



**western  
national  
parks**

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*Courtesy of Mary O'Neill*



**2026 APPLICATION PACKET**

**JAMES E. COOK**

**NATURE'S CLASSROOM GRANT**

**ENRICHING K-12 EDUCATION THROUGH NATIONAL PARKS**

**AUGUST 1, 2025**

# Expanding Access, Inspiring Minds: A Guide to the James E. Cook Nature's Classroom Grant



*James E. Cook*



Established in 2022, the *James E. Cook Nature's Classroom Grant* honors Western National Parks Association's (WNP) Chief Executive Officer from 2011 to 2022. Dedicated to enhancing access to national parks for underrepresented K-12 youth, this grant provides essential funding for educators to bring the wonders of national parks into classrooms and offer transformative park experiences. Reflecting Jim Cook's commitment to educating youth and expanding access for underrepresented communities, the grant supports efforts to make national parks more accessible. Through this initiative, WNP and Jim's legacy continue to foster a deep passion for our natural and cultural heritage in the next generation of park stewards.

We invite you to learn more about this grant opportunity. Detailed information and eligibility criteria are provided to guide your application and help us support educators in fostering the next generation of park advocates, while promoting accessibility and welcoming spaces for all.

To learn more, visit [WNP | Awards, Grants, and Scholarships](#), or meet our [WNP | Past Honorees](#).



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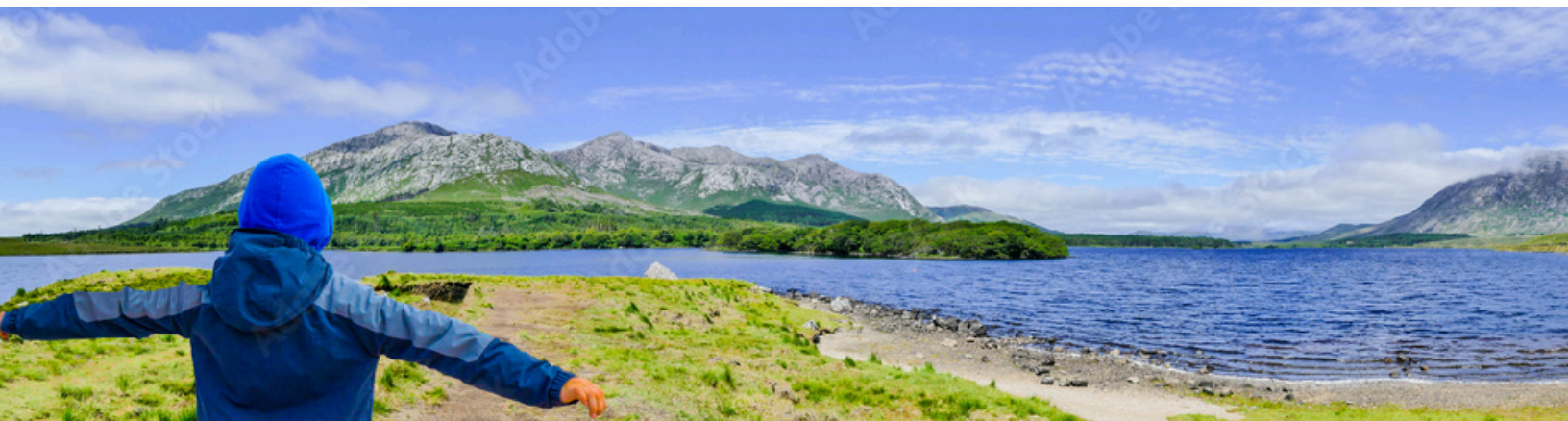
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# General Information ---

## APPLICATION PREPARATION

Before you start your application, here is what you need to know.

- **Select:** Choose the WNP-partner park you want to collaborate with to create your experience. Refer to page 9 or visit [WNP | Discover Our Parks](#) for a list of these parks.
- **Connect:** Contact the park visitor center to get the name and contact information of the National Park Service staff member who will work with you to create your experience.
- **Discuss:** Talk with the park representative about the types of experiences offered by the park. Confirm whether the park can accommodate an oversized vehicle, such as a motor coach, and if there are any vehicle length restrictions.
- **Choose:** Decide on your park experience type: virtual classroom, in-classroom, or in-park.
- **Confirm:** If you selected an in-park experience, contact your local transportation provider to confirm vehicle availability, accessibility to the park (including length restrictions), and any restrictions or requirements for your planned field trip.

