



Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge

Earth Charter Indiana's program Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge began in 2019 in partnership with the Indianapolis Office of Sustainability. This program sprang from the city of Indianapolis's THRIVE Program to create more sustainable and resilient communities. Initially, the ITSC program not only distributed funding but certifications for schools starting and continuing to lead the charge in sustainability projects throughout Indianapolis.

Application 1 will be open November 11 - December 9, 2022. Application 2 will be open June 16- July 14, 2023. All applications must be submitted online.

Highlights of the ITSC program:

2019: The inaugural year of the Indianapolis Thriving Schools Challenge (ITSC) certified 53 green schools from all corners of Marion County, while granting funding for 31 schools totalling 51 unique sustainability projects.

2020: Earth Charter Indiana took over the program entirely, as well as adopted a two application round approach to enable more schools to participate.

2021: ITSC went statewide becoming the Indiana Thriving School Challenge, with our first school Danville Middle School

2022: ITSC was awarded a USDA NIFA Food and Service Learning Program grant supporting the School Garden Pillar and the implementation of the School Garden Liaison Initiative.

As of November 2022 ITSC has supported:

86 Indiana Schools Received Grant Funding

\$174,444 Project Based Learning Grants

147 Sustainability Projects

\$64,500 Stipends for Indiana educators

87,272 Directly or Indirectly Impacted Students

Every year we learn, grow and readjust our focus to best serve our Indiana Schools in becoming the community hubs they deserve to be. All the while, this program is centered on youth engagement, circular economy and civic engagement in the world of sustainability.

Students, educators and parents are engaging with sustainability education and forging climate resiliency solutions - equipping our community with the knowledge and tools most needed today and in the future. If you haven't yet joined the challenge, we hope you will this year.

Program Overview

The Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge is a project based learning grants program for Indiana K-12 schools, with precedence given to schools in Marion County and underserved rural communities. Project funding is available to schools in need of financial support, maximizing the opportunity for all schools in our community to participate in tackling sustainability. Selected schools will be eligible for up to \$5,000 in funding to implement up to 3 new projects, as well as to improve upon or expand existing projects. The dedicated teachers and staff who champion the implementation of new projects at selected schools will receive a stipend of up to \$1,000 with no strings attached. For projects that have multiple Champions, decisions regarding how to split the stipend is at the discretion of the school.

- Projects must be within the 3 Pillars of the ITSC program: School Gardens*; Energy & Waste Reduction; Climate & Sustainability Curriculum Creation.
 - **Round 1 Grant Funding: support School Gardens* Pillar only.** This includes but is not limited to native, pollinator or food gardens; food rescue projects; composting.
 - **Round 2 Grant Funding: supports all pillars**
- Priority consideration will be given to: projects emphasizing circular economy and civic engagement; schools within historically underserved communities based on the percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Meal assistance, demographics of the student body, median household income, proximity to grocery stores and more.
- All schools must have students involved with ideation and implementation, generally known as a Green Team, but can also be but not limited to an afterschool garden club, individual classroom, entire grade or entire school. **Youth involvement is mandatory.**

All ITSC cohorts will have to attend and exhibit details of their project(s) at one or both of the following events or their virtual equivalent. **Participation is mandatory** in either:

Round 1

- Eco Science Challenge on April 21, 2023 at the Indiana State Museum

- Submit a 3-5 minute video showcasing their project results due with their final report in May 2023

Round 2

- Eco Science Challenge at the Indiana State Museum or corresponding event in April 2024
- Submit a 3-5 minute video showcasing their project results due with their final report in May 2024

Schools are welcome to participate in both events.

Note that it is not necessary for the funded projects to be completed by the event dates

Program Benefits

Education in sustainability engages children and young adults around important topics like environmental stewardship, climate resilience, social responsibility, waste reduction, circular economy, systems thinking, place- and problem-based learning, and resource conservation. Creating new projects will provide students, educators, and parents alike with hands-on implementation experience. Through project-based learning, students will exercise critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of creating authentic, meaningful projects. These skills and knowledge will be crucial to the development of innovative solutions to the challenges of the 21st century.

Guidelines

All Indiana schools are eligible to apply for project funding through the Indiana Thriving Schools Challenge. There are two opportunities to participate in the Challenge:

- Round 1 application, open November 11 - December 9, 2022, is for grant funding to support School Gardens* Pillar only. This includes but is not limited to native, pollinator or food gardens; food rescue projects; composting. This program runs from January - May 2023. Final reports will be due at the end of May 2023.

- Round 2 application, open June 16- July 14, 2023, is for grant funding supporting all pillars of the ITSC program. This program is for the 2023/24 school year and runs August 2023- May 2024. Final reports will be due at the end of May 2024.

All participating schools will receive a Thriving School decal to display their achievement on the school and digital graphics to use in digital documents or the school website. The use of these materials is at the discretion of each school.

Champions

Schools seeking funding must have a dedicated school Champion(s). This individual (or individuals) will be the driving force behind the project's planning, implementation, and classroom incorporation. One individual will serve as a point of contact to ITSC organizers.

Recognition and a stipend of up to \$1,000 will be awarded to school champion(s) selected for project funding. The stipend amount will depend on the complexity, duration and classroom incorporation of selected project(s). Stipends will be disbursed in January 2023 for Round 1 Applications and August 2023 for Round 2 Applications.

Champions are encouraged to attend monthly virtual meetings with ITSC Program Director and other cohorts to discuss progress. These meetings are completely voluntary. The purpose is to create a network of educators across the state at various stages of projects that can share skills and methods.

