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Guidelines for Request for Application (RFA) on the New Mexico

New Mexico Outdoor Learning Start-Up Grant

I. PURPOSE OF THIS REQUEST FOR APPLICATION (RFA)

The outdoors is a resource for enhancing learning, social engagement, and health and is available to all New Mexico students in every community. Experiences in nature and access to the outdoors are associated with greater health and well-being and academic success.

In New Mexico, children are experiencing higher rates of stress, depression, obesity, diabetes, and other health risks. Utilizing outdoor spaces for academic learning and incorporating **environmental education** into school curricula can help reduce these health risks and inequities.

The most effective **outdoor learning** is student-centered, culturally, and linguistically relevant and responsive, multidisciplinary, and supports physical, emotional, and social, health and well-being.

This RFA is designed to promote innovation in the critical area of outdoor learning by expanding access to outdoor learning and environmental education programs for New Mexico students. Up to two hundred twenty-five thousand dollars ($225,000.00) in competitive grants are available to New Mexico PreK–12 public school districts or state-chartered charter schools, a group of public schools (**consortium of schools**), regional educational cooperatives, and single public schools in partnership with a community outdoor learning or environmental organization, to operate, expand, and sustain outdoor learning programs to:

1) Provide all students and families with equitable access to outdoor learning environments to interact, play, explore, discover, and learn.
2) Integrate culturally sustaining, social-emotional, interdisciplinary, outdoor, and environmental education programs that are aligned with state content standards and are in collaboration with local organizations and based on community need.
3) Provide a variety of learning experiences that integrate environmental literacy and systems thinking concepts.
4) Make connections between local, regional, national, and global community systems and how they work together for a sustainable future.

Note: **Emboldened** terms are defined in the Glossary of Terms

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II. NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (PED) VISION

Provide a culturally, linguistically responsive education to ALL students in New Mexico to prepare them socially, emotionally, and academically for success in college, career, and life.

III. LEVEL OF FUNDING

One-year, one-time planning grants of up to thirty thousand ($30,000.00) are available through an application process, where total funding shall not exceed two hundred twenty five thousand ($225,000.00) for fiscal year 2026. Grant amounts will be determined by each entity's grant application. The full amount may be awarded to multiple applicants or a combination of applicants submitting a single application. Any funds not expended by June 30, 2026, shall be reverted to the PED and shall not be permitted to carry over to subsequent years. Current and continued funding for this project is dependent upon annual legislative appropriations.

IV. ALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS

Funds may be used for:

- for professional learning tuition, fees, and/or training program costs, and/or professional learning books and/or materials for the teachers receiving training;
- teacher stipends or substitute costs when teachers participate in professional learning in outdoor learning;
- contracts with professional learning providers, mentors, or coaches with outdoor learning expertise to work with schools to plan and create a new outdoor learning program;
- developing outdoor learning spaces may be used for detached shade structures, concrete pavers, concrete seating stones, gravel for pathways, and materials for greenhouses, school gardens, or living schoolyards;
- the purchase of equipment, gear, and learning materials for students in relation to outdoor learning;
- transportation to and from outdoor learning opportunities and experiences; and
- hiring of Full Time Employees (FTE) or Part Time Employees, and Contractors.

V. UNALLOWABLE USE OF FUNDS

Indirect costs are not allowable. The fiscal agent shall bear any indirect costs.
Ineligible Programs:

- Programs without significant time engaging in outdoor learning;
- Traditional organized youth sports played on developed fields (i.e. soccer, football, etc.);
- Infrastructure development;

- Out-of-state travel;
- Summer camps providing only organized sports opportunities; or
- Equipment-only projects (i.e., applications with no programming element).

VI. LENGTH OF FUNDING

The resulting contract shall begin upon the awarding/execution of an award memo to winning applicants and continue through June 30, 2026. The PED reserves the right to terminate any award that does not meet the requirements as defined by the guidelines governing the program or does not demonstrate substantial progress toward meeting the objectives outlined in its approved application.

