



**2020 Soil Health Initiative Outdoor Environmental Learning Center
Gardens on School Campuses Application Guidance Document**

TO: NC Soil and Water Conservation Districts

DATE: March 23, 2020

APPLICATION PERIOD: Monday March 23 until Friday, June 5, 2020 at midnight

Q&A Session: March 30 at 1:30 PM OR April 3, at 9:30AM

Call in 1.515.604.9094; access code 402588278

FUNDING ANNOUNCEMENT: The NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation's (Foundation) goals include educating citizens of all ages about the importance of soil health, food and crop production, and conservation of natural resources. The Foundation received an EPA Region 4 Environmental Education grant to further these goals, including a 5th Mobile Soils Classroom, 5 on-farm cover crop demonstration, and 5 school gardens. The following information includes instructions to NC Conservation Districts on applying for the School Gardens, with program information at <http://ncsoilwater.org/active-programs/outdoor-environmental-learning-centers/>.

The Foundation will fund up to 50% of project costs, with a funding cap of \$2,500, for the planning, design, and establishment of a Garden that is incorporated into an Outdoor Environmental Learning Center (OELC) on a school campus; each OELC is required to include an innovative soils education component. Grant funds will be disbursed based on receipts received by the Foundation. The District is required to obtain \$2,500 or more in match funding, either as direct cash or in-kind contributions. In-kind contributions can include the volunteer hours for planning and installation of Gardens. Volunteers can include school staff, parents, students, and other agencies supporting the project. The value of donated materials from businesses for items directly needed for the Garden or OELC are also eligible as match. A lesser match amount will decrease the funding amount awarded by the Foundation.

All Conservation Districts are encouraged to reach out to educators in their county and determine if an OELC can be incorporated into the school's long-range plans for educational programming. By providing Conservation Districts with resources to create a Garden in OELCs that include an innovative soils component the project will increase student's knowledge about sustainable agriculture and how to maintain healthy soils and clean water. Children and adult volunteers both will gain a greater appreciation of conservation stewardship through place-based, experiential learning and stewardship activities.

This document serves as a guidance to the application process. Attached are the application questions for your reference. Further questions should be directed to Michelle Lovejoy at 919-510-4599 or ncfswc@gmail.com.

PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

OELC School Champion: Identify a motivated educator, an OELC Champion, at the school that is interested in serving as the school's liaison and is comfortable sharing lessons learned with the public. The District is highly encouraged to work with an educator that will continue the outreach efforts in future years, beyond the requirements of this program. The school must be committed to the establishment of the Garden within the OELC, and the OELC Champion is a critical part of making sure the long-range plans for continued use and maintenance of the OELC happens.

Project Support Team: Identify a strong Support Team that can support the project. The Foundation recognizes that not all Districts have expertise in OELCs. Your District is encouraged to build a team that can provide the educational over-site and coordination needed to make this project successful. Use this project as an opportunity to strengthen relations with sister agencies, local businesses, and volunteer civic groups. It is recommended to seek input from other county agencies such as County Extension Service agents (horticulture or crop specialist), Master Gardener program volunteers, and District Board members.

Innovative Soils Component: The planning team can determine the type of Garden that is best suited for the school and the students. Gardens can be a variety of types; fruit and vegetable raised-bed gardens, herb gardens, wildlife and pollinator gardens, or others. Districts will need to describe the innovative soils component in their application. Think about hands-on action-based activities. The Project needs to include signage that describes the soils in the area, additional technical resources will be provided to assist in the design of the sign.

OELC Management Plan: Develop a concept plan for the OELC and Garden that is acceptable to all partners, child friendly, educational (including a specific soil component), easy to access, and has a long-range maintenance plan for continued use for many years. Districts should encourage the schools to have the students directly involved in the Garden design and site selection. It is recommended that students will evaluate soil types as compared to available nutrients and water to determine the desired type of Garden and plantings. Consider how the District will advertise the successful project to get the largest public exposure.

Train the Trainers: The District should consider the ability to host a training workshop to encourage other Districts and schools to build similar OELCs. Consider ways to ensure attendance such as hosting workshops on teacher workdays or applying for professional continuing education credits for the educators. The District is encouraged to leverage local resources to offset additional costs associated with the workshop and possible funding for expansion or new OELCs in the future.

