



School Waste Prevention and Recycling Grant Program 2025-2026 Guidelines

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Introduction

Dakota County (County) is required by state law to develop programs to reduce waste being landfilled and to achieve a 75% recycling rate for all waste generated in the County. County Ordinance 110 (Solid Waste Management) [requires Dakota County schools to collect a designated list of recyclables](#) (paper, cardboard, metal, plastics [#1,2,5], glass, cartons), pair recycling next to all trash containers, label all containers and educate staff and students. In addition, most schools are required to collect organics (food scraps) from back-of-house food preparation areas.

Available assistance

Dakota County's School Waste Prevention and Recycling Grant Program (Grant Program) provides a variety of resources to help schools educate students and staff on waste management best practices and implement projects to donate food, prevent wasted food, reduce waste, and to start or improve recycling or organics (food scraps) collection.

Grant funding

Schools can apply for large grants (up to \$10,000) and mini grants (up to \$1,000) for eligible items as described below. No matching funds from schools are required. Schools may apply for additional large and mini grants for different projects in future grant cycles.

Free technical assistance

The county provides free assistance to schools including:

1. On-site visit to determine what is needed to implement a successful waste diversion project and to assist with completing and submitting a full application.
2. On-site assistance to help implement the project from container placement to student and staff education and troubleshooting.
3. Assistance with project evaluation, including project reporting.

Free container labels, posters and activity guides

Dakota County will provide educational resources including container labels for recycling, organics, trash, and liquids in a variety of sizes. The labels are color-coded and have standardized terminology and images. Free posters and K-8 student activity guides are also available and have standardized messaging specific to schools.

Free waste education performances

Schools can receive free waste education performances for K-3 students and free field trips for Grade 4 students, Green Team students (i.e., environmental club) in fifth grade and above and school staff.

Application process

Interested schools complete the online Request for Assistance survey when available for large project grants and have access to apply for mini grants year-round as funds allow. Eligible schools must complete the County-provided Application. Applications are considered for approval based on County priorities and as County budgets allow. Previous grant recipients are eligible, but priority is granted to first-time applicants, district-wide applicants, and applicants for Traditional Recycling and Traditional Organics grants. Grant prerequisites and submittal timelines must be met.

Grant agreements

After Dakota County Liaison approval of the Grant Application, a Grant Agreement is sent to the school for signature. Schools send the signed Grant Agreement along with all required attachments to the County Liaison.

All eligible expenses contribute to the Grant Agreement maximum.

Eligible schools

Public and private schools and districts (includes all school-owned buildings) serving K-12 physically located in Dakota County are eligible to participate. If the school has multiple locations, each location in Dakota County is eligible to participate. Home-based schools, preschools that are independently owned and operated outside of a school or district serving K-12, and schools not physically located in Dakota County even if owned or operated by a Dakota County-based school or organization are not eligible. Preschools and non-public colleges and universities are eligible for assistance through the Business Recycling Program. All colleges/universities are eligible for free school waste education opportunities (e.g., field trips).

Eligible and ineligible expenses

Waste management project expenses not identified below may be eligible with prior written approval from the Dakota County Liaison.

Eligible expenses

Eligible expenses (the school or County may purchase) include but are not limited to:

Recycling and organics containers

- Indoor and outdoor recycling containers, lids, barrels, dollies, totes, carts, cart tippers, signage, and other bins to carry the recyclable materials to containers serviced by the waste hauler. Pre-approved eligible containers can be found on the Equipment Order Form and Outdoor Container Recommendations List.
- Indoor and outdoor organics containers, lids, barrels, dollies, totes, carts, cart tippers, signage, and other containers for transportation of organic materials to containers serviced by the waste hauler. Pre-approved eligible containers can be found on the Equipment Order Form.

- On-site compost bins to give students hands-on experience with composting.
- Liquids collection infrastructure, including screens to avoid contaminants.
- Infrastructure to collect problem materials separately for recycling (e.g., plastic wrap).

