polls for students to vote on favorite plants to be placed at the entrance to the garden, sharing photos and videos of garden progress via the e-learning platform and having each classroom learn about one specific native plant and its pollinators so they can contribute to an electronic “field guide” for the garden.

2b. What implementation activities will students perform for the project? Be specific.

Students will be involved in activities throughout the implementation of the garden project. They have already participated in spreading mulch over a layer of newspapers to smother the turf and to prepare

the site for spring planting, and the Girl Scout troop associated with our school sowed native plant seeds in milk jugs (prepped by parent volunteers). They will be helping to install young plants in the garden in the spring, an activity that can be done safely by employing physical distancing and wearing masks. When they return to the classroom, they will also raise butterflies to release in the garden and observe caterpillars and chrysalis formation in the garden, once it is established.

2c. What maintenance activities will students perform for the project? Be specific.

Students can assist with weeding, watering young seedlings and collecting seeds in the fall. They can also help remove dead stems in late spring and observe how the plants are beginning to sprout underneath the stems and leaf litter.

3a. Describe how the project will enhance the educational use of the area. Please do not list learning standards.

This project will offer preschool and kindergarten students an opportunity to directly engage with a natural resource that supports learning across many areas. In preschool, the garden will enhance student explorations of concepts including life cycles, seasonal changes and the basic needs of living things and allow them to directly observe, investigate and categorize living things using all of their senses. In kindergarten, the garden can be integrated into investigations of seasonal weather changes and plants and animals, for example, describing patterns of what plants and animals need and their interactions, looking for evidence of how plants and animals can change their environments and modeling the relationship between the needs of living things and the places they live. Additionally, in future years the garden will provide opportunities for joint activities between preschool and kindergarten classrooms, building a sense of community and connection between the students. The garden will be integrated across subject areas by integrating hands-on garden activities into our STEAM curriculum. Finally, students will be directly involved in the development and planting of the garden, providing them with a sense of ownership and understanding of ways that humans can help the environment.

4. Describe how the proposed project will positively affect wildlife, improve wildlife habitat and demonstrate relevant ecological concepts.

The proposed pollinator garden will provide nesting sites, food for larvae and caterpillars and pollen and nectar for pollinators. The plants will also provide food, nesting sites and cover for small mammals and birds. The deep roots of our native plants will aerate the soil, contribute organic matter back to the soil, prevent erosion and help regulate water levels by guiding water from spring and fall inundation deep into the ground and up into the plants. Students will be able to observe food chains/webs in action as the plants form the basis for a new community for plants and animals. The site will be free from fertilizers and herbicides, protecting our waterways and our local wildlife.

6. What is your time line for this project? List the major activities associated with development of the project and when you expect to perform them.

Fall: smother turf and weeds with thick, overlapping newspaper and mulch (student activity)

February: begin winter sowing in plastic milk jugs (student activity)

Spring: continue prepping the planting site by adding a layer of cardboard and another layer of wood chips

April/May: plant seedlings from nurseries and from winter sowing in plastic milk jugs (student activity)

Late spring: build low wire fence/border around site

Summer: water seedlings using sprinkler and timer; begin monthly volunteer weeding workdays

Fall: collect seeds (student activity)

Late fall: broadcast seeds (student activity)

7. A long-term care/maintenance plan for the project is imperative.

7a. How will the area be maintained during the school year? Who will do the work?

During the school year, the faculty liaisons designated by the school will receive a yearly stipend in return for their efforts in coordinating community volunteers, building and grounds staff, and groups of students led by teachers to maintain the area.

7b. How will the area be maintained during the summer? Who will do the work?

Near the end of the school year, the faculty liaisons will help set up and publicize monthly summer workdays with community volunteers, beginning with the garden committee that has been formed within our parent group. Parent volunteers include a land manager from the local nature center and experienced home gardeners. These volunteers will do the work during the summer months.

7c. How will the area be maintained in subsequent years? Who will do the work?

Our expectation is that the support of the administration and staff through the designated faculty liaisons will provide continuity and focus to the ongoing work of maintaining the site. We hope to involve current and former families of children who attended our school as well as community members who will be drawn to the highly visible and accessible garden site.

8. Tell us about the resources that you utilized in preparing for this project and discuss how you will involve other people (teachers, community members, etc.) in the project.

School administrators, including the principal and the superintendent of the district, have been very supportive of our effort to establish a new pollinator garden. They have helped to guide our planning process by suggesting activities to help students become more invested in the garden area, such as painting rocks in the form of colorful fish to create a border definition. They have also requested that we try to use garden activities as an opportunity for joint activities between prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms, to build a sense of community and connection between students and provide hands-on activities integrated into our STEAM curriculum. School custodial staff will keep the area around the garden neat and will coordinate deliveries of materials to the garden area. We have had a lot of positive feedback from teachers and staff about the instructional and enrichment opportunities that this garden will provide.