

Portland Clean Energy Fund

2025-2026 Student-Led Initiative Toolkit

The **Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund** (PCEF) focuses on priority populations, groups that are under-resourced by sustainability, climate action, and clean energy programs, and therefore are centered in PCEF's investments to ensure equitable climate action. These may include, but are not limited to, people with low incomes, people with disabilities, and people of color. Priority populations often have less access to the benefits of environmental investments while facing greater vulnerability to climate-related harms such as extreme heat, wildfire smoke, vector-borne diseases, and flooding.

How does PCEF work with schools?

Student-led initiatives

Approximately 50 Portland middle and high schools with grade levels 6-12 will receive \$15,000 per year.

- At least \$10,000 to fund student-led climate initiatives.
- Up to \$5,000 for teacher/district support for students.

Physical improvements

PCEF is also funding districts physical improvement projects that reduce GHG emissions and improve climate resiliency, funding improvements to buildings, school yards, and for transportation upgrades.

How to use the toolkit

This document is to support students and advisors to develop and submit their student-led climate project proposals.

You'll find:

- Project requirements and example projects
- Instructions on how to submit your project idea

If you have questions, please contact your school advisor or PCEF at:

PCEFschoools@portlandoregon.gov



Student-led initiatives

Student-led initiatives must be designed to fit the following parameters:

- Must include decision-making process that **clearly demonstrates student empowerment and leadership**. For example, decision-making could be made through participatory budgeting, student elective class, and student clubs.
- Physical improvement projects must be located in the city of Portland.
- Projects must receive approval from school advisors and PCEF before starting.
- Must demonstrate connection to GHG reduction or sequestration, related to one of these categories:

Workforce development	Transportation decarbonization	Regenerative agriculture and green infrastructure	Energy efficiency and renewable energy
-----------------------	--------------------------------	---	--

Step 1: Develop your idea

Each school will need to define:

- Teacher or staff sponsors supporting the work.
- The project name, proposed project costs, and high-level information, including:

How it will help PCEF priority populations.	How many students will participate and how students will lead the project.	Goals for the project and measurable outcomes (e.g. trees planted, event held).	Which PCEF categories the project will focus on.	If the project includes physical improvements.
---	--	---	--	--

Below are project examples to spark ideas for your project. **Note that physical improvement projects at school sites will require additional approval from school facilities teams.**

Workforce Development

- Host a podcast or video series about climate-related jobs and professions in transportation.
- Shadow professionals in any PCEF related fields.
- Participate in a Career Fair or field trips focused on sustainable careers.
- Invite guest speakers to present about jobs in transportation, food systems, or clean energy.

Transportation decarbonization

- Encourage biking through bike and safety equipment giveaway bike festival and celebration, bike repair station and classes and/or a student bike library.
- Map safe biking and walking routes to school or create a competition for walking, biking, or taking transit to school.
- Orchestrate a “No Idling” campaign or organize driver safety courses for bike awareness.





Project ideas, continued.

Regenerative agriculture and green infrastructure

- Garden planting, including native plantings, pollinator plants, rain gardens, and/or food forests.
- Install cistern system for water reuse and garden irrigation.
- Launch composting education campaign or create compost system for cafeteria.
- Set up greenhouse for plant seedlings.
- Organize field trips to learn about regenerative agriculture or green infrastructure.
- Host trash cleanups to enhance green infrastructure health.
- Create community gardens with outside community members and the Portland Parks division.
- Plant trees on the school grounds.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy

- Design a solar + backup battery system for e-bikes (this example also fits under Transportation).
- Create an Earth Day celebration focused on climate and energy.
- Partner with an energy expert to do an energy audit at your school.
- Host a field trip to a solar or wind farm.
- Attend a conference focused on energy efficiency or renewable energy.

Other (must show a link to one of the funding areas above)

- Meet with local or state legislators to ask them to pass stronger climate change regulations.
- Remove plastic forks from the cafeteria, replacing with reusable silverware.
- Place recycling bins around the school for improved recycling.



Step 2: Submit your project ideas and budget

You'll submit team project ideas in November. The goal is to complete projects before the start of the following school year. If your projects will need to flow into the following year, work with your teachers or staff support to determine how to make it happen.

Please follow this process to submit your project ideas:

- **Portland Public Schools:** should work with their district representative to submit their project ideas. PPS will submit project ideas to PCEF.
- **Schools from all other districts:** will work with teachers and district staff to get approval and then submit their ideas via a Project Proposal form that will be provided each fall.

PCEF will review all proposals and may provide feedback to adjust project scopes by mid-late December each year. Once you receive approval, you can begin your project!

If you need to amend your proposal, you may make up to one change during the school year. Reach out to your staff advisors if you need to make changes. Obtaining approval from PCEF before starting on the new project or going on an unapproved field trip is required.

Step 3: Share your progress

At the end of the year students will report out on their projects. PPS students will work with the district leads to share their end of year report. For all other districts PCEF will provide a template for schools to share about projects. This template will include space for students to share a summary of activities and outcomes, report on the number of students involved in the project and to share how they spent their budgets.



Media on Student-led initiatives

VIDEO SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT PROJECTS



Looking for inspiration for your own project? This video features four student-led projects in action.

([short version](#) | [long version](#)).

IN THE NEWS

THINK OUT LOUD

Portland Clean Energy Fund supports student-driven climate action projects



By Allison Frost (OPB)

Sept. 10, 2024 4:37 p.m. Updated: Sept. 18, 2024 3:44 p.m.

Broadcast: Wednesday, Sept. 11

Oregon Public Broadcasting gave a shout out to this student-led initiative in a Think Out Loud story including perspectives from two local students. Give it a listen.



Frequently asked questions

IF I HAVE QUESTIONS FOR PCEF, WHO SHOULD I CONTACT?

You should first connect with your school advisor for this project. You may also connect with PCEF staff at PCEFschoools@portlandoregon.gov.

CAN STUDENTS USE THESE FUNDS TO PAY THEMSELVES FOR WORK THEY CONDUCT ON THEIR STUDENT LED INITIATIVE?

Students can't be paid an hourly rate. Stipends for work can be offered.

DO I NEED TO OBTAIN PERMISSION FROM MY SCHOOL TO DO THIS PROJECT?

You will be working with a staff advisor to help develop your project proposal and determine the budget needed. If you would like to propose a physical improvement, you'll need to work with your school facilities team to obtain permission prior to submitting your project proposal.

WHEN DO I NEED TO PROVIDE MY PROJECT PROPOSAL AND WHEN DOES MY PROJECT NEED TO COMPLETE?

Project proposals are due in late November. You should aim to complete your project before the start of the following school year. If you need additional time to complete your project, please discuss your timeline with your school staff advisor for this project.

DOES THE PROJECT NEED TO BE AT MY SCHOOL?

Projects can happen outside of your school. If the project is a physical improvement it must happen within the City of Portland. Field trips can happen outside of the Portland area. PCEF encourages students to first explore locations that are in the Portland area and include climate-friendly transportation options (e.g., biking, walking, public transit). Students must obtain approval from the project advisor and PCEF before starting a project.

