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2027 APPLICATION PACKET

JAMES E. COOK

NATURE'S CLASSROOM GRANT

ENRICHING K-12 EDUCATION THROUGH NATIONAL PARKS

September 3, 2026
Updated

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 the Chief Executive Officer of Western National Parks Association, known as Western National Parks (WNP), 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, WNP continues to foster a deep passion for our natural and cultural heritage in the next generation of park stewards.

Detailed information and eligibility criteria are provided on the pages that follow to guide the application process and support educators in fostering accessible, welcoming outdoor learning experiences for all.

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

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Courtesy of NPS



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. Review the list of these parks [here](#).
 - Note: Sabino Canyon National Recreation Area and Palisades Visitor Center, both in Arizona, are not currently eligible for Nature's Classroom Grant funding.
- **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](#).
 - Note: Sabino Canyon National Recreation Area and Palisades Visitor Center, both in Arizona, are not currently eligible for Nature's Classroom Grant funding.
 - 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 April 1, 2027, and May 30, 2028. Funding expires May 31, 2028.
- 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

Grantees

- Submit a completed, current-year W-9 form for the school upon notification of award selection. Information provided on the W-9 will be used to generate the Award Letter.
- Complete the WNP Nature's Classroom Grant Award Letter (see Resource Materials, page 3 to review sample), signed by both the school principal and the teacher responsible for the experience described in Part Two of the application.
- 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.
- Submit a final report to WNP within 60 days of the experience date noted in the application. Refer to the Resource Materials on page 3 to review a copy of the report form and required elements.
- Meet all safety, health, and regulatory requirements of the school and park.

SELECTION AND NOTIFICATION

- Criteria for this program has been established by WNP.
- Submissions will be reviewed and scored by a WNP Selection Committee. View the sample evaluation form in the Resource Materials below for scoring criteria.
- Recipients will be notified the week of February 15, 2027.

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: <https://wnpa.org/grants>
- To properly prepare your submission, refer to the sample application form in the Resource Materials below.
- 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 4, 2026.
- Deadline for submission is December 11, 2026, 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.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

- Pointers for Using the Online Application: [View tips](#)
- Sample online application to assist with preparing your submission: [View form](#)
- Selection Committee Evaluation Scoring Criteria: [View form](#)
- WNP Partner Parks: [View list](#)
 - Note: Sabino Canyon National Recreation Area and Palisades Visitor Center, both in Arizona, are not currently eligible for Nature's Classroom Grant funding.
- Grant Recipients (Grantees):
 - Final Report: [View sample form and required elements](#)
 - WNP 2027 Nature's Classroom Grant Award Letter: [View sample](#)

[Submit Your Application Now](#)