Equipment

- Waste grabbers to remove contamination, especially from cafeteria bins.
- Stainless steel sorting tables (eligible only for schools with organics collection in cafeteria).
- Reusable service ware (e.g., washable trays, baskets, bowls, clamshells, cups, utensils) to reduce waste. Reusable bags for breakfast-to-go are allowed. Pre-approved eligible service ware can be found on the Equipment Order Form.
- Dishwashing equipment to support use of washable service ware. Must be Energy Star certified and National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) certified, with a plan review submitted to the regulating health authority when applicable. Preference for temperature sanitizing versus chemical sanitizing models.
- Bulk food and liquid containers (e.g., milk and condiment dispensers).
- Six-month supply of BPI-certified compostable bags for lining organics collection containers. Eligible only to implement a Traditional Organics large grant or an organics project in new areas.
- Initial supply of reusable collection bags.
- Water filling stations or filler retrofits to support waste reduction, with a maximum of \$2,000 per location. Requires a Green Team project to promote use of personal reusable water bottles.
- Lifts, recycling container wash stations, and equipment for debagging recyclables.

Wasted food prevention tools

- Wasted food prevention equipment, such as food share tables, stainless steel carts, food-safe bins, spices and spice racks/shakers, and portable beverage dispensers. Pre-approved eligible equipment on the Equipment Order Form.
- Refrigerators/freezers for storing milk or other perishable items near the food share table or prior to donation. Must be Energy Star certified and meet MN food code requirements, with approval from the regulating health authority when applicable.
- Food donation supplies (such as reusable pans, insulated bags).
- Food waste tracking software and other tools to minimize wasted food. This includes equipment to support the software, training on how to use it, and software contracts costs for up to one year. Vendor examples include LeanPath, Phood and Winnow.

Miscellaneous

- Signage, banners, and other educational materials not identified on the Label and Educational Resource Order Form.
- Construction upgrades for external loading dock/enclosure space improvements or expansions that directly result in increased capacity to accommodate waste collection program changes, with a maximum of \$5,000 per location.
- Environmentally preferable purchasing tools and equipment, including software, to increase environmentally preferable purchasing (i.e., waste reduction, reuse of products, increased recycled content, toxicity reduction) and to yield more sustainable upstream purchasing.

- Six months of confidential shredding service cost reimbursement with at least 12 months of service. Applicant must submit documentation of confidential shredding service to be reimbursed, and shredding must be a new service (not currently existing). Use state contract vendor or more cost-effective alternative.

Education

- Stipend for one adult staff cafeteria monitor to be trained to oversee separation of organics, recycling, and trash in school cafeterias, with a \$30/hour flat rate up to a \$1,800 maximum for one month. Stipend is only for schools with an organics program and only for the portion of their work related to project activities at the school. Must agree to permanently incorporate responsibilities for recycling and organics monitoring at lunch into an assigned staff member’s job description.
- Custom signage and labels that meet County labeling requirements. Container labels that meet County mandatory labeling requirements are available to order at no cost through the County and their use is preferred if applicable.
- Custom recycling and organics educational materials that meet County education requirements. Customizable education templates are available to order at no cost through the County and their use is preferred if applicable.
- Staff education for waste management (e.g., conferences, workshops, online training). Dakota County can also provide free staff trainings.
- Green Team support including:
 - Stipend for one or multiple adult staff to lead a student Green Team (i.e., environmental club). Stipend is only for the portion of their work related to waste reduction/recycling activities at the school, with a \$30/hour flat rate up to a \$2,100 maximum for all or part of the nine-month school year (includes FICA/TRA/PERA amounts). This leader will be a point of contact for student and staff waste reduction and recycling initiatives throughout the project. Dakota County can provide support to build a Green Team plan of action, educational videos and resources, free classroom presentations and free performances and field trips.
 - Stipend to purchase Green Team resources (e.g., reusable vests, recycling books). These items must create minimal waste (i.e., no “wasteful giveaways”), with a maximum of \$500.

All schools applying for a large project grant are strongly encouraged to first set aside appropriate funds to provide support to staff leading a student Green Team (i.e., environmental club).

