Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Environmental Education
March 2026

Ohio Environmental Education Fund State Fiscal Year 2027 Agenda

This fact sheet summarizes the SFY27 annual plan of the Office of Environmental Education (OEE) at Ohio EPA and spending priorities for OEEF-funded activities.

State Fiscal Year 2027 (SFY27) begins July 1, 2026, and ends June 30, 2027. Legislation that created the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF) requires that an agenda be submitted to the state legislature and the governor by April 1 each year describing the proposed uses of the Fund.

The Ohio General Assembly created the OEEF in 1990 to enhance public awareness and understanding of issues affecting environmental quality. Funding comes from one-half of the civil penalties collected by Ohio EPA for violations of Ohio's air and water pollution control laws. On the OEEF agenda for SFY27 are grant programs, student- and citizen-led water quality education and monitoring, and environmental science and engineering career initiatives.

Grant Programs

Ohio EPA offers two grant cycles, with application deadlines in July 2026 and January 2027, using OEEF funds to support projects closely linked to Ohio EPA's overall priorities and efforts to protect Ohio's environment. For the SFY27 grant cycles, we are interested in funding environmental career exploration opportunities for K-12 students, and education projects related to eight of the most pressing current environmental issues confronting the state.

Encouraging Ohio students to explore environmentally related careers

In keeping with the state's emphasis on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education and preparing students for jobs in Ohio's high-tech economy, Ohio EPA supports students considering careers in environmental science and engineering. Fundable projects include teacher workshops, exhibits, classroom activities, and field trips to help elementary, middle, and high school students interact with Ohio environmental professionals to understand job duties, education and training requirements, along with demand and pay scales for the wide variety of environmental careers available.

Ohio EPA invites comments on this agenda.

Comments may be submitted electronically to the SmartComment Portal or by mail to the address at the bottom of this fact sheet. Comments received by 5 p.m. March 27 will be included in the official record. A public hearing will be held to discuss the annual agenda, answer questions, and accept public comments.

Meeting Details

Date: March 25, 2026
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Ohio EPA
Lazarus Government Center, 6th floor
50 West Town Street, Columbus

Guidance for the Preparation of Soil Management Plans at RCRA Sites

Encouraging habitat and ecological restoration efforts

Ohio's natural resources provide clean water for swimming, fishing, and boating, forests for hiking, camping, and hunting, and green spaces for recreation and adventure. Maintaining and restoring these resources improves the quality of life for Ohioans today and future generations. Fundable projects include programs, exhibits, publications, and interpretive signs to help students and adults understand the importance of protecting wetlands, vernal pools, riparian corridors, and other critical habitats, and removing or preventing the introduction of invasive species.

Reducing emissions to improve air quality, including through energy conservation and alternative energy sources

Successful efforts to improve Ohio's air quality (see Ohio EPA's Air Quality Index Reports webpage) are linked to understanding air pollution sources, associated health risks, and potential steps to reduce emissions for individuals, communities, and industry. Fundable projects include public awareness campaigns about local air quality concerns and ways to protect public health; efforts to encourage citizens and businesses to reduce engine idling, conserve energy, or consider alternative forms of transportation and alternative fuels to lower air emissions.

Encourage planning and emergency preparedness for extreme environmental events (environmental releases, extreme weather, etc.)

Ensuring Ohioans are prepared for unexpected environmental events can minimize the impact on citizens' lives, health, and well-being, and on the environment. Fundable projects include, but not limited to, public awareness campaigns about proper debris management post-weather-related events to reduce exposure to asbestos and hazardous chemicals from damaged buildings; understanding and following drinking water advisories; efforts to encourage citizens and businesses to build and/or relocate out of flood prone areas; recognizing reliable information sources for environmental releases, such as local fire departments, or emergency management agencies (EMA); workshops on drought resistant agricultural crops and native landscaping; and open burning impacts on respiratory conditions.

Using innovative practices to improve water quality, reduce nutrient loading, and prevent Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

Keeping Ohio's rich water resources safe and plentiful today and into the future requires understanding the threats and how to minimize their impacts. Fundable projects include efforts to persuade developers, site designers, local officials, businesses, and residents to use options such as permeable pavement, vegetated roofs and swales, rain gardens, passive treatment trains, stormwater treatment wetlands, low-impact development techniques, sediment and erosion controls, and naturally functioning stormwater infrastructure.

