PEYA Application Guide

Section 1: Program History

The President's Environmental Youth Awards (PEYA) recognizes outstanding environmental stewardship projects developed by K-12 youth. PEYA promotes awareness of our nation's natural resources and encourages positive community involvement.

Section 2: How the Program Works

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has 10 regional offices across the country. The PEYA awards panel may select up to one winner in each age group, based on the evaluation criteria in defined in Section 6: How Applicants are Judged. Applicants are welcome to include youth across multiple grade levels; however, the application will be categorized based on the applicant with the highest-grade level.

For example, if one applicant group consists of two 4th graders, one 3rd grader and one 6th grader, the application will be evaluated in the Grade 6-12 category.

Each award-winning project will receive a Presidential plaque. The sponsors of all qualified, non- winning applicants will receive EPA acknowledgement of the applicant's efforts to protect human health and the environment.

Frequent Questions about PEYA

View frequently asked questions and answers on the PEYA web page.

Section 3: Project Eligibility

The eligibility requirements of applicants include:

- Project is completed while the applicant(s) is in kindergarten through 12th grade

- Applicant(s) is a citizen of the United States or its territories or has been lawfully admitted for permanent residency. Applicant also resides in a U.S. state, territory, or Tribal land.

- Project is sponsored by at least one adult 21 years of age or older.

- Project started during the 2025 calendar year and had activity during the 2025 calendar year. A project initiated prior to 2025 is also eligible for consideration as long as the project had activity during the 2025 calendar year.

- Project includes an environmental stewardship component based only on one or more of the focus areas as defined in Section 6: How Applicants are Judged.

- Applicant(s) is a citizen of the United States or its territories or has been lawfully admitted for permanent residency. Applicant also resides in a U.S. state, territory, or Tribal land.

- Project is sponsored by at least one adult 21 years of age or older.

- Project started during the 2025 calendar year and had activity during the 2025 calendar year. A project initiated prior to 2025 is also eligible for consideration as long as the project had activity during the 2025 calendar year.

- Project includes an environmental stewardship component based only on one or more of the focus areas as defined in *Section 6: How Applicants are Judged*.

Section 4: Project Sponsors

Each applicant or group of applicants applying for PEYA must be represented by at least one sponsor who is a teacher or other education professional. An applicant may also have a co-sponsor, who is typically another teacher or education professional or someone in the community or a subject matter expert who has provided guidance on the project. For home- schooled applicants with no interaction with formal educators or youth development clubs, the teacher sponsor can be a parent. All sponsors/co-sponsors must be adults at least 21 years of age.

Typically, sponsors/co-sponsors are individuals who have offered advice and guidance throughout the project to:

- Support the student(s) in developing a well-thought-out project.

- Aid the student(s) in project implementation.

- Foster work between other groups and individuals in the community and the student(s). sponsors/co-sponsors.

- Certify that the project was completed by all student(s) by signing and dating the PEYA Application Form.

- Gather forms and other application materials and submit the application to EPA.

- Serve as the primary point of contact for EPA correspondence regarding the application.

For K-5 applicants, sponsors/co-sponsors also typically complete the application form and assist in preparing the project detailed description and any supporting information. Questions about the roles of teacher(s) or sponsor/co-sponsor(s) should be directed to PEYA@epa.gov.

Please note: Sponsors/co-sponsors are responsible for managing all correspondence with EPA including application submission, submitting questions, and all other communication. To protect the online privacy of student applicants, **EPA will not respond to inquiries submitted by student applicants. All communications must be sent by the adult sponsors/co-sponsors.**

Section 5: How to Apply

Each applicant or team of applicants applying for PEYA must be represented by at least one sponsor (See Section 4: Project Sponsors) who submits the application to EPA and serves as EPA's point of contact for the application. The PEYA Application Form and all application materials should be typed. There are no defined font or spacing requirements although EPA recommends a font size no smaller than 10 point.

All application contents are required to be submitted in English. If you wish to submit an application in a language other than English, please email PEYA@epa.gov.

The PEYA Application Form, which includes Consent for PEYA Student Works Form and the PEYA Permissions Form can be viewed or downloaded at the PEYA web page.

Sponsor Responsibilities and Steps to Complete Application

1. **CONFIRM ELIGIBILITY:** Applicant sponsor/co-sponsor confirms that applicants meet all eligibility requirements defined by completing the Eligibility Self-Screen Checklist. The completed checklist is not required to be submitted in the application materials.

