Wheels To Water Pilot Program
REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

I. Overview

The State of Michigan launched the From Students to Stewards (FS2S) Initiative in 2019 to grow future water stewards, leaders, and decision-makers in Michigan. The FS2S Initiative is a collaborative effort by several state-level partners, including the Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Office of the Great Lakes (OGL), the Environmental Education Program, and the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity's MiSTEM Network.

This is a request for applications for funding to reimburse transportation-related expenses for field trips to a freshwater ecosystem. These non-competitive grants will support Great Lakes literacy by helping Michigan-based schools cover transportation costs for field trips to freshwater ecosystems in Michigan. These field trips will allow students to learn about Great Lakes water issues and/or develop solutions to local water issues.

Approximately $81,000 will be awarded in grants of up to $1,000. The total number of field trips funded will vary based on successful applicants' budgets. Funding will be distributed to approved applicants on a rolling basis until the balance is spent down. This grant program is funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and administered by the OGL with support from EGLE's Environmental Education Program.

The grantee will be expected to complete a school field trip to a freshwater ecosystem that incorporates an opportunity for students to participate in experiential learning activities that will advance their Great Lakes literacy.

II. Background

According to Sustaining Michigan's Water Heritage: A Strategy for the Next Generation, a 30-year road map to protect, restore, and sustain Michigan's water resources that was published by the OGL, many Michigan residents lack basic knowledge about the Great Lakes and watersheds, and how people's actions directly affect water resources.

Integrating water literacy principles into State of Michigan standards tied to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) across all grade levels in accordance with the state's STEM Strategy is a state-wide opportunity to build freshwater literacy and grow lifelong stewards. Michigan's STEM strategy also prioritizes problem-, project-, and place-based (3P) approaches to STEM education. In addition, statewide strategies recommend coordinating, delivering, and supporting ongoing freshwater-focused professional development for Michigan K-12 educators.

Previous phases of the statewide FS2S program have made progress toward growing the next generation of water stewards. Phase I focused on institutionalizing 3P freshwater education in K-12 schools by providing grants to support incorporation of Great Lakes and Water Literacy Principles into curriculum, train teachers in 3P pedagogy, and integrate 3P learning into the school improvement planning process.

Phase II expanded this work by providing targeted support to schools just beginning this work. The current phase, Phase III, began in 2024 and focuses on supporting the implementation of 3P pedagogy by providing the financial support schools often need to provide the necessary firsthand experiences and project development and implementation that characterize 3P learning. This support includes this Wheels to Water Pilot Program to reimburse transportation-related expenses for field trips to Michigan freshwater ecosystems that incorporate experiential field learning opportunities in the field.

III. Deliverables

The deliverables of the project are:

- Final summary document that includes the following:
    - Date field trip occurred
    - Number of students and teachers that attended the field trip
    - Name, location, and description of the freshwater ecosystem visited
    - Description of the learning activities conducted at the site and how the activities build awareness of Great Lakes literacy principles among their students

Providing separate high-resolution photos in addition to the report is highly preferred. By providing pictures to EGLE, you are granting permission that the photos may be used in future publication materials. Providing images of students also assumes the applicant organization has acquired all permissions to share and use such images.

IV. Funding Information

a. Who Can Apply

❖ Eligible Applicants

- K-12 schools and school districts

Note: Grants cannot be awarded to individuals.

❖ Ineligible Applicants

An applicant for whom any of the following conditions existed in the 12 months prior to the application deadline for this RFP is not eligible for funding:

- EGLE grant contract terminated
- Unresolved EGLE enforcement actions
- History of inability to manage or meet EGLE contractual terms and conditions
- Listed on the federal/debarment list (sam.gov)

b. Grant Amount

A total of approximately $81,000 will be awarded through grants of a maximum of $1,000.

c. Match Requirement

Match funding is not required.

d. Project Award Period

Applicants will be evaluated on whether their proposed field trip meets funding requirements and the timing falls within the eligible field trip time frame: August 2026 to May 2027.

e. Ineligible Uses for Grant Funds

This grant cannot be used to fund anything except reimbursing transportation-related expenses for field trips to freshwater ecosystems.

f. Application Deadline

Complete applications must be received no later than **Friday, December 18, 2026, 5:00 pm Eastern Time** for this funding, which will support field trips in academic calendar year 2026-2027. Approximately $81,000 will be available for use. Funds will be available until December 18, 2026, or until funds have been expended, whichever comes first. See the table below for guidance on important dates. Applications received after December 18, 2026, 5:00 pm Eastern Time will not be considered.

Table 1: Deadlines and estimated timelines.

Application received by	Estimated award notification*	Grant start date and agreement executed by*	Approximate eligible field trip start date*	Final eligible field trip date
May 29, 2026	July 1, 2026	Aug 1, 2026	Aug 1, 2026	May 31, 2027
July 31, 2026	Sept 1, 2026	Oct 1, 2026	Oct 1, 2026	May 31, 2027
Aug 28, 2026	Oct 1, 2026	Nov 1, 2026	Nov 1, 2026	May 31, 2027
Oct 30, 2026	Dec 1, 2026	Jan 11, 2027	Jan 11, 2027	May 31, 2027
Dec 18, 2026	Feb 1, 2027	Mar 1, 2027	Mar 1, 2027	May 31, 2027

*Note: These time frames are estimated and subject to timely submission of required documentation and signatures. Field trip dates must occur after grant is fully executed, so building in a buffer between estimated date of executing grant agreement and taking the field trip is recommended.

g. Application Submittal

Applications must be submitted online through the Wheels to Water Funding Application form. If you are unable to submit applications through this form, please contact Jeanine Barks to make alternative arrangements.