Fundable projects also focus on efforts to educate agricultural producers, livestock operations, golf courses, and other entities about adopting nutrient management projects; sediment control projects (filter areas); controlled drainage water management systems; livestock exclusion and manure management; conservation crop rotation projects with cover crops; and riparian re-vegetation/protection projects. Funding could also be used to educate about alternative technologies such as anaerobic digesters; to educate businesses and residents about maintaining

septic systems; to encourage responsible lawn and garden fertilization; and to educate the public about the causes, dangers, and prevention of HABs.

Reducing lead exposure in drinking water

Efforts to reduce lead exposure in drinking water are tied directly to the public's understanding of the health risks of lead exposure, lead sources (see Ohio EPA's Learn About Lead webpage), and how to minimize exposure. Fundable projects include public awareness campaigns about sources of lead in homes that contribute to lead in drinking water; health concerns of lead, especially in pregnant women and young children; efforts to encourage citizens and businesses to reduce lead exposure in drinking water including but not limited to replacing plumbing and/or fixtures, using approved water filters, and using cold water for cooking and baby formula.

Reducing exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as "forever chemicals"

"Forever chemicals" are present in everyday items like nonstick cookware, cosmetics, and stain-resistant fabrics. These long-lasting chemicals have lasted in the environment for many years and are linked to a variety of health issues. Funding projects include public awareness campaigns to reduce exposure by recognizing sources, understanding potential health impacts, private well treatment, and methods to reduce PFAS exposure and presence.

Connections between the environment and human health, including but not limited to, air quality and respiratory conditions, tick prevalence and Lyme disease, scrap tires and mosquitoes

A healthy society relies on clean air, clean water, and places to recreate. Understanding connections between the environment and human health may encourage Ohioans to make choices that benefit them and future generations. Fundable projects include public awareness campaigns about local air quality concerns, how to reduce impacts to local air quality, environmental sources impacting human health and ways to protect public health; efforts to encourage citizens and businesses to properly store and dispose of scrap tires to minimize associated mosquito-spread diseases; increase riparian corridors and urban tree planting to mitigate localized heat extremes and improve air quality; raise awareness of parasites prevalent in Ohio and related health disorders; and understand fish consumption advisories.

Environmental Science and Engineering Career Initiatives

In addition to making this a funding priority for the OEEF general and mini grants, OEEF supports several initiatives to introduce students to careers in environmental technical fields.

Environmental Career Ambassador Network

Ohio EPA has partnered with The Ohio State University School of Environment and Natural Resources and the Environmental Education Council of Ohio to recruit a statewide network of more than 480 professionals who volunteer as Environmental Career Ambassadors. The initiative is designed to bring environmental scientists and engineers from business, industry, government agencies, and the nonprofit sector into classrooms and career/technical centers to explain their job responsibilities, education, and training to middle and high school students. Career Ambassadors may also provide field trips, internships, and shadowing opportunities for local students. The program helped create a series of career chat videos, available on EECO's Student STEM Environmental Careers webpage, with professionals in a wide range of environmental occupations.

Guidance for the Preparation of Soil Management Plans at RCRA Sites

The Environmental Professionals Network (EPN) provides an online bridge linking schools with practicing professionals. Members have access to various job tools and resources, such as news and current event information from related organizations, the latest research reports from colleagues, and a special search function that can be used to find participants for special projects. EPN also hosts a monthly networking and discussion event on significant current issues in air quality, environmental health and toxicology, sustainability, land use, and conservation. Teachers and career counselors may contact Environmental Career Ambassadors in their area through OSU's EPN Connect or the Environmental Education Council of Ohio.

Future City Engineering Competition

At the middle school level, OEEF supports DiscoverE's National Engineers Week Future City Competition™, challenging students to explore careers in environmental engineering by designing a city of the future. Ohio EPA serves on the board for the Ohio competition (see Ohio EPA's Future City Competition webpage) and Ohio EPA volunteer judges help evaluate student projects on criteria such as energy efficiency, environmental friendliness, open space preservation, waste minimization, water resource management and transportation efficiency.

