

## **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 should be available to all New Mexico students in every community. Experiences in nature and access to the outdoors are associated with greater health, well-being and academic success.

In New Mexico, children are experiencing higher rates of stress, depression, obesity, diabetes, and other health risks. These health risks, which increase with health inequity, have been further exacerbated by the pandemic. Therefore, utilizing outdoor spaces for academic learning and incorporating **environmental education** into school curricula can help reduce these risks and inequities. COVID-19 has made it more relevant than ever to bring learning outdoors during school reentry to help lower stress while engaging students in a setting that reduces the risk of transmission— similar to when students were brought outside to protect them against tuberculosis and the Spanish Flu at the beginning of the 20th Century.

The most effective **outdoor learning** is student-centered, culturally, and linguistically relevant and responsive, multidisciplinary, and supports physical, emotional, 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 three hundred thousand (\$300,000.00) 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

## **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 fifty thousand (\$50,000) are available through an application process, where total funding shall not exceed three hundred thousand (\$300,000) for fiscal year 2024. 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, 2024, 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 professional learning tuition, fees, and/or training program costs, and/or professional learning books and/or materials for the teachers receiving training. Funds may be used to pay teacher stipends or substitute costs when teachers participate in professional learning. Funds may be used to contract with professional learning providers, mentors, or coaches with outdoor learning expertise to work with schools to plan and create a new outdoor learning program. Funds for 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. Funds may also be used towards the purchase of equipment, gear, and learning materials for students in relation to outdoor learning.

## **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;
- Student transportation projects; 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, 2024. 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 set forth in its approved application.

## **VII. ELIGIBLE ENTITIES**

Eligible entities are New Mexico PreK–12 public school districts or state-chartered charter schools, a group of public schools (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, it is possible that not all schools included in a school district’s or consortium of school’s application will 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 Martinez-Yazzie Action Plan/Discussion 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 for PreK through grade twelve outdoor learning.

**IX. DEFINITIONS**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Consortium of schools</b>	A group of public schools across school districts or within a regional education cooperative.
<b>Culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive</b>	Validating and affirming an individual’s home culture and language to create connections with other cultures and languages in various social contexts.
<b>Environmental education</b>	An interdisciplinary educational process that helps people learn more about individual and community connections to natural systems, fostering environmental literacy and civic engagement.
<b>Outdoor classroom</b>	An external shelter or space within the school grounds which creates a practical area for outdoor learning.
<b>Outdoor learning</b>	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.
<b>Rural</b>	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, Division Director, Curriculum and Instruction*  
[Jacqueline.Costales@ped.nm.gov](mailto:Jacqueline.Costales@ped.nm.gov)

*Shafiq Chaudhary, Director, Math and Science Bureau*  
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*Therese Baca-Radler, Outdoor Learning Specialist, Math and Science Bureau*  
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*Vanessa Barela, Outdoor Learning Specialist, Math and Science Bureau*  
[Vanessa.baraela@ped.nm.gov](mailto:Vanessa.baraela@ped.nm.gov)

## **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 Martinez-Yazzie Action Plan/Discussion Plan) (10 points)
- II. Project Narrative (Detailed narrative illustrating intended goals, scope, partners, timeline, and any evidence-based justification) (7 points)
- III. Project Plan (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, 2024) (7 points)
- V. Sustainability of Project (Narrative detailing how the project will continue past June 30, 2024) (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.**

## **XII. COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE**

All eligible entities awarded grant funding must participate in a Community of Practice (CoP) through the PED during the SY2023–2024 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 and share best practices, 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 2023–2024 school year. At a minimum, participants should include the schools' principal and teachers implementing outdoor learning programs.

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

## **XIII. CANVAS**

Grant applications must be submitted to Canvas, in module 5: Submissions under the Grant Application Submission Assignment by **4:00pm MST on Thursday, July 20, 2023**. 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.](#)

**XIV. TIMELINE**

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

Action	Responsible Party	Due Dates
Issue RFA	PED	June 20, 2023
Discuss RFA with interested stakeholders	PED	June 27, 2023
Deadline to submit Intent to Apply	Potential applicants	June 30, 2023
Deadline to submit questions	Potential applicants	July 10, 2023
Response to questions	PED	July 14, 2023
<b>Submission of applications</b>	<b>Potential applicants</b>	<b>July 20, 2023</b>
Evaluation of applications	Review Panel	July 20 – 28, 2023
Selection of grantees	Review Panel	July 29 – 30, 2023
Finalize award memos	PED/Grantee(s)	July 31 – August 4, 2023
Award Memo(s) Transmission	PED/Grantee(s)	August 23, 2023
Community of Practice #1	PED/Grantee(s)	September 2023

**XV. 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 go over the guidelines as stipulated in this document with interested stakeholders on **June 27, 2023, from 2:00–3:00pm MST**. [Please register](#) for this webinar through the registration link. If you have questions or issues regarding registration, please email Shafiq Chaudhary.

***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 applicant must submit the Intent to Apply via SurveyMonkey at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ODLG24> by **11:59pm MST June 30, 2023**. Completing the Intent to Apply Form does not obligate the eligible entities in any way but will provide useful information to the PED 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 10, 2023**, 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 20, 2023**. 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 will perform the evaluation of applications. The process will take place as indicated in the timeline above depending on the number of applications received. During this time, Shafiq Chaudhary may initiate discussions with Applicants for the purpose of clarifying aspects of the proposals. However, proposals may be accepted and evaluated without such discussion. Discussions may not be initiated by Applicants.

***Selection of Grantees***

The Evaluation Committee will notify all Applicants of the decision on their application August 2, 2023, or earlier. 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 in order to arrive at final scores and committee feedback for each component.

For more detail 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 assurances terms leading to the awarding/execution of award letters.



***Contract Awards***

After review of 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 set forth 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.

**XVI. 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.



## **XVII. REPORTING**

Each successful grantee awarded funding through the NM Outdoor Learning Start-Up Grant is required to report, at a minimum, the following information to the New Mexico Public Education Department on or before **July 7, 2024** that **includes but is not limited to:**

- a summary of what planning occurred leading to next steps the entity will take;
- a timeline of program implementation;
- 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;
- the number of teachers who implemented outdoor learning and participated in the community of practice;
- the number of students who participated in outdoor learning;
- the gender, racial, and socioeconomic diversity of those students;
- agendas from trainings or events with attendance marked;
- a summary of which schools were represented at trainings or events; and
- a narrative showcasing the impact on students, teachers, community engagement, school culture and any other aspects that you have noticed, including artifacts.