2. **PREPARE APPLICATION FORM:** Applicant sponsor/co-sponsor completes pages 1-4 of the PEYA Application Form. Excess pages submitted beyond the limits stated below will not be considered. Carefully consider inclusion of web links that clearly support the project description and/or supplementary information in conveying how the project achieved applicable review criteria as reviewers will not click on more than 5-6 web links per application. Note also that we cannot accept links to file share drives or social media accounts.

   a) **PROJECT TITLE:** Identify the name of the project title on page 1 of the Application Form. Please ensure that the project title is accurate as the project title will be used in program materials, including plaques, certificates, and letters of acknowledgement. The project title cannot be changed after application submission.

   b) **APPLICANTS BY NAME AND GRADE LEVEL:** The sponsor/co-sponsor(s) are responsible for identifying the name and grade level of each applicant. It is very important that the applicant names are accurate as the names provided on the application form will be inscribed on all materials, including certificates, letters of acknowledgement award plaques, and in program materials. Applicant names cannot be changed after application submission.

   c) **PROJECT SUMMARY:** The Project Summary, up to 300 words, is intended to describe the project's purpose and goals and identify the results achieved. The project topic must only cover one <u>or</u> more of the focus areas listed in *Section 6: How Applicants are Judged*. Space for the Project Summary is provided on page 4 of the Application Form.

d) **DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Grade 6-12 applicants are required to provide a more detailed description of the project preferably organized by each of the evaluation criteria in Section 6: How Applicants are Judged. Grade K-5 applicants are encouraged to have written, with the assistance of the sponsor/co-sponsor(s), a description of the project. The Project Description must be no more than 5 pages or 5 slides.

e) **SUPPORTING MATERIALS:** Applicants may submit up to 5 additional pages of optional supporting materials; for example, photographs, newspaper articles, or other information to provide a more comprehensive view of the project. Accompanying videos may be submitted, although applicants must provide a web link to where the videos can be viewed online. Please DO NOT send video files by email; video files sent by email will not be reviewed.

3. **SIGN AND DATE APPLICATION:** Sponsor/co-sponsor must sign and date page 4 of the PEYA Application Form. Signatures must be electronic; typing in the sponsor's name does not fulfill the application requirements. Page 4 of the PEYA Application Form can be submitted as a separate file if needed.

4. **COLLECT PARENT-SIGNED FORMS:** Sponsor/co-sponsor collects signed and dated Consent for PEYA Student Works Forms and the PEYA Permission Form from each applicant's parent/guardian. Please review the forms carefully to ensure that signatures by the parent/adult are electronic. Typing in the parent/adult's name does not fulfill the application requirements.

5. **COMPLETE THE PRE-SUBMISSION CHECKLIST:** Sponsor/co-sponsor completes the pre- submission checklist. The completed checklist is for self-assessment before application submission and is not required to be submitted in the application materials.

6. **SUBMIT THE APPLICATION BY THE DEADLINE:** Sponsor/co-sponsor sends a complete application package with all application materials so that they are received at EPA by **11:59 PM ET on January 16, 2026**. See instructions below for how to submit an application.

President's Environmental Youth Award
Today's Youth Protecting Tomorrow's Environment

EPA

How to Submit the Application

- To protect the online privacy of student applicants, application materials must be submitted by applicant sponsors/co-sponsors. Materials submitted by student applicants will not be considered.

- All application materials must be submitted electronically (email) by applicant sponsors/co-sponsors.

- Email completed application materials to PEYA@epa.gov by **11:59 PM ET on January 16, 2026**. Applicants are encouraged to provide application materials via a single email, with attachments in PDF, MS Word or PowerPoint, or JPEG. Please contact us if trying to send ZIP files or file attachments over 20MB. Note also that we cannot accept links to file share drives or social media accounts.

- A confirmation email is sent upon receipt of the application. Ongoing correspondence regarding the application is with the sponsor/co-sponsor(s) named in the application. Please note that a secondary email address is requested on the Application Form as correspondence with applicants selected for award typically occur outside the academic calendar.

Consent for PEYA Student Works form and PEYA Permission Form

- The PEYA Application Form includes two forms, Consent for PEYA Student Works and PEYA Permission, that must be signed by the parents or legal guardian of each applicant under the age of 18 at the time of the application submission.

- Student applicants aged 18 years or older at the time of application submission are permitted to sign the Consent for PEYA Student Works Form and PEYA Permission Form on their own behalf. The student applicant is advised to include a statement in the application package confirming that they are 18 years of age or older and providing consent to participate in the program.

- Please see the sample Consent for PEYA Student Works Form as a guide for the information to be provided on the form.

Updated Fall 2025

- Before signing the PEYA Permission Form, parents and/or guardians should review EPA's privacy policy available on the agency's website.

Section 6: How Applications Are Judged

Applications determined eligible and complete are evaluated by a PEYA awards panel. The PEYA awards panel will conduct an evaluation of the applications based on the evaluation criteria.