**Now you are ready to apply!**

## AWARD

Applicants may apply for one of the following funding awards:

- Up to \$750 for a virtual classroom experience that connects the park ranger to the classroom via Zoom or another video conferencing tool.
- Up to \$750 for an in-classroom experience that brings the park ranger to the school.
- Up to \$2,000 for an in-park experience that takes the classroom to visit a park.

## APPLICANT REQUIREMENTS

- Applicants must
  - Create their experience with a WNP-partner park. For a list of these parks, refer to page 9 or visit [WNP | Discover Our Parks](#).
  - Have students who meet the WNP definition of underrepresented youth: groups of individuals that have limited access to participation in outdoor recreation opportunities (e.g., hiking, biking, fishing, and skiing) or in-park interpretive/educational programs and may face barriers to participating in those activities (e.g., income, physical access, social economic factors).
- Experiences must take place between March 23, 2026, and May 30, 2027. Funding expires May 31, 2027.

- Applications must include
  - Park-themed learning outcome focused on the environment, history, or outdoor recreation/healthy lifestyles. [Examples](#)
  - Emphasis on park stewardship. Park stewards support ways to preserve and improve national parks for everyone. This can be a part of an activity or lesson at a park, in the classroom, or virtually. [Examples](#)

While not a requirement for submission, priority will be given to applications from Title I schools.

## ELIGIBILITY

- K-12 public, private, parochial, or home-school educators may apply.
- More than one application per school can be submitted. Only one application per class will be accepted.

## QUALIFIED USE OF FUNDS

Funding can be used toward transportation costs, program fees, park entry fees, educational supplies, park-steward component supplies, materials for arts and crafts, scientific equipment for gathering nature-study data, and supplies for citizen-science projects; in addition, virtual classroom equipment rental fees and Zoom access, provided complimentary by WNP if needed, supplies for pre-visit and/or post-visit activities, and other materials needed for a powerful learning experience will be considered.

Examples: Books, maps, science kits, materials for a letter-writing campaign or posters, bulletin board supplies, journals for each student to write about their park experience, fishing gear, camping gear, iPad, LCD projector/screen rental, trail camera (with advance permission from the park), microphones, and tripods.

## RECIPIENT REQUIREMENTS

Grant awardees

- Are required to submit a final report to WNP within 60 days of the experience date noted in the application. Refer to page 6 to review a copy of the report form and required elements.
- Will receive 90 percent of the grant award in advance, with the remaining 10 percent paid upon fulfillment of the final report requirement. Failure to meet the final report requirement within the allocated time frame will result in a forfeiture of all unpaid funds.
  - When creating your budget, you may allocate your post-experience activities and reflections with this 10 percent or more.
- Must complete the [WNP 2026 Nature's Classroom Grant Agreement](#), signed by both the school principal and the teacher responsible for the experience described in Part Two of the application
- Are responsible for meeting all safety, health, and regulatory requirements of the school and park.





Courtesy of NPS

## SELECTION AND NOTIFICATION

- Criteria for this program has been established by WNP.
- Submissions will be reviewed and scored by a committee comprising WNP board members and/or the WNP executive leadership team. View the [sample evaluation form](#) for scoring criteria.
- Recipients will be notified the week of February 16, 2026.

WNP values and respects all individuals. The selection process ensures fair consideration and equal opportunity for all applicants.

## SUBMISSION

- All applications must be completed through the WNP website here: [WNP | Grants](#).
- To properly prepare your submission, refer to the sample application form on page 4.
- The information supplied is limited to the space provided and submitted on the electronic form.
- Applications received in any other format will not be accepted.

If you do not have access to a computer and would like to submit an application, contact the Program Administrator.

## TIMELINE

- Submissions open on August 1, 2025.
- Deadline for submission is December 31, 2025, end of day.

## PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR

Please address questions regarding this grant to Julie Tainter, senior business services manager, via email at [julie.tainter@wnp.org](mailto:julie.tainter@wnp.org).

# Sample Application Form

The application sample outlined below is a guide. All applications must be submitted electronically here: [WNP | Nature's Classroom Grant Application](#). The information supplied is limited to the space provided and submitted on the electronic form. Applications received in any other format will not be accepted. If you do not have access to a computer and would like to submit an application, contact the Program Administrator.

## PART ONE: School Information

1. Name of school
2. Mailing address, city, state, zip code, main phone
3. Principal name, phone, email
4. For the entire school, what percentage of students qualify for free or reduced lunch?
5. Is your school a Title I school?
  - While not a requirement for submission, priority will be given to applications from Title 1 schools.

## PART TWO: Teacher Information

1. Teacher first name, last name
2. Direct phone, email

## PART THREE: General Information

1. Name of the WNP-partner park you are partnering with to create your experience.
2. Contact information for the person you are working with at the park to create your experience.
3. Approximate date of your experience.
4. Estimated number of students participating.
5. Grade level(s) of participating students.
6. Total amount of funding requested.
  - This amount must match the budget total stated in Part Five.
7. Select the type of experience you are planning: Virtual Classroom, In-Classroom, or In-Park.

## PART FOUR: Tell Us More about Your Proposed Experience

1. Provide an overview—be sure to include your learning outcomes. [Response up to 250 words.](#)
2. Expand on the park-themed educational elements. If a National Park Service program, include the program name, and what state requirement(s), if any, it meets. [Response up to 300 words.](#)  
[Examples](#)
3. Outline how this experience will teach your students about park stewardship. [Response up to 250 words.](#) [Examples](#)
4. Share any pre- and/or post-experience activities/lessons you are planning for the students. If not applicable, insert N/A. [Response up to 250 words.](#)
5. Explain how your class and school would benefit from this grant. [Response up to 250 words.](#)
6. Describe how your students meet the WNP definition of underrepresented youth: a group of individuals that have limited access to participation in outdoor recreation opportunities (e.g., hiking, biking, fishing, and skiing) or in-park interpretive/educational programs and may face barriers to participating in those activities (e.g., income, physical access, social economic factors). [Response up to 250 words.](#)

## PART FIVE: Your Experience Costs

Provide a detailed budget for your experience. Please note that WNP does not fund salaries, tips, food/beverages, or park memorabilia. The total budget amount **must** match the funding request amount stated in Part Three. If there is a discrepancy, WNP will use the total budget amount.

# Sample Application Form

Category	Funds Requested from WNP	Brief Explanation of Each Expense
Transportation	\$	
Program fees	\$	
Park entry fees	\$	
Educational component supplies	\$	
Park-steward component supplies	\$	
Arts and crafts supplies	\$	
Materials to support pre-visit activities/learnings	\$	
Materials to support post-visit activities/learnings	\$	
<b>THE ONLINE FORM HAS SIX BLANK LINES FOR ADDITIONAL EXPENSES.</b>	\$	
<b>BUDGET TOTALS</b>		\$
		This amount MUST match the amount of the funding request stated in Part Three.

## PART SIX: Submit Your Application

### Terms and Conditions

- Western National Parks Association (WNP) is the grantor, and the school is the grantee.
- By submitting your application, you give WNP consent to use the name and information you provided for public relations and fundraising in any media now or hereafter known, including, but not limited to, digital and print. If you provide photos and/or videos, all applicants grant an irrevocable perpetual, worldwide, nonexclusive license to WNP, to reproduce, distribute, display, and create derivative works of the image in connection with WNP, in any media now or hereafter known, including but not limited to digital and print.
- If this application is approved for funding
  - WNP will issue the [2026 Nature's Classroom Grant Agreement](#) outlining all funding terms and conditions. For WNP to proceed with funding, the agreement will require the signatures of the school principal and teacher responsible for creating and executing the experience stated in Part Two of this application.
  - Grantees are required to submit a final report to WNP within 60 days of the experience date stated in the grant agreement.
  - WNP will release 90 percent of the grant award to the grantee upon receipt of the fully executed WNP grant agreement. The remaining 10 percent will be paid upon fulfillment of the final report requirement. Failure to meet the final report requirement within the allocated time frame will result in a forfeiture of all unpaid funds.
  - Grantee is responsible for meeting all safety, health, and regulatory requirements of the school and park.