The County reserves the right to negotiate with the applicant prior to contract execution for reasonable pricing of eligible items.

Ineligible expenses

Ineligible expenses include but are not limited to:

1. Employee or contracted labor costs to collect and manage waste and recycling/organics, except pre-approved reimbursable staff stipends and waste education opportunities.
2. Plastic bags used for trash or recycling collection.
3. Vehicle-related costs such as trucks, trailers, fuel, etc.
4. Pallet jacks and other similar equipment.

5. Installation and labor costs related to equipment purchase (e.g., dishwasher).
6. Compostable food service ware (e.g., plates, cups, flatware, etc.).
7. Hauling service costs related to trash, recycling, or organics collection.
8. Containers normally provided by a waste or recycling service provider, such as dumpsters, compactors, balers, and open-top or enclosed roll-off boxes.
9. Replacement or service costs for currently functioning materials/equipment, including dishwashers, refrigerators/freezers and water filling stations.
10. Products that create waste (e.g., reusable water bottles) and items for use outside of the school location, unless pre-approved as part of the grant activities.
11. Project-related costs incurred before contract execution.
12. Project-related costs in areas where waste cannot be safely and effectively managed, as determined by the County.

Grant program description: Categories and prerequisites

Dakota County's school grant program offers large grants and mini grants. Specific participation requirements are described below.

Large grants

Up to \$10,000 per location may be allocated for eligible expenses. Complete applications with proposed one or more activities must be submitted by the County's specified deadline. Schools may apply for grants in multiple large grant categories with Dakota County Liaison approval. There are five (5) large project grant categories. All large grants require Green Team engagement.

Traditional recycling category

Implement recycling best practices in all interior spaces, including classrooms, offices, common spaces, and cafeterias.

- Prerequisite: schools have not received funding for the Traditional Recycling category in the past.
- If approved by the Dakota County Liaison to be paired with another grant category, traditional recycling improvements must be implemented first or simultaneously with other grant category activities.
- Schools may only receive funding for the Traditional Recycling category once.

Traditional organics category

Implement organics (i.e., food scraps) best practices in indoor school areas with a focus on kitchens. Schools may also choose to implement best practices in other indoor school areas to capture traditional organics (e.g., cafeteria, staff lounge).

- Prerequisite: schools have not received funding for the Traditional Organics category in the past.
- Prerequisite: schools must demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with recycling best practices in all interior spaces (paired containers and color-coded labels at minimum).

Expanded recycling and organics category

Implement recycling and organics collection solutions beyond traditional collection (e.g., outdoors, stadiums, solutions for meals outside the cafeteria).

- Prerequisite: schools must demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with recycling best practices in all interior spaces (paired containers and color-coded labels at minimum).
- Prerequisite: for expanded organics project requests, schools must also demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with organics best practices in interior spaces (color-coded labels at minimum).
- Schools may apply for the Expanded Recycling and Organics category more than once for different projects.

Waste and toxicity reduction/reuse category

Reduce waste with reusable or bulk options (e.g., washable utensils, bulk milk/condiment dispensers) or solutions to reduce toxic products (e.g., green cleaning infrastructure, battery collection).

- Prerequisite: schools must demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with recycling best practices in all interior spaces (paired containers and color-coded labels at minimum).
- Schools may apply for the Waste and Toxicity Reduction/Reuse category more than once for different projects.

Wasted food prevention category

Reduce or prevent food waste, including food donation initiatives (e.g., installing food-share tables in cafeterias, small refrigerators to rescue food).

- Prerequisite: schools must demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with recycling best practices in all interior spaces (paired containers and color-coded labels at minimum).
- Schools may apply for the Wasted Food Prevention category more than once for different projects.

Mini grants

Up to \$1,000 per location may be allocated for eligible expenses (for districtwide applications, flexibility may be allowed with County approval). Complete applications with proposed one or more activities may be submitted year-round and are approved on a first-come, first-served basis as funds allow. Mini grants may be applied for while receiving a large grant on a case-by-case basis with County approval (e.g., schoolwide waste reduction/recycling plan or policy development, staff education). Potential mini grant initiatives include implementing a plastic wrap recycling program, collecting liquids as part of a breakfast-in-the-classroom program, transitioning from disposable to reusable bowls, or providing staff education.

