

HENNEPIN COUNTY

MINNESOTA



Solicitation for grant applications

School waste reduction and recycling grants

Round one solicitation due date: Thursday, March 12, 2026 at 4 p.m.

Round two solicitation due date: Thursday, October 15, 2026 at 4 p.m.



1 Introduction

1.1 Program overview

The County of Hennepin, State of Minnesota ("County") is soliciting applications for the School waste reduction and recycling grant (the "Grant"). As used herein, the entity/individual responsible for any awarded Grant may be referred to as the "Applicant" and the Applicant's response to this solicitation (the "Solicitation") may be referred to as the "Application".

Hennepin County provides grants for preschools, K-12 schools, colleges, and universities to start or improve programs to divert recycling and organic materials, which include food and compostable paper, from the trash. Grant funding can also be used to take steps to prevent waste, including wasted food.

In 2026, as much as \$150,000 will be awarded to schools that meet the funding objectives and eligible expense requirements as described in the following sections.

1.2 The grant

The first round of funding will be available to two-year colleges, Head Start programs, and preschools and K-12 schools where at least 50% of students are eligible for educational benefits, such as the former free or reduced lunch program. This round will open in late January of 2026 with applications due March 12. Individual schools may apply for up to \$15,000, and public schools may apply for up to \$45,000 across the district.

Applications from any K-12 school, preschool, college, or university in the county will be accepted in the second round from April 2 through October 15, or until available funds are depleted.

Grant funding can be used toward the following three objectives:

Objective 1: Reduce waste and reuse

Projects in this category could involve reducing packaging and food waste. Strategies include repurposing food in internal programs or donating it. Packaging waste can be reduced by serving food and beverages in bulk. Project proposals that include food waste prevention or donation will be given preference for funding.

The following are project examples that meet this objective:

- Implementing a sharing table in the cafeteria where unwanted foods can be distributed to other students.
- Donating leftover/surplus food to a hunger-relief program
- Adding storage capacity to save and use food in future meals
- Replacing single-use and disposable food service items with reusable items
- Replacing individually packaged foods (such as condiments or beverages) with bulk options

Objective 2: Improve or expand recycling

Projects in this category would improve recycling programs or provide new opportunities to recycle at schools. Projects should contribute to a more efficient, abundant collection of recyclables.

The following are project examples that may meet this objective:

- Initiating recycling in cafeterias
- Adding recycling bins for every classroom and office space
- Expanding collection to outdoor areas, including athletic facilities and playgrounds
- Collecting recyclables at events

Objective 3: Start or improve organics recycling

Projects in this category initiate or expand food to hogs or organics for composting programs. It is important to avoid contamination in organics because if there are too many contaminants in a load it will not be accepted at a compost site or pig farm. To avoid contamination, there are several conditions that must be met to start an organics program in a cafeteria. Any qualifying school may apply for funding to collect organics in the kitchen. To start an organics program in a cafeteria, educational institutions must:

- demonstrate that they have a well-established recycling program or focus on improving their recycling program during the first phase of the grant project
- serve food in bulk using reusable or compostable food ware. To avoid contamination, schools cannot provide plastic utensils, or condiment packets and must minimize the use of foods in individual plastic wrappers, consider ways to prevent food waste (i.e. sharing tables, serving methods, etc.)

The following are project examples that may meet this objective:

- Collecting organics to be processed at a composting facility
- Collecting food waste to be processed into animal feed
- Establishing an on-site composting program (in most cases, only some of the organics will be able to be handled on site)
- Expanding collection of organics to other areas of buildings (such as staff lounges)

1.3 Eligible expenses

Eligible for funding

The following are examples of eligible expenses. Purchases must occur during the grant period.

[Bins, barrels, carts, bags, sorting stations, etc. for collecting recycling or organics](#)

- Recycling and organics containers
- Cafeteria sorting stations (\$2,500 maximum per station)
 - Trash bins (only funded for cafeteria sorting stations)
- Waste grabbers to remove contamination, especially from cafeteria bins

- Compostable bags for lining organics collection containers (three-month supply, eligible only for new programs)
- On-site compost bins to give students hands-on experience with composting

Project implementation (up to 75% of the total grant amount):

- Time to lead the implementation of the grant project (staff or volunteers)
 - Staff time already accounted for in your annual budget is not an eligible expense
- Reimbursement/incentives for monitors (staff, students or volunteers) who oversee separation of organics, recycling, and trash in cafeterias or dining halls during the initial launch of project
 - Physical incentives should be low-waste items that are durable, consumable, or recyclable. Experience incentives are preferred (like student parties). Hennepin County staff can help you determine appropriate incentive choices.
- Stipends for teachers/staff to start and lead student environmental clubs
 - For the portion of their work related to supporting waste-diversion activities