**Check to accept and confirm: \_\_\_\_\_ I have read and understand the stated terms and conditions. On behalf of the school, I attest that I am authorized to submit this application to Western National Parks Association for consideration.**

How did you hear about this grant? Select all that apply: WNP website, National Park Service, WNP staff, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, WNP email, State/National print or digital article, Other.

### Submitting Name and Contact Information

If the submitter is not the teacher listed in Part Two of this application, please check the box to insert your contact information—name, title, phone, email.



# Sample Recipient Final Report Form

This final report form is a guideline. All final reports must be submitted electronically through the WNP web portal—recipients will be given directions to access the online form. The information supplied is limited to the space provided and submitted on the electronic form. Final Reports received in any other format will not be accepted.

## PART ONE: Awardee

1. Name of school, mailing address, city, state, zip code, main phone
2. Principal name, phone, email
3. Teacher who created and executed the experience: name, phone, email
4. WNP grant number (refer to your grant agreement)

## PART TWO: Share Your Experience

1. Date your experience took place.
2. Number of participating students.
3. Specify the type of your experience: Virtual Classroom, In-Classroom, or In-Park.
4. Amount of your award.
5. Name of the WNP-affiliated park you collaborated with to create your experience.
6. Expound on your experience working with your NPS partner at the park to create your experience. [Response up to 250 words.](#)
7. Teacher:
  - Briefly restate the plan outlined in the original application. Were any modifications to the plan necessary? Did you achieve your goals and objectives? [Response up to 250 words.](#)
  - Share a story that was a highlight of the experience. [Response up to 250 words.](#)
  - Explain any plans for post-experience activities and/or learnings. [Response up to 150 words](#)
8. Student Responses: Provide three to five age-appropriate responses from your students. Use the following questions as your guide and modify them for your varying age groups and abilities.
  - What did you learn during the experience? [Response up to 300 words.](#)
  - What was your favorite part of the experience and why? [Response up to 300 words.](#)
  - Based on what you learned during your experience, how will you be a park steward and help care for and protect our parks in the future? [Response up to 300 words.](#)
    - For direct quotes, please provide the student first name and last initial.

## PART THREE: Required Upload

Six pictures that capture the experience events. Maximum 20 MB.

- Photo captions not to exceed 25 words.
- Photo credit not to exceed 25 words.
- Before uploading, name photos in the following sequential format:  
WNPGrantNumber.photonumber | Example: JEC26-04.1

# Sample Recipient Final Report Form

## **PART FOUR: Optional Upload**

Three to-five-minute video that tells the story of your experience.

- Be creative, a professional video is not necessary—a cell phone video will suffice if the picture and audio are clear.
- Who participated in creating your video, and what roles did they play?
  - Name of narrator
  - Name of videographer
  - Others and their role(s)
- Before uploading, name the video in the following format:  
WNPGrantNumber.video | Example JEC26-04.video

## **PART FIVE: Confirm and Approve**

***On behalf of the school, I declare the***

1. Information provided herein is accurate.
2. Nature's Classroom Grant experience has been completed to the satisfaction of the school.
3. Submitter of this final report is either the teacher noted in Part One, who created and conducted the experience, or the school principal.

***I approve this final report for submission to Western National Parks Association.***

Name, Title, Date

# Learn more about Us



## Our mission

Since 1938, WNP has partnered with the National Park Service to support education, interpretation, research, and community engagement—helping enhance the park experience to ensure that national parks are appreciated and valued by everyone, now and into the future.

## Our commitment

National parks tell the story of America, and WNP helps share that story in all its richness. We highlight the beauty, culture, and heritage of these treasured places through a lasting commitment to discovery—new knowledge, deeper understanding, and fresh ways to connect people to parks and to each other.

