Illinois Schoolyard Habitat Action Grant - Sample Application One

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 One

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

We will establish a school garden program for students in grades 1-5. The program would begin in spring with a 400-square-foot pollinator garden that would serve as habitat and an outdoor learning space.

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

The goals for the pollinator garden are to benefit both local wildlife as well as students and teachers. For wildlife, the goal is to: 1) create a native plant pollinator garden that will provide habitat and food sources for birds, butterflies, bees and insects; and 2) double the observed species of pollinators within two years.

For students and teachers, the goals are to: 1) provide an extension of the classroom for 1st-5th grade students to enhance their STEM curriculum through nature-based activities and projects; 2) create an experiential outdoor learning environment for students to observe, measure, record, predict, listen, read, write, draw and reflect; 3) compile student observations into an annual schoolyard species count of bird and insect populations and contribute them to local citizen scientist projects, such as Bee Spotter and Journey North; 4) foster a beneficial and active garden space for students to learn about the importance of pollinators, to engage with local ecosystems and to connect more deeply with local flora and fauna; and 5) train all grade-level teachers in the uses of the schoolyard habitat to meet curricular standards.

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

Overall success for the project will be measured by the health and functionality of the pollinator garden as well as the activities and interactions that students and teachers have with the garden. Additionally, students and teachers will develop a monitoring plan to track and record changes in wildlife use and habitat. Success will look like a two-fold increase in pollinators over two years and a four-fold increase over five years. Success will also be measured by the outcomes of the related subject matter. For example, science students will predict, observe and record wildlife data that can translate to their overall science curriculum.

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

Students from the Girl Scout/Daisies troop (grades 1-3) will help raise funds for the project through the sale of Girl Scout cookies. All students from grades 1-5 will paint and decorate the small boulders that will serve as edging for the pathway through the garden. Fifth grade STEM students will help assess the

site (soil testing, drainage, sun/shade, microclimate analysis). Second and third grade students will create a planting map for the garden.

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

All students in grades 1-5 will help with planting the native plants on planting days in May. The days will be divided between the Girl Scout troop and four different classes with each class planting for 30 minutes. Four adults (teachers, parents or principal) will assist with the planting. Students will also create a sign for the garden that shares information on the benefits of a pollinator garden as well as the names of the plants.

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

During the school year, students in grades 1-5 will incorporate maintenance activities into their lessons. For example, plant biology and anatomy will be taught through watering. Native versus invasive as well as larger social/cultural lessons will be taught through weeding.

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

Currently, the designated area for the pollinator garden is an unused lawn in front of the school. This area will be transformed into an educational and interactive outdoor learning space with opportunities to connect with nature and learn about local wildlife. As a learning tool, the pollinator garden will support myriad classroom lessons and connect to many subject areas – from science, math, art, music and physical education to reading, writing, language, religion and social studies. For example, through an activity like partnering to harvest seeds from plants, students will learn about seasons, food sources, food chains and life cycles as well as foster critical thinking, teamwork and social interaction with peers. Perhaps the most significant educational aspect of the pollinator garden will be its capacity to promote awareness, knowledge and care of the environment that will lead to long-lasting stewardship actions.

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

The native plants in the pollinator garden will support local biodiversity and provide food and habitat for birds, butterflies, bees, insects and other species that are struggling for a home, especially in urban areas. The garden plants will also enrich the soil, control erosion, absorb and filter water and sequester carbon (all valuable lessons for students). Additionally, pollinator gardens require very little maintenance after the first couple of years – eliminating the use of pesticides, fertilizers, irrigation and other harms to the environment.

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.

March 8-12: Coordinate team and goals; March 15: Assess site (soil testing, drainage, sun/shade, microclimate analysis with fifth grade STEM class); March 22: Create a planting map and work plan (mock garden design with second and third grade STEM classes); March 23-26: Contact local businesses, garden clubs, construction/landscaping companies, environmental organizations for in-kind donations of materials; April 5-9: Prepare site during spring break; April 19-23: Create planting schedule, order plants, acquire tools and other materials, send out invitations to garden celebration ceremony; May 3-7:

Planting days and establishing the garden (second, third and fifth grade STEM students, Girl Scout troops, second grade classes); May 14: Garden celebration and ribbon-cutting ceremony; May 17 and beyond: Maintenance of the garden (separate time line, including “Adopt a Garden Week” schedule); May 17: Send thank-you notes to all donors, supporters and volunteers.

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?

As part of their learning activities, students will be highly involved in the maintenance of the garden during the school year. Additionally, Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts and sixth through eighth graders who are looking to fulfill their service project requirements will help maintain the garden.

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

Over the summer, first through fifth grade families can “Adopt a Garden Week” during which they will be responsible for maintaining the garden through regular watering, weeding and clean up.

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

The same maintenance schedule will be followed from year to year – evolving as needed.

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.

The success of the garden will hinge on the students, teachers and parents who use and care for the garden on a regular basis. Community volunteers will be a big part of the garden team as advocates for the garden and citizen scientists who help report on species in the garden. We are also excited that we have commitments from local businesses and city agencies to donate more than $1,000 worth of garden materials and supplies (mulch, organic soil, lumber, hardware, hoses and stumps).