There are separate evaluation criteria for K-5 and 6-12 applications. A maximum of 100 points can be awarded to each application.

Evaluation Criteria K-5 (100 points)

1. *Youth-Driven Initiative (15 points)*

   a) How did the applicant(s) come up with the idea for the project, which must be on one or more of the focus areas that are listed below?

   b) How did the K-5 youth applicants take ownership of the project from the creation and support implementation of the project?

2. *Environmental Stewardship* and Impact (30 points)*

   a) How did the project demonstrate and address environmental stewardship in one or more of the focus areas that are listed below?

   b) How did the applicant(s) identify the environmental need for this project?

   c) What were the short- or long-term environmental benefits or outcomes of the project?

3. *Achieving Competition Goals (15 points)*

   - Projects must address environmental stewardship* through one or more of the focus areas listed below to be considered eligible for the competition. How did the project specifically address environmental stewardship in one or more of the focus areas, which are:

     o Agricultural practices

     o Artificial Intelligence

- Food waste

- Recycling

- School gardens or green space (e.g., playground, park, or other community spaces)

- Use science, data analysis or other creative approaches

- Water infrastructure

- Water quality and/or litter within waterways

- Is evidence provided to demonstrate that the project achieved the goals in relation to the environmental stewardship* of only one or more of the focus areas from the list above (example: descriptions, images, videos, student work, etc.)?

4. *Community Involvement (15 points)*

   a) To what extent did the project involve others in the school or community? Please describe how others were engaged in the project initiative(s).

5. *Project Creativity and/or Innovation (15 points)*

   a) How did the applicant(s) use creativity and/or innovative approaches for the project?

6. *Project Approach (10 points)*

   a) To what extent does the application tell a complete and detailed story about the project, which must be on one or more of the focus areas listed above?

   b) Did the applicant(s) show evidence of having a thought-out approach to solving the problem based on research, observations and/or discussion with the school/community?

Updated Fall 2025

Evaluation Criteria 6-12 (100 points)

1. *Youth-Driven Initiative (15 points)*

   a) How did the applicant support and give justification behind why they developed their project, which must be on one or more of the focus areas listed below? To what extent did the project demonstrate a direct connection to the applicant's initiative(s)?

   b) How did the 6-12 youth applicants take ownership in the project from creation, leading, and driving implementation of the project? *The driving force for the project must be the applicant(s), not the sponsor/co-sponsor.*

2. *Environmental Need and Appropriateness (20 points)*

   a) How did the applicant(s) identify the environmental need for this project that must identify only one or more of the focus areas listed below?

   b) How did the project demonstrate and address a clear environmental need as it relates to only one or more of the focus areas listed below?

   c) Did the project demonstrate appropriateness and thoughtful consideration for the community in which it was performed?

3. *Environmental Stewardship* and Impact (15 points)*

   a) How did the project demonstrate and address environmental stewardship as it relates to only one or more of the focus areas listed below?

   b) What were the short-term environmental benefits or outcomes of the project?

   c) What are the potential long-term environmental benefits or outcomes of the project including the ability to potentially replicate it in other places?

4. *Achieving Competition Goals (15 points)*

   a) Projects must address environmental stewardship through one or more of the focus areas listed below to be eligible for the competition. How did the project specifically address environmental stewardship in one or more of the focus areas of the competition, which include:

      o Agricultural practices

Updated Fall 2025

- o Artificial Intelligence

- o Food waste

- o Recycling

- o School gardens or green space (e.g., playground, park, or other community spaces)

- o Use science, data analysis or other creative approaches

- o Water infrastructure

- o Water quality and/or litter within waterways

b) Is evidence provided to demonstrate that the project achieved the goals in relation to the environmental stewardship of a focus area(s) from the list above (example: descriptions, images, videos, student work, etc.)?

c) **2 bonus points** will be awarded for projects that highlight the power of artificial intelligence in addressing ecological challenges and encouraging environmental stewardship.

5. *Community Involvement (15 points)*

a) To what extent did the project positively involve others in the community? Please describe how others were engaged in the project initiative(s).

b) What community resources, expertise, leadership, or publicity did the applicant(s) use?

6. *Project Creativity and Innovation (10 points)*

a) How did the applicant(s) use creativity and/or innovative approaches for the project?

7. *Soundness of Approach, Rationale, and Scientific Design (10 points)*

a) Does the project application demonstrate a clear problem, sound justification for selected initiative, and approach for addressing an environmental topic from the listed focus area(s) above? If so, please describe.

b) Did the applicant(s) show evidence of having a thought-out approach to solving the problem based on research, observations and/or discussion with the school/community?

Please note that project activities should highlight environmental stewardship[1] and community involvement in only one or more of the focus areas listed above. Individual research projects that do not focus on environmental stewardship and one or more of the focus areas listed above will not be eligible for the competition.