Equipment for the cafeteria or kitchen

- Bulk milk and condiment dispensers to replace individually packaged products
- Reusable food ware to replace disposable food ware
 - Durable baskets or reusable bags for breakfast to-go are allowed
- Dishwasher and installation costs
 - \$10,000 limit per location/district (each funding round)
 - Must be National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) certified, and a plan review must be submitted to a regulating health authority when applicable
 - Must be ENERGY STAR certified
 - Replacement of an existing dishwasher is not allowed

Food waste prevention

- Supplies for a sharing table such as a table, stainless steel cart, and steel or plastic food-safe bins
- Food waste tracking software to minimize wasted food
 - Equipment to support the software and training on how to use it
 - Software contract costs for up to one year
 - Examples of vendors: LeanPath, Phood and Winnow
- Refrigerator or freezer to expand capacity in the kitchen, to store perishable items on the sharing table or to store food and beverages prior to donation
 - \$2,500 maximum per site/cafeteria
 - Must be ENERGY STAR certified
 - Must meet MN Food Code requirements and have approval from regulating health department
 - No freezers or refrigerators to replace current equipment

Hauling and construction upgrades for organics

- Hauling costs of organics (eligible only for new programs, for three months)
- Construction upgrades to loading docks and enclosures to facilitate organics collection (\$5,000 maximum per location)

Hand dryers to replace paper towel dispensers

- \$200 maximum per dryer, with a \$5,000 limit per site/district (each funding round)

1.4 Grant application

When submitting an Application, Applicants must follow the specific format and content requirements in the grant application. Failure to do so will likely prolong the evaluation process and/or may be grounds for rejection of the Application.

Applicant shall describe, in detail, the proposed uses of the Grant funds for the Project. Any other use of Grant funds is strictly prohibited. Applicant shall be solely responsible for securing all additional funds necessary for completion of the Project.

Applicant agrees to only use the Grant funds for the uses indicated above. Use of Grant funds for any other purpose is strictly prohibited. If Applicant uses Grant funds for any other purpose, Applicant shall, upon County's written demand, repay all Grant funds awarded.

1.5 Guidelines

The following guidelines apply to all project proposals:

- A. No matching funds are required for grant proposals.
- B. The first 50 percent of grant funds will be disbursed upon execution of the grant agreement, 20 percent of grant funds will be released when an updated budget and receipts/invoices for items purchased are submitted and approved. The remaining funds will be released upon approval of the final project report.
- C. The maximum award per school is \$15,000. A school district may receive a maximum of \$45,000 per calendar year.
- D. As a general guide, the intent of this grant is to support modest capital expenditures, and any equipment purchased must be used for waste-reduction activities beyond the term of the grant project.
- E. Priority will be given to projects in which the applicant can demonstrate a strong plan to sustain the proposed activities after grant funds have been exhausted.
- F. Upon notification of award, county staff will contact you to set up an initial grant meeting with the people involved with the project. The purpose of this initial meeting is to discuss project implementation and to review the reporting guidelines.
- G. If a proposal is submitted as a collaborative effort involving more than one public school or organization, the school district must act as the primary applicant and submit an application on behalf of the schools involved.
- H. Projects must be completed by June 30, 2028.
- I. The county reserves the right to recommend no award or award partial funding for project proposals.
- J. Upon grant award, the applicant must submit a resolution from its governing board authorizing execution of a grant agreement with the county and execute an agreement.
- K. Grant recipients are strongly encouraged to attend Hennepin County Sustainable Schools meetings held during the school year.

1.6 Application submission

Review and grant information at hennepin.us/schoolrecycling and fill out the [school recycling and waste reduction inquiry form](#) to receive the application materials. Project proposals for the first grant round must be submitted to Hennepin County Environment and Energy using the form provided by 4 p.m. on Thursday, March 12, 2026.

Grant award recommendations for round one will be communicated in March of 2026.

Project proposals for the second grant round may be submitted to Hennepin County Environment and Energy from April 2 through October 15, or until available funds are depleted.

To complete your application, email the following items to grant program staff at schoolrecycling@hennepin.us:

1. The application in DOCX (Word), PDF, or Google Docs format
2. The budget spreadsheet in XLXS (Excel) or Google Sheets format
3. A signed copy of the first page of the application; a scanned copy or electronic signature is accepted.

1.7 Information meetings

Bring your project ideas, get answers to your questions, and discuss other ways county staff can help make your project a success.

A virtual information session will be held via Zoom:

- Wednesday February 11 from 9 to 10 a.m. [Register](#).

1.8 Reporting requirements

Grant reports must detail progress made to achieve goals, project results, including quantitative data when available, and expenditures. Project reports include a written report, a budget spreadsheet, and invoices/receipts.

Reports must be submitted by the following deadlines:

- 1) If your project will take **one year** to complete, submit your final report by **April 30, 2027**.
- 2) For projects that will require **two years** to complete, the grantee has the option of an interim progress report or a site visit. Schools choosing a site visit must also submit mid-term waste reduction/recycling data. The deadline for the mid-term report/site visit is **April 15, 2027**. A final project report must be submitted at least two months prior to expiration of the grant agreement, no later than **April 30 2028**.
- 3) Reporting deadlines for grantees that apply after March 19, 2026 will be decided on a case-by-case basis. Generally, final reports will be due 1-2 years after a contract is executed.