Anticipated Timeline: *Please note the Foundation is monitoring work restrictions related to COVID19 and will adjust the timeline accordingly. Any deadline extensions will be posted to the Foundation's website, announced by email on the District and District Only listserves maintained by the Division, and shared with the Division's Regional Coordinators.*

March 23: Foundation opens applications to Districts

March 30 at 1:30PM and April 3 at 9:30AM: Optional teleconference to address any questions from applicants.
Call 1.515.604.9094; code 402588278

June 5, 2020 at midnight: Deadline to submit applications online and submit attachments electronically to ncfswc@gmail.com.

June 8 to June 15: Foundation's Workgroup reviews applications; recommends Districts for contracting based on quality of the proposed project and the overall geographic spread for larger programmatic impact.

June 19: Foundation announces funding decision and awards contracts to Districts.

Late June to August: Districts will work with OELC Champion and Support Team to finalize plans; determine material list, assist with contacting contractors (as needed), prepare for fall construction and establishment of plants, secure water sources

Sept/Fall 2020: Engage the students; begin installation or construction of garden beds, fall plantings, educational programming in OELC

Spring 2021: Complete garden installation, spring planting, educational programming, host spring workshop and advertise project

APPLICATION SELECTION CONSIDERATION: The Foundation will utilize a review team to make recommendations on which applications to accept for funding. Special consideration will be given to schools with at least a 20% underserved population.

- **OELC Design & Management Plan:** Partners will be looking for a plan that includes all the features required, plus a long-range maintenance plan to ensure continued use for many years. Provide specific details as to who will manage in garden outside of school hours including the summer months.
- **Local Support:** Based on the make-up of the Support Team, what is the strength of resources available to the District? Partners will look for a team that can work well together and continue outreach efforts in future years. The reviewers will also consider the District's ability to encourage others to develop similar projects.
- **OELC & Garden Functionality:** Is the garden innovative? It is designed for ease of usage and easily accessible by all levels of the student population and school staff? Partners will be looking for innovative OELC educational ideas, interactive soils lessons. Partners will also consider the complexity of the OELC, innovative soil display/lessons and the ability to duplicate the project at other schools.

APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Obtain permission from the District Board to apply for the grant. Depending on how your District is structured, this may also require the approval of County Government or the School Board.
2. Identify the school and a motivated educator that will champion the project. Seek support and approval from the school maintenance department and the local school administration. Seek input from local businesses and civic groups for participating on the planning team. These groups may also be willing to donate funds, volunteer hours (in-kind) and supplies.
3. Complete the online application. For ease of updating or changing answers, it is recommended to answer the application questions 1-20 (listed below) in a Word Document that you can come back to.
4. To fill out the online application, log in as a new user by setting up a username and password; instructions are provided in the next section. Once the application is submitted, you will not be allowed to return to change answers. Print a copy of your responses for your records. You should also be emailed a copy of your responses.
5. Applications will be accepted until June 5, 2020 at midnight. If any document is not received by the application deadline, the entire application will be considered ineligible. *If you run into technical issues with email or the Form Site please contact the Foundation ASAP (919-510-4599 office, 336-345-5335 cell).*
6. Send the following email attachments to ncfswc@gmail.com in addition to completing the online application. Be sure to use the labels provided, where it says SWCD include your District's name.
 - a. **Board Certification Letter [labeled SWCD_2020OELC_BoardLtr]:** The letter is to be on District letterhead and signed by the Chairperson or another designated member. Include the date the resolution or motion to participate was passed at a board meeting. Do Not provide a copy of the minutes or resolution, just the date of the meeting. *Letters signed by staff will not be accepted.*
 - b. **Site Plan [labeled SWCD_2020OELC_SitePlan]:** Developed a concept site plan as a sketch or drawing to show layout of Garden within the OELC (birds eye view). This plan can be amended, and more detail added as needed, once grant funding is given. Include the location of types of expected plants to be grown in different areas.
 - c. **Site Map [labeled SWCD_2020OELC_SiteMap]:** Use an aerial photograph that shows the location of the school. Indicate the boundaries or location of the OELC. Include a north arrow and scale of the projected size if possible. It is acceptable to print an aerial photo and hand draw in the boundary of OELC. For location planning purposes, always check with the school staff or maintenance crew for location of underground utilities/pipes and access to water. Also consider amount and direction of sunlight.
 - d. **Site Photos [labeled SWCD_2020OELC_Pic1, then Pic 2, etc.]:** Provide no more than 5 photographs of the OELC and Garden site. Include a closeup of the Garden site and a view of the surrounding area. Send

the photos with a description log with the direction the photograph was shot in. Send each photo as a stand-alone image and the description log in a word document.