- Prerequisite: schools must demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with recycling best practices in all interior spaces (paired containers and color-coded labels at minimum).
- Prerequisite: for organics project requests, schools must also demonstrate by photo documentation compliance with organics best practices in interior spaces (color-coded labels at minimum).

- Schools may apply for the Mini Grant more than once for different projects and may submit multiple applications in the same program year with a maximum grant cycle limit of \$1,000.

Participation requirements

Large grants

Participants must agree to the following:

1. Execute a Grant Agreement with the County.
2. Begin project activities within three (3) months of Grant Agreement execution.
3. Complete and submit a full Application, including a completed W-9. Requests for reimbursable products and infrastructure must include a quote with specifications and costs.
4. Host a minimum of three (3) site visits and partner with Dakota County to implement a successful waste diversion project. The County will coordinate the following main project phases:
 - Initial site visit with appropriate school personnel to assess school needs and gather information necessary to complete a full application. The County or County's contractor will complete a comprehensive walk-through and develop recommendations for improvement. Allow pre- and post-project photos for planning and evaluation purposes.
 - Kickoff virtual meeting including Dakota County and required school representatives to review roles/responsibilities, proposed grant activities and recommendations, and next steps for project implementation and education. Required school representatives include the Principal, School Liaison, and Green Team leader(s). Head school custodian, Head school food service manager, Superintendent/head of school, District buildings and grounds director, and District food service director are highly encouraged to attend.
 - Implementation with County assistance including at least one mid-point site visit, which may include but is not limited to infrastructure placement, labeling of containers, student and staff education and troubleshooting.
 - Start or engage an existing student Green Team throughout the project. Exceptions may be considered on a case-by-case basis (e.g., if students are not present at the building). County contractor will collaborate with school's staff Green Team leader(s) to develop and implement a Green Team project plan to engage students, including at least two activities:
 - Activity focused on supporting specific grant project initiatives (e.g., reusable utensils).
 - Activity focused on education for students/staff on how to recycle right.
 - Provide pre- and post-project information and data to the County to assist with project evaluation upon request, including hauler invoices and Right Sizing Forms. Adjust the hauler collection schedule (frequency of pick up) and container capacities (dumpster sizes) as necessary to sufficiently collect existing and new materials (e.g., organics).
 - Final project meeting including Dakota County and required school representatives to review project results, obtain feedback, and provide recognition for student and staff efforts. County contractor will prepare a summary report with relevant activities, accomplishments, and recommendations for sustaining these efforts.
5. Required school representatives complete a Grant Program survey provided by Dakota County.

6. Complete all project activities prior to Grant Agreement conclusion.

Mini grants

Participants must agree to the following:

1. Execute a Grant Agreement with the County.
2. Begin project activities within three (3) months of Grant Agreement execution.
3. Complete and submit a full Application, including a completed W-9. Requests for reimbursable products and infrastructure must include a quote with specifications and costs.
4. Collaborate as needed with Dakota County to plan, implement, and measure Grant activities.
5. Gather pre-and post-project data and submit the Report Form provided by Dakota County.
6. Required school representatives complete a Grant Program survey provided by Dakota County.
7. Complete all project activities within six (6) months of Grant Agreement execution.

Fund distribution

Funding and reimbursement approved by County staff will be distributed as follows:

- Standard Containers, Labels, and Educational Resources
 - No funds will be distributed to schools for pre-selected items identified in the Equipment Order Form and Label and Educational Resource Order Form. These will be ordered by the County upon execution of a contract.
- Reimbursable Expenses
 - Requests for reimbursement of eligible pre-approved expenses must include a Reimbursement Request Form and proof that funds were spent on approved items, including a copy of the paid receipt for the purchased equipment or work completed under the terms of the executed contract. Staff stipend reimbursements may be submitted once per semester or at the end of the project term.