Ohio Envirothon

At the high school level, OEEF supports the annual Ohio Envirothon competition, which tests students' knowledge about forestry, soil, water quality, wildlife, and current environmental issues and encourages cooperative decision-making and team building. Each year, about 1,500 high school students compete in local competitions with the hope of advancing to the state and then the national events. The competition is sponsored in Ohio by the Ohio Federation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Natural resources and environmental specialists from many agencies, organizations, colleges, universities, park districts, and businesses devise the Envirothon questions and staff the various test stations.

Teachers, Industry, and the Environment

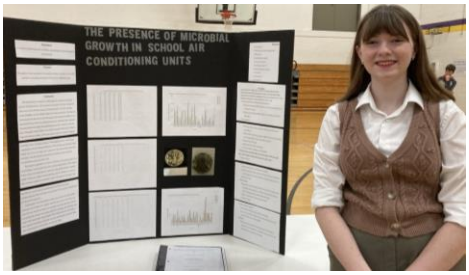
OEEF provides financial support and Ohio EPA staff members provide presentations for the Ohio Chemistry Technology Council's Teachers, Industry, and the Environment (TIE) Conference professional development conference.

The conference demonstrates hands-on, inquiry-based science education and introduces teachers to career opportunities for their students in environmental chemistry and chemical engineering

Scholarships

OEEF provides $50,000 in scholarships annually to environmental science and engineering students (see Ohio EPA's Scholarships and Career Exploration webpage) at Ohio colleges and universities. Administered through a partnership with the Ohio Academy of Science, the scholarships help students complete their degree programs and begin professional practice.

State Science Day and Governor's Awards for Excellence in Environmental Protection Research



OEEF will continue to provide support to the Ohio Academy of Science for State Science Day and the Governor's Awards for Excellence in Environmental Protection Research (see Ohio EPA's State Science Day webpage), honoring the best middle and high school student environmental science projects selected in statewide competition.

Water Quality Education and Monitoring by Students and Citizens

Ohio EPA's Office of Environmental Education (OEE) supports OEEF water quality and environmental career initiatives for students, educators, the regulated community, and the public.

Project WET and Healthy Water, Healthy People

Ohio EPA's Office of Environmental Education provides statewide coordination of Project WET (Water Education Today), an award-winning national curriculum for elementary and middle schools, and *Healthy Water, Healthy People* (HWHP), Project WET's secondary-level curriculum, introducing middle and high school students and adult volunteers to scientific testing procedures for various parameters such as pH, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity, as well as threats to water quality. The office and many well-trained facilitators from across Ohio offer educator workshops to disseminate each of Project WET's curricula.

Each year OEEF supports facilitator trainings to certify additional WET and HWHP facilitators and instructors around the state, and teacher workshops by providing educators' guides, technical manuals, and hands-on practice in using sampling equipment. The OEEF grant application guidelines strongly encourage K-12 applicants to incorporate these excellent teaching resources and adapt them to local watersheds.

Ohio's Credible Data Law

The federal Clean Water Act requires states to develop plans to reduce pollution entering rivers and streams that do not meet water quality standards.

Ohio's Credible Data law explains how professionals and volunteers can collect and share the results of their water quality monitoring. As part of this effort, local agencies and community organizations are teaching residents to identify their local watersheds and understand how we all contribute to pollution and how we can all help reduce it.

OEEF funding helps citizen scientists and school classes monitor the health of local streams by kick-seining for bugs; testing the chemistry of the water column; and understanding how physical features, such as overhanging trees, riffles, and vegetation on banks, improve water quality.

OEE staff members offer training sessions across the state each year to prepare teachers and citizens to become certified Level One Qualified Data Collectors.

Ohio Stormwater Conference

OEEF funds Ohio EPA's annual, multi-disciplinary Ohio Stormwater Conference, drawing more than 1,000 professionals involved in planning, design, implementation, and regulatory compliance related to stormwater management, nonpoint source pollution, and the modelling of urban water systems. Topics include low-impact design, NPDES Phase II permit and education requirements, transportation, legal policies, effective best management practices, sustainable development, stormwater treatment, public outreach, and innovative equipment, technology, and case studies. The event provides continuing education units (CEUs) to attendees, including professional engineers.

Contact

For more information about the Ohio Environmental Education Fund or Ohio EPA's Office of Environmental Education, please call 614.644.2873 or visit Ohio EPA's Ohio Environmental Education webpage.