VII. ELIGIBLE ENTITIES

- Eligible entities are New Mexico PreK–12 public school districts or state-chartered charter schools, agroup of public schools (a consortium of schools), regional education cooperatives, and single public schools in partnership with a community outdoor learning or environmental organization to operate, expand, and sustain outdoor learning programs.
- A school district that wishes to apply does not have to include all schools within the district in its application to be eligible for funding. Similarly, not all schools included in a school district's or consortium of school's application may be funded.
- A charter school's authorizer will be the fiscal agent, if funded.

VIII. COMPETITIVE PRIORITIES

The PED will prioritize the distribution of available grant funding based on:

- proposals planning the creation of a new outdoor learning program;
- proposals from **rural** entities that serve a student body in which at least 40 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, pursuant to the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act;
- proposals from **rural** entities that serve a student body in which at least 50 percent of students are "at-risk", pursuant to the PED Comprehensive Strategic Plan;
- impact in terms of the number of students or potential students it will directly impact; and
- eligible entities that are working with providers of high-quality professional learning forK through grade twelve outdoor learning.

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IX. DEFINITIONS

Term	Definition
Community and place-based education	Engages New Mexico land and cultures as the starting point for learning within all academic subjects, ensuring that the curriculum is deeply connected to the local community and students' identities, cultures, and experiences. This approach provides community-connected instruction that infuses high-level content, inquiry-based learning, and problem-solving with real-world learning opportunities, increasing academic achievement and engagement, improving individual and collective health, and building pride in oneself and in the State of New Mexico.
Consortium of schools	A group of public schools across school districts or within a regional education cooperative.
Culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive	Validating and affirming an individual's home culture and language to create connections with other cultures and languages in various social contexts.
Environmental education	An interdisciplinary educational process that helps people learn more about individual and community connections to natural systems, fostering environmental literacy and civic engagement.
Outdoor classroom	An external shelter or space within the school grounds which creates a practical area for outdoor learning.
Outdoor learning	An interdisciplinary set of activities that include discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the outdoors and natural world, and engaging in environmental and recreational activities in an outdoor setting.
Rural	Any part of the state other than Los Alamos County, Albuquerque, Rio Rancho, Farmington, Las Cruces, Roswell, Santa Fe, and within a 10-mile radius around those cities.

X. PROGRAM OVERSIGHT AND MANAGEMENT

The PED has assigned the following individuals to oversee and manage the progress of the projects/programs, listed below:

Jacqueline Costales, Ed.D., Division Director, Curriculum and Instruction
Jacqueline.Costales@ped.nm.gov

Shafiq Chaudhary, Director, Math and Science Bureau
Outdoor.learning@ped.nm.gov

Patricia Gharrity, Assistant Director, Math and Science Bureau
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Kristy Reale, Outdoor Learning Specialist, Math and Science Bureau
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XI. SCORING GUIDELINES

Each application will be scored across five (5) application sections. A total of 50 points are possible:

I. Project Justification (Detailed narrative that exemplifies how the program meets the eligibility criteria, student demographics, and how the proposal aligns to the PED Comprehensive Strategic Plan) (10 points)
II. Project Narrative (Detailed narrative illustrating intended goals, scope, partners, timeline, and any evidence-based justification) (7 points)
III. Project Timeline (Detailing the identification and implementation of high-quality professional learning to support teachers) (20 points)
IV. Project Budget (Budget overview detailing the requested funding by category through June 30, 2026) (7 points)
V. Sustainability of Project (Narrative detailing how the project will continue past June 30, 2026 (6 points)

Either a score of '0' or 'no submission' of any of the components of the application will result in a disqualification of the application.

REVIEW CRITERIA

Proposed projects will be reviewed and scored based on the criteria below:

Project Justification

- Does the narrative describe how the program will meet the eligibility criteria, including student demographics, and how the proposal aligns to the PED Comprehensive Strategic Plan?
- Does the proposed project support individuals' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivations to engage in outdoor learning and/or sustainability conversations?
- Does the applicant address priorities and cite objectives?
- Does the applicant explain the need for implementing the program within the identified target audience (grade levels, groups of students)?