Jeanine Barks
BarksJ@Michigan.gov
517-275-1302

V. Information for Applicants

Applicants can visit the OGL's **Stewarding the Great Lakes webpage**, **EGLE Classroom**, **MiSTEM's toolbox**, and **Freshwater Literacy and Stewardship playbook** for more background information and additional resources on 3P freshwater education and Great Lakes literacy and stewardship. Schools can apply for and receive FS2S Student Community-Based Water Stewardship projects funding concurrently.

Proposal information will not be kept confidential. Grant proposals are considered public information under the Michigan Freedom of Information Act, PA 442 of 1976, as amended.

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a grant agreement with EGLE with standard terms and conditions which are not subject to modifications. Failure of a successful applicant to accept these obligations will result in cancellation of the grant award.

VI. Application Package

Applications must be submitted through the online application form that can be found on the From Students to Stewards webpage. The online application must be digitally signed by an authorized representative of the applicant, and all required information and documentation must be included to be submitted successfully. Required documentation includes proof of a successful financial audit for a period ending within the 24 months immediately preceding the application due date and proof that applicant is not on the federal/debarment list (sam.gov).

Online form questions are previewed in Section XII to assist applicants' preparation of answers to questions before entering them into the form.

VII. Attachments

The below documents must also be submitted by uploading them through the online application form to successfully complete an application:

- Proof of successful financial audit
- Proof that applicant is not on the federal/debarment list (sam.gov)

VIII. Evaluation Criteria

The OGL invites interested applicants to contact program staff early in the proposal development process for assistance and guidance as needed on identifying locations or activities. Complete applications will be evaluated for funding based on the following considerations:

- Eligibility of Michigan-based school, field trip location, and ability of planned activities to fulfill grant requirements
- Number of students and teachers participating
- Overall quality and clarity of the application
- Organizational capability of the applicant and feasibility to complete the project as proposed within the grant period

- Cost-effectiveness

IX. Reporting Requirements and Funding Disbursement

The grantee must complete and submit a final project report and financial report according to a form and format prescribed by the State and must include supporting documentation of eligible project expenses.

X. Program Contact

If you have any questions or comments regarding the program or the application process, please contact:

Dr. Katie Mika
Office of the Great Lakes
Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy
517-643-6790
MikaK2@Michigan.gov

XI. Preview of Online Application Form Questions

a. Background and Contact Information

1. What is the primary contact's full name?
2. What is the primary contact's email address?
3. What is the primary contact's phone number?
4. What is the name of the school?
5. What County is the school located in?
6. What School District is the school part of?
7. What is the school's street address?
8. What is the school's city?
9. What is the school's ZIP code?
10. If different, what is the school's Business / Financial contact's full name?
11. If different, what is the school's Business / Financial contact's email address?
12. If different, what is the school's Business / Financial contact's phone number?
13. Approximately how many students plan on attending the field trip?

b. Eligibility Information

14. Please enter an estimated month between August 2026 and May 2027 in which you are looking to participate in a Wheels to Water field trip.
15. What is the field trip location? Please describe how the field trip location is a freshwater ecosystem in Michigan.
16. Please describe the type of activities the students will be participating in upon arrival and how they relate to learning about Great Lakes water issues and / or solutions to local water challenges.
17. What is the expected transportation cost (up to $1,000) to be reimbursed for the field trip? What do these costs include?

18. Please submit proof of successful financial audit for a period ending within 24 months immediately preceding the application due date.
19. Please submit proof that applicant is not on the federal/debarment list (sam.gov).

c. Optional Questions

20. Have you performed a project/activity like this before? If so, please explain.
21. Is your school Title 1 funded?

d. Acknowledgement of Understanding and Submission

22. Acknowledgement of understanding:
    I acknowledge I have read the associated Request for Applications and understand that successful applicants will be required to enter into a grant agreement with EGLE with standard terms and conditions which are not subject to modifications. Failure of a successful applicant to accept these obligations will result in cancellation of the grant award.
    a. I understand the Grantee is required to submit a final report that describes the location of the field trip, activities conducted at the site, how the activities build awareness of Great Lakes literacy principles among the students, and states how many students were involved in the field trip to qualify for transportation expense reimbursement.
    b. I also understand that documentation verifying transportation costs (e.g., transportation office invoice, receipt, and cancelled check to show payment) must be submitted to qualify for transportation expense reimbursement. The maximum EGLE is able to reimburse is $1,000. This program is funded with federal dollars; if funding is terminated, EGLE may not be able to provide reimbursement.
    c. Contact your school's business office to confirm your SIGMA Vendor Number prior to submitting the reimbursement request. If your school does not have its own Vendor Number, your school district's Vendor ID could be used. Your profile will need to include a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) because this program is supported with federal funds. It is strongly recommended to request a new UEI or confirm an existing UEI prior to submitting final reimbursement to EGLE. EGLE cannot reimburse funds without a UEI being set up in the school's SIGMA profile.
    d. Providing separate high-resolution photos in addition to the report is highly encouraged. By providing pictures to EGLE, you are granting permission that the photos may be used in future publication materials.

23. The individual signing below certifies by their signature that they are authorized to sign this application on behalf of their school.