Project Funding

All Indiana schools are eligible to apply for up to \$5,000 in project funding to support the implementation of up to 3 new projects, or to expand, improve upon, or sustain an existing sustainability project. A lack of existing sustainability initiatives does not disqualify schools from applying for project funding. All proposals for project funding must have the support of the school leadership (i.e. principal, but also, when appropriate, head custodian, cafeteria manager, groundskeeper, etc.).

Each project, regardless of category, requires a pre- and post assessment of impact. Examples of metric/ data to collect:

- Attendance of Green Teams throughout the course of the program
- Amount of volunteers that came to assist with projects
- Weight of trash collected before implementation and during

- Weight of produce grown and distributed
- Account of how much food was saved or donated from food rescue
- Amount of people that visited outdoor space
- PICTURES of your green teams in action
- PICTURES of your designated project areas before, during and after implementation
- PICTURES of posters created to educate classmates or sharing the movies your green teams create
- Energy bill comparisons of before and after energy reduction projects

Green Teams

All schools receiving project funding must start a Green Team or Club, made up of students along with a teacher, administrator, staff member, and/or parent. If your school already has a sustainability-focused team or club, there is no need to start a new, separate, club.

The idea behind the Green Team is that we believe students should be leading the process of planning and implementing new projects. A Green Team may be a classroom or a multi-age student/teacher/parent group, and they can meet either during or after school.

Important dates

- ***ROUND 1* cohorts program begins January 2023***
- ***Let's Talk: ITSC monthly discussions (virtual) ONGOING***
 - Every month ITSC champions, Green Teams and more will be invited to attend discussions on various topics pertinent to sustainability in schools; these discussions will be a space for cohorts to share best practices, ask questions and be in community together; participation is not mandatory but highly recommended. Details about these discussions are shared in the ITSC monthly newsletters.
- ***Indiana Thriving Schools Virtual Showcase*** February 3, 2023
 - This will be our official announcement of the new cohorts and when your school is able to publicly announce becoming an ITSC cohort.
- ***Eco Science Challenge April 21, 2023*** 10-2pm at Indiana State Museum
 - ITSC cohorts will be asked to present on their ITSC projects; projects don't need to be complete but can report on decision making process and/or findings to date; cohorts are welcome to present multiple projects on various topics with only one

needing to be directly about ITSC project(s); Participation in ESC or a 3-5 minute video submission in May is mandatory; Cohorts are welcome to participate in both

- ***ROUND 1 cohorts final reports due at the end of May 2023***
- ***ROUND 2 2023 ITSC grant application opens June 16- July 14, 2023***
 - This grant round supports all the pillars of the ITSC program and is open to all Indiana K-12 schools.
- ***School Garden Liaison* Program June- July***
- ***Round 2 cohorts program begins August 2023 midterm report due December 2023 and final report due May 2024***
- ***Thriving Schools Virtual Showcase August 18***
 - This will be our official announcement of the new cohorts, schools are able to publicly announce becoming an ITSC cohort and past ITSC cohorts showcase their projects.

Project Guidance

Schools selected for project funding will work with Tatjana Rebelle (they/them), the Director of Youth Programming of Earth Charter Indiana, throughout the process of planning and implementing new projects. Tatjana will serve as a mentor to Champions and Green Teams who wish to receive support and guidance as they go through the program, whether that be to ask questions, talk about potential partners, community resources available, or anything else that comes up. Earth Charter Indiana has worked in this field for a decade - and has been mentoring schools since the program's inception.

Reporting

All cohorts will need to submit a final report. Round 2 cohorts will also be asked to submit a midterm report, due to length of program. Report submission will be done via a link issued to champions weeks prior to the due date. Champions will be expected to report on attendance of green teams; an itemized budget; data from project implementation and more. It is highly encouraged to share photos or videos of your progress. You will have space to share those with your reports but are welcome to share those at any time with the Director of Youth Programming via email.

Please provide permissions/media releases associated with those photos or videos, so we know we can use those images.

Note that the report you submit may be used as testimonial content for promoting the ITSC program.

Report dates are as follows:

Round 1 ITSC cohorts: May 2023

Round 2 ITSC cohorts: December 2023 & May 2024

Schools are required to maintain contact with Tatjana Rebelle of Earth Charter Indiana, particularly during project milestones, via email. If you share your progress on social media, be sure to use the hashtags - #IndianaThrivingSchools, #EarthCharterIndiana and #ThrivingSchoolsThursday.

Selection Criteria

It is strongly encouraged that all projects are to be student-led, increasing the project-based learning benefits. Schools applying for project funding must demonstrate that the project(s) will provide hands-on, educational opportunities for students. Selected schools must start (or already have) a Green Team or Club, made up of students along with administrators, teachers, staff, and/or parents.

Due to the alignment of the goals of the Thriving Schools Challenge and our primary funders, we will be particularly interested in projects that emphasize and illustrate the benefits of circular economy and/or civic engagement

Circular Economy: *A regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimized by slowing, closing, and narrowing energy and material loops; this can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, recycling, and upcycling. This is in contrast to a linear economy which is a 'take, make, dispose' model of production. — Definition courtesy the UN Climate Change.*

Civic Engagement: *Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. - Courtesy of the American Psychological Association*

Equity consideration: schools within historically underserved communities based on the percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Meal assistance, demographics of the student body, proximity to community assets and more .

Please direct any questions to program director, Tatjana Rebelle (they/them) at tatjana@earthcharterindiana.org

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