Project Narrative

- Do the proposed activities, expected outputs, and outcomes support the goal of this RFA?
- Does the proposed project include all project partners in the design and development of programming?
- Does the proposed project include using NM assets to achieve project goals?
- Does the proposed project include using standard-aligned resources to achieve project goals?
- Do the proposed activities engage a target audience with meaningful opportunities to understand outdoor learning and/or sustainability topics better?
- Does the proposed project include best practices (such as project-based learning, industry

voice and empowerment support, and environmental education guidelines)?
- Does the proposed project include opportunities for participants to interact with PED, industry, or other subject matter experts?

Project Timeline
- Does the proposal clearly describe how the project will be executed logistically?
- Does the proposal include details sufficient to determine that it can reasonably be completed in the proposed time frame?
- Does the project include anticipated professional learning, communities of practice, staff development, field trips, programming, and/or other milestones?

Project Budget
- Is the proposed budget request reasonable and justified?
- If the proposed project is part of a joint project request, does it represent two complementary but distinctly different proposals?

Sustainability
- Is there evidence of a plan to sustain the proposed program in subsequent years? Does this project increase the likelihood of ongoing inclusion of programming that supports environmental literacy at informal and/or formal learning institution partner sites?
- Does the applicant demonstrate how partnerships might continue past the project end date?

XII. ADDITIONAL SELECTION FACTORS

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To ensure a diverse cohort of funded projects, PED, in collaboration with the review committee, may select a proposal out of review rank order if justified based upon the following factors:
- Balance/distribution of funds
  - By geography
  - By type of institutions
  - By type of partners
  - By project types
  - By audience types
- Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by other state agencies
- Applicant's prior award performance
- Partnerships with/participation of targeted groups

XIII. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

All eligible entities awarded grant funding must participate in a monthly scheduled Community of Practice (CoP) through the PED during the SY2025–2026 in order to receive grant funds. Failure to actively participate will constitute in awarded funds returned to the PED. All eligible entities must enroll in the CoP, share best practices, and problems of practices to support collegial learning among one another. All applicants must enroll in and

complete any required online Canvas course modules during the SY2025–2026. At a minimum, participants should include the school's principal and/or identified program manager, and teachers implementing outdoor learning programs.

Awarded entities will be surveyed to determine the best dates/times to host the CoP.

XIV. CANVAS

Grant applications must be submitted to Canvas, in Module 6, Submissions by 4:00 pm MST on Friday, July 18, 2025. Please ensure the program grant manager has a Canvas account. You may request a Canvas account by putting in a help desk ticket.

You may access the Canvas course here to review and upload the application packet.

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XV. TIMELINE

Program managers will make every effort to adhere to the following schedule:

Action	Responsible Party	Due Dates
Discuss RFA with Interested Stakeholders	PED	May 15, 2025
Request for Application Open	PED	June 2, 2025
Deadline to submit Intent to Apply (Optional)	Potential applicants	June 18, 2025
Deadline to submit questions	Potential applicants	July 1, 2025
Response to questions	PED	July 7, 2025
Application Submissions Due	***Applicants***	***July 18, 2025 @ 4:00 p.m.***
Evaluation of applications	Review Panel	July 21—25, 2025
Selection of grantees	Review Panel	July 26—27, 2025
Finalize award memos	PED/Grantee(s)	July 28 – August 1, 2025
Award Memo(s) Transmission	PED/Grantee(s)	August 22, 2025
Community of Practice #1	PED/Grantee(s)	September 2025

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XVI. EXPLANATION OF EVENTS

Discuss RFA

Pursuant to the issuance of the RFA, officials from PED will host a virtual meeting to discuss the intention of the RFA and review the guidelines as stipulated in this document with interested stakeholders on **May 15, 2025, from 2:00–3:00 pm MST. Please Register** for this webinar through the registration link. If you have questions or issues regarding registration, please email the Outdoor Learning Team at outdoor.learning@ped.nm.gov

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Issuance of RFA

This RFA is being issued on behalf of the New Mexico Public Education Department on the date specified in the above timeline.