2 Evaluation and selection

2.1 Applicant evaluation and recommendation for selection

County will consider the Application to determine whether it meets County's requirements and is otherwise eligible for a Grant award. Submission of an Application shall neither obligate nor entitle an Applicant to enter into a contract with the County or to receive a Grant.

2.2 Evaluation of responsiveness

The County will consider all the material submitted by the Applicant to determine whether the Applicant's offer is in compliance with the terms and conditions set forth in this Solicitation. Applications that do not comply with the provisions in this Solicitation may be considered nonresponsive and may be rejected. Notwithstanding the foregoing, County expressly reserves the right to reject any or all Applications with or without cause.

Applications will be reviewed and recommended for funding based on the following criteria: project description, project plan, data gathering, education for students and staff, timeline, budget, and plan for sustaining the project.

The County reserves the right to determine whether any aspect of the Application satisfactorily meets the criteria, the right to seek clarification or additional information from any Applicant(s), and the right to waive any irregularities or informalities that the County deems is in its best interest.

2.3 Execution of grant agreement

County may condition the Grant award upon Applicant's execution of a Grant agreement provided by County. As applicable, the Grant agreement shall define the legal relationship between County and Applicant.

3 General rules

3.1 Solicitation for Grant Applications and Grant overview

This Solicitation for Grant Applications is an invitation for Applicants to submit a Grant Application to the County. It is a means by which the County may facilitate the acquisition of information related to awarding the Grant and is **NOT A COMMITMENT OR OBLIGATION TO AWARD ANY AMOUNT.**

Nothing in this Application shall obligate County to (i) award any amount; (ii) award any subsequent grants; or (iii) pay or otherwise make any additional distributions.

3.2 Questions and pre-application assistance

Hennepin County Environment and Energy staff are available to help throughout the application process, project implementation, and report writing.

Hennepin County provides the following assistance and resources:

- Site visits by county staff to provide suggestions on set-up of collection systems.
- Advice on gathering baseline, interim and final data.
- Free container signs and labels to help educate students and staff about which materials can be recycled or composted.
- Training for staff and students.

You are encouraged to contact the grant program staff at schoolrecycling@hennepin.us to discuss your project ideas and for assistance with developing your project proposal.

3.3 Addenda

The County reserves the right to modify this Solicitation at any time prior to the Application due date. The County will modify the Solicitation only by formal written addenda. Applications should be based on this Solicitation document and any formal written addenda.

3.4 County's right to withdraw, cancel, suspend and/or modify the Solicitation

The County reserves the right to withdraw, cancel, suspend, and/or modify this Solicitation for any reason and at any time with no liability to any prospective Applicant for any costs or expenses incurred in connection with the Solicitation or otherwise.

3.5 Applicant's right to edit or cancel an Application

An Application may be edited or cancelled prior to the Application due date.

3.6 Applications will not be returned

Upon submission, Applications will not be returned.

3.7 Public disclosure of Application documents

This Solicitation and any data or information submitted to County in response are subject to applicable law, including but not limited to the provisions of the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act Minnesota Statutes, chapter 13 ("MGDPA").

If the Applicant believes private/non-public data is included in its Application, Applicant shall clearly identify the data and provide the specific rationale in support of the asserted classification. Applicant must type in bold red letters the term "CONFIDENTIAL" on that specific part or page of the Application which

Applicant believes to be confidential. Classification of data as trade secret data will be determined pursuant to applicable law, and, accordingly, merely labeling data as “trade secret”, “confidential” or the like does not necessarily make the data protected under any applicable law.

The Applicant agrees, as a condition of submitting its Application, that the County will not be liable or accountable for any loss or damage which may result from a breach of confidentiality related to the Application.

3.8 Applicant’s costs

The County shall not be responsible for any costs incurred by Applicant in relation to this Solicitation. Applicant shall bear all costs of Application preparation, submission, and attendance at interviews, or any other activity associated with this Solicitation or otherwise.

3.9 Conflict of interest

The Applicant affirms that to the best of its knowledge the submission of its Application, or any resulting Grant award, does not present an actual or perceived conflict of interest. Strictly for illustration purposes, a personal relationship with a County employee directly or indirectly involved in the Grant process may be a conflict of interest.

The Applicant agrees that should any actual or perceived conflict of interest become known, it will immediately notify the County and will advise whether it will or will not avoid, mitigate, or neutralize the conflict of interest.

The County may make reasonable efforts to avoid, mitigate, or neutralize a conflict of interest by an Applicant. To avoid a conflict of interest by an Applicant, the County may utilize methods including disqualifying an Applicant from eligibility for the Grant or cancelling the Grant if the conflict is discovered after the Grant has been issued. The County may, at its sole and absolute discretion, waive any conflict of interest.