## Our role

As a nonprofit education partner of the National Park Service, WNP supports more than 70 parks across 12 Western states. We create products, programs, and services that spark curiosity, deepen understanding, and make every park visit more meaningful.

One of the most visible ways we fulfill our mission is through our park stores, located in the visitor centers of our partner parks throughout the West. These stores offer thoughtfully curated items—many developed and published by WNP—that reflect each park's unique stories, landscapes, and cultural significance. Visitors will find a wide range of materials: from trail and field guides to cookbooks and children's stories, authentic arts and crafts, collectible park gear, and even food inspired by the region's diverse cultures and ecosystems. Kids can discover educational toys, books, and Junior Ranger gear that make learning about parks fun and memorable. And our award-winning publications help extend the experience long after a visit ends.

At The National Parks Store, our flagship store in Tucson, Arizona, we host educational programs and events that celebrate the cultural and natural heritage of the Southwest. Topics have included Native basketry, flute making, pottery techniques, and Navajo rug weaving—drawing more than five thousand attendees each year. One of our signature events is The National Park Experience Pavilion at the Tucson Festival of Books, where we bring representatives from 20 national parks together to connect with more than 140,000 festivalgoers, sharing the wonder of national parks with the broader community.

In addition to offering programs, WNP provides direct financial support to national parks, funding cultural, historical, and educational initiatives developed by park rangers. These efforts enhance the visitor experience, foster youth engagement, and connect with diverse local communities. We've supported thousands of events, from Indigenous cultural exchanges and cultural festivals to Junior Ranger camps, art exhibits, and hands-on history programs.

WNP also proudly supports a wide range of [research projects](#) that help preserve, manage, and interpret national parks. For us, research is more than just science—it's a way to illuminate the deeper stories parks hold and to help make those stories more inclusive and accessible. Through this work, we strive to support more inclusive experiences across all national parks.

To learn more, visit [wnp.org](https://wnp.org).





# Partner Parks by State

## Arizona

Canyon de Chelly National Monument  
Casa Grande Ruins National Monument  
Chiricahua National Monument  
Coronado National Memorial  
Fort Bowie National Historic Site  
Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site  
Lake Mead National Recreation Area  
Montezuma Castle National Monument  
Navajo National Monument  
Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument  
Saguaro National Park  
Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument  
Tonto National Monument  
Tumacácori National Historical Park  
Tuzigoot National Monument  
Walnut Canyon National Monument  
Wupatki National Monument

## California

Channel Islands National Park  
Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site  
John Muir National Historic Site  
Mojave National Preserve  
Pinnacles National Park  
Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial  
San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park  
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area  
Whiskeytown National Recreation Area

## Colorado

Bent's Old Fort National Historic Site  
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park  
Curecanti National Recreation Area  
Great Sand Dunes National Park & Preserve  
Sand Creek Massacre National Historic Site

## Kansas

Brown v. Board of Education National Historical Park  
Fort Larned National Historic Site  
Fort Scott National Historic Site  
Nicodemus National Historic Site

## Montana & Wyoming

Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area  
Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

## Nevada

Great Basin National Park  
Lake Mead National Recreation Area  
Tule Springs Fossil Beds National Monument

## New Mexico

Aztec Ruins National Monument  
Bandelier National Monument  
Capulin Volcano National Monument  
Carlsbad Caverns National Park  
Chaco Culture National Historical Park  
El Malpais National Monument  
El Morro National Monument  
Fort Union National Monument  
Gila Cliff Dwellings National Monument  
Pecos National Historical Park  
Petroglyph National Monument  
Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument  
White Sands National Park

## Oklahoma

Chickasaw National Recreation Area  
Washita Battlefield National Historic Site

## Texas

Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument  
Big Thicket National Preserve  
Chamizal National Memorial  
Fort Davis National Historic Site  
Guadalupe Mountains National Park  
Lake Meredith National Recreation Area  
Lyndon B Johnson National Historical Park  
Padre Island National Seashore  
Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park  
San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

## Utah

Golden Spike National Historical Park  
Timpanogos Cave National Monument

## Trails

Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail  
Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail  
Santa Fe National Historic Trail  
Trail of Tears National Historic Trail