Deadline to Submit Intent to Apply

Potential applicants may submit the Intent to Apply via SurveyMonkey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FY26ODLINTENT by **11:59 pm MST June 18, 2025**. Completing the Intent to Apply Form does not obligate the eligible entities in any way but will provide useful information to thePED in preparing for the grant review process. Entities may continue to apply even if they miss the deadline to submit the Intent to Apply.

Deadline to Submit Questions

Potential applicants may submit questions to the NM Outdoor Learning Grant Q&A on Canvas to the intent or clarity of the RFA until **4:00 pm MST on July 1, 2025**, as indicated in the timeline above. Program Managers should have a Canvas Account. Questions shall be clearly labeled and shall cite the relevant sections of the RFA or any other attending documents.

Response to Questions

Responses to questions will be distributed as indicated in the timeline above and according to the order in which the questions were received.

Submission of Application

All applications must be received for review and evaluation through the New Mexico Outdoor Learning Start-Up Grant Canvas Portal no later than **4:00 pm MST on July 18, 2025.** Applications received after this time will not be accepted. The date and time of receipt of the application will be noted on the application itself.

Evaluation of Applications

The Evaluation Committee consists of stakeholders outside the Math and Science Bureau. The committee will evaluate applications based on the priorities outlined. The process will take place as indicated in the timeline above depending on the number of applications received. During this time, Patricia Gharrity may initiate discussions with Applicants to clarify aspects of the proposals. However, proposals may be accepted and evaluated without such discussion. Applicants may not initiate discussions.

Selection of Grantees

The Outdoor Learning team in the Math and Science Bureau will notify all Applicants of the decision on their application before or near August 1, 2025. Feedback and final application score will be distributed to Applicants not selected for funding. Each application will be scored by the panelists individually and then discussed at a meeting of the entire panel to arrive at final scores and committee feedback for each component.

For more details on the scoring guidelines, see the “Scoring Guidelines” section above.

Finalize Awards

During the window of time stipulated in the timeline above, the PED will work directly with successful grantees to establish assurance terms leading to the awarding/execution of award letters.

Contract Awards

After reviewing the Evaluation Committee Report and the signed contractual agreement, the Agency Procurement Office will award as per the schedule in the timeline above. This date is subject to change at the discretion of the State Purchasing Division or relevant Agency Procurement Office. The award letter(s) shall be awarded to the Applicants whose proposals are most advantageous to the State of New Mexico and the PED, taking into consideration the evaluation factors outlined in this RFA. The award is subject to appropriate Department and State approval, and both entities reserve the right to not fund any of the applications, if none are judged to be advantageous and/or do not score sufficiently.

XVII. EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The committee tasked with the evaluation of applications has a broad level of experience with professional learning programs and content experts collectively, representing a variety of perspectives and experience in the field. Members are highly familiar with the professional learning and outdoor learning landscapes in New Mexico.

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XVIII. REPORTING

Each successful grantee awarded funding through the NM Outdoor Learning Start-Up Grant is required submit an end of year report to include the following information to the New Mexico Public Education Department on or before **July 6, 2026 that includes but is not limited to**:

- an executive summary including:
  - How the program met the proposal, outputs, and outcomes.
  - Program Objectives
  - Program Achievements
  - Program Outlook (how the program will be sustained, the future plans, and anticipated growth for implementation)
- planning phase process including:
  - agendas from all planning meetings with attendance marked;
  - the number of teachers who attended planning meetings or participated in professional learning;
  - the number of administrators who attended each planning meeting;
  - name of stakeholders, coaches, and/or mentors who assisted with planning and participated in the community of practice;
- implementation phase including:
  - the number of teachers who implemented outdoor learning and participated in the community of practice;
  - the number of students who participated in outdoor learning;
  - attendance percentage of students who participated in outdoor learning
  - the gender, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of those students;
- teacher trainings including
  - agendas from school or partner trainings or events
  - attendance of participants
  - the impact on students including: a narrative highlighting the impact on students, teachers, community engagement, school culture, and any other aspects that you have noticed, including artifacts.
  - Artifacts which highlight student impact and programming such as student and teacher testomonials, images, PLC and CoP artifacts.
- Challenges and opportunities for future improvement