- e. **OPTIONAL: Support letters from partnering organizations [labeled SWCD_2020OELC_SupportLtr 1, then SupportLtr2, etc.]:** Include a letter from the school. You may also submit letters from other agencies and organizations such as: Master Gardener groups, local businesses, volunteer groups.

ONLINE APPLICATION: http://fs25.formsite.com/ArEG8K/n4gxrltpj1/form_login.html

- You need to log in as a new user, setting up a username and password. This will allow you to go back to the Formsites to update and revise the application as many times as needed. Note your username and password in your Word Document with the draft answers.
 - Remember to “SAVE PROGRESS” at the bottom of the page each time you add or update information. Once the form is submitted, you can no longer edit responses.
 - BEFORE hitting submit, print your responses or save as a PDF. You should be able to right-click anywhere on the screen and chose print.
 - TO COMPLETE THE APPLICATION HIT SUBMIT at the bottom. After hitting submit you will get an on-screen confirmation that your entry was received, print this as well. PLEASE NOTE your automatically generated email may end up in your spam folder.
 - The Foundation will reply within 3 working days to confirm receipt of attachments. If you do not get either of these emails (Form Site or Foundation) in 3 working days, please contact the Foundation ASAP at ncfswc@gmail.com, 919-510-4599 (office) or 336-345-5335 (cell).
1. **County Name**
 2. **District Town / City** List the town where the District office is located
 3. **District Telephone Number**
 4. **District’s Project Point of Contact First Name** *This will be the Foundation’s primary point of contact.*
 5. **Point of Contact Last Name**
 6. **Point of Contact Cell Phone**
 7. **Point of Contact Email**
 8. **Point of Contact Primary Work Duties:** educational, technical, administrative, mark all that apply
 9. **OELC Champion First Name:** Verify that the assigned person is employed at the school and has time to commit to the project and their level of expertise.
 10. **OELC Champion Last Name**
 11. **OELC School Name** List full name of school where OELC will be located.

12. **OELC School Street Address** Provide physical address of school location where OELC will be located.
13. **OELC School Town**
14. **OELC School Zip Code**
15. **Project Support Team:** List names of those serving on the team, the organization they represent, and a brief statement as to the role they will play on the project.
16. **Ability to provide demonstration:** Will the school and/or District be willing to hold workshops for training opportunities for other schools or Districts?
17. **Needs Statement** – Provide a brief statement as to why your District should be selected for funding. Consider things like current District educational programs and school partnerships, specific school needs for educational programming, ability for OELC to be duplicated in the county, school and community support for long range maintenance, special populations that you will target for outreach, or any other relevant information.
18. **Describe the overall concept plan of the OELC and the Garden** – Provide a brief overview of the project including the potential soils lessons or interactive demonstrations. The Foundation understands the possibility of needed changes as the project develops to meet the needs of the school’s specific site but keeping the overall goals in the concept plan is critical. Include the type of Garden, the number and age of students that will be able to access the Garden area, the types of lessons planned, and the educational program goals.
19. **Program Promotion** – Identify how the District will promote the project, and if any messaging will target special needs populations such as the underserved schools or communities. Also include plans to showcase the completed project, and possible future training workshops for other schools and Districts.
20. **Long Term Maintenance Plan** – The District is expected to support the demonstration in future years so that it remains a viable educational resource. Please describe the process that the District will use in future years to keep the program viable.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- 1. Can the District apply on behalf of the school or another organization?** No, the District can only apply if it is willing to oversee installation of the Garden.
- 2. What can the Garden grant funds be used for?** Reimbursable expenses include materials to build/construct raised garden beds, soil (planting mix), plants, mulch, water line or water hose for irrigation needs, fencing materials, as needed to protect Garden from wildlife, and printing educational materials. Funds can be used to rent small equipment needed to construct specific items in the Garden. Any other specific costs will be considered on a case by case basis but must be approved by the Foundation prior to the purchase.
- 3. Can funds cannot be used to drill a new water well or offset the school staff time?** School staff time, maintenance department equipment, school staff time, and District staff time can be considered “in-Kind” donation for the match. Hours will need to be kept for each person working on project for verification of matching funds and the current volunteer hourly rate will be used to determine the value.
- 4. Should we include a copy of the minutes or a copy of the resolution when we submit our certification letter?** A certification letter will be accepted without secondary information.

More questions will be answered during the conference call, and FAQs will be added to the application throughout the open application period.