Eligibility Self-Screen Checklist

Sponsors/Co-Sponsors: Before starting the PEYA Application Form, complete the checklist below to confirm that the applicant(s) and project meet the eligibility requirements of the PEYA program as defined **in *Section 3: Project Eligibility*.** The completed checklist does not need to be submitted in the application materials.

- o Project was completed while the applicant(s) was in kindergarten through 12th grade.

- o Applicant(s) is a citizen of the United States or its territories or has been lawfully admitted for permanent residency. Applicant(s) also resides in a U.S. state, territory, or Tribal land.[2]

- o Project is sponsored by at least one adult 21 years of age or older.

- o Project started during the 2025 calendar year and had activity during the 2025 calendar year. As long as a project had activity during the 2025 calendar year, a project initiated prior to 2025 is also eligible for consideration.

- o Project includes an environmental stewardship component based only on one or more of the focus areas as defined in ***Section 6: How Applications are Judged***.

If you answered yes to all of the questions, please move on to the application. If you responded no to any of the questions, your project may not meet one or more of the requirements of the PEYA awards program.

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[1]Definition: "Environmental Stewardship" is voluntary commitment, behavior, and action that results in environmental protection or improvement, or conservation of our natural resources. Stewardship refers to an acceptance of personal responsibility for actions to improve environmental quality and to achieve conservation outcomes. Stewardship involves lifestyles and business practices, initiatives and actions that enhance the state of the environment and natural resources

[2] The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services defines lawful permanent residency as any person not a citizen of the United States who is residing in the United States under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence as an immigrant, also known as "Permanent Resident Alien," "Resident Alien Permit Holder," and "Green Card Holder."

Updated Fall 2025

Pre-Submission Checklist

Sponsors/Co-Sponsor(s): **Please carefully review the pre-submission checklist below to ensure that all requirements have been met and to confirm that the application package is complete.** *Please note that application materials submitted after the competition close date of January 16, 2026, at 11:59 PM ET will not be considered.*

o Eligibility Self-Screen Checklist was completed by sponsor or co-sponsor and applicant was deemed eligible.

o Application form and attachments are typed, not handwritten. Please contact PEYA@epa.gov if assistance is needed with the application materials.

o The full name of each student applicant is listed along with respective grade level(s). The name(s) reflect how the student prefers to be referred to on a certificate, plaque, and/or at a program ceremony. Names are accurate and do not omit any team members to be acknowledged. Please note that the applicants' names as provided on the application form will be the name inscribed on the award plaques; names cannot be changed after submission of the application.

o At least one sponsor is a teacher or education professional. For home-schooled applicants who have no interaction with formal educators or youth development clubs, the sponsor can be a parent. Please see *Section 4: Project Sponsors* for more details regarding the role of project sponsors.

o Applicant(s) have identified the current competition environmental focus area(s) addressed by their project. Note: Projects that do not clearly identify how their project addressed an environmental focus area from the list identified in *Section 6: How Applications are Judged,* will be ineligible for the competition.

o Grade 6-12 applicants have written a detailed description of the project. The detailed description does not exceed 5 pages or 5 slides. Applicants are strongly recommended to organize the detailed description by the application review criteria defined in *Section 6: How Applications are Judged*.

o Grade K-5 applicants have written, with the assistance of the sponsor/co-sponsor(s), a description of the project. The detailed description does not exceed 5 pages or 5 slides.

Applicants are strongly recommended to organize the detailed description by the application review criteria defined in *Section 6: How Applications are Judged.*

o The detailed project description and supplementary information combined, including photographs, newspaper articles, videos, or other information about the project, does not exceed 10 pages in length.

o All acronyms (for clubs, organizations, and school names) are spelled out at least once in the application.

o The primary sponsor has signed and dated the Application Form and provided a valid mailing address and a secondary email address for correspondence that typically takes place in the summer months.

o For students under the age of 18 at the time of application: Parent or guardian has signed and dated both the Consent for PEYA Student Works Form and PEYA Permission Form.

o For students aged 18 years or older at the time of application: Student has signed and dated both the Consent for PEYA Student Works Form and PEYA Permission Form. Doing so provides documentation that the student applicant is aged 18 or older and is providing their consent to participate in the program.

o For applications: All file names indicate the content of the file (for example, PEYA Application Form, supporting materials, detailed project description, PEYA Consent for Student Works form, PEYA Permission form) and project name. Parent-signed forms may include student first names or student initials in file name. The files must be saved as a PDF, MS Word, MS PowerPoint, or JPEG. File and supplemental materials may not be transmitted using private share drives (for example, Google Drive) or social media links.

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