

Birmingham Audubon MiniGrants for Education Advice for Applicants

Mission statement

Birmingham Audubon's mission is to promote conservation and a greater knowledge of birds, their habitats, and the natural world.

Accessing the application

To download application materials, visit birminghamaudubon.org/minigrants.

Basic submission guidelines

All signed, completed applications must be saved as PDF documents and emailed to info@birminghamaudubon.org no later than **31 July**. Please *do not* mail a physical copy of your application. If you experience difficulty scanning your signed copy, or if you need further technical assistance, email the address above, or call us at 205-719-3678 ext. 2.

Birmingham Audubon accepts Education MiniGrant applications from individuals representing schools and educationally oriented non-profits from throughout our seven-county service area (Jefferson, Shelby, Bibb, Blount, Chilton, St. Clair, and Walker counties), as well as from the Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Auburn-Opelika, Anniston, and Dothan areas. Eligible organizations must be tax-exempt non-profits with IRS public charity status, or be public entities qualifying under Section 170(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. An EIN (tax identification number) must be included with the principal or executive director signature on page 5 of the application.

How we evaluate applications

We regularly receive many more applications than we are able to fund, and so use the following criteria to evaluate and rank submissions. The most competitive applications will:

- include a strong focus on Alabama birds and their conservation
- maximize the number of students who benefit from the project
- target a diverse student audience
- outline a detailed, carefully considered budget
- explain how this project can serve as a stepping stone for future bird-based learning
- explain how the project fits within a school or organization's educational plan
- include a plan for evaluating student outcomes
- be innovative, creative, and "outside the box"

As always, it's a good idea to proofread your application carefully for errors and typos before submitting.

What kind of projects are appropriate?

Our education MiniGrants prioritize four kinds of bird-focused educational projects:

- physical improvements within school or community habitat sites
- select field trips to visit significant public bird areas
- purchases of classroom birding equipment
- innovative, student-led projects with citizen-science or habitat-monitoring components

Physical improvements

One of the biggest challenges facing migratory and resident bird populations has been the recent, rapid loss of habitat due to human development. Creating small patches of locally sustainable bird habitat can help offset the effects of this global problem by providing birds with refuges during migration, overwintering, or the breeding season. Consider requesting funding to install bird houses—like those described at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's NestWatch website (nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses)—on your school's property. Place easily observable feeders near a bird-safe window outside your classroom. Or consider installing drought-resistant native plants into your school landscape; these plants not only create new places for birds to hide, build nests, and eat food, but also provide space for pollinators and other beneficial insects (audubon.org/plantsforbirds). Better yet, get students involved in the planning and execution of your habitat garden plan for a complete introduction to the principles of conservation stewardship.

Field trips

There's no better way to get students excited about birds than to take them out into the field. Birmingham Audubon MiniGrants can be used to support trips to significant public birding areas around Alabama, including, but not limited to:

- Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge
- Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge
- Dauphin Island's Audubon Bird Sanctuary
- Bankhead, Talladega, and Conecuh National Forests
- Little River Canyon National Preserve
- Birmingham Botanical Gardens

All proposals for field trips should be cleared with Birmingham Audubon's Outreach Director (anselpayne@birminghamaudubon.org) prior to submission. (Please note: pre-approval of a field trip proposal does not imply funding, as proposals are evaluated in the context of all other applications by the full Birmingham Audubon education committee.)

While MiniGrant funding cannot be used to pay for stipends, salaries, indirect costs, or interpretive programs, Birmingham Audubon may be able to provide free staff guidance during your field trip. Again, interested applicants should check with the Outreach Director prior to submission.

Trips to participate in the Discovery Field Trip program at Birmingham Botanical Gardens are subject to special requirements, including participation in the Gardens' Birmingham Audubon Bird Walk program. Because these bird walks are only available on select days, teachers *must* coordinate field trip plans with the Gardens staff no less than two weeks in advance. For more information, email Ellen Hardy, ehardy@bbgardens.org, or call her at 205-414-3953.

Classroom birding equipment

A lack of quality birding equipment is a major obstacle for many students. Since good binoculars and field guides can make a big difference in a young person's enjoyment of the outdoors, Birmingham Audubon is committed to helping schools acquire the best equipment they can afford. As such, we strongly encourage MiniGrant proposals that seek to buy classroom sets of quality binoculars, bird guides, and related equipment.

There are a number of different binocular brands that we recommend depending on budget, size of order, and the ages of your students. If you're interested in applying for funds to outfit your classroom, we strongly recommend contacting us (anselpayne@birminghamaudubon.org) *prior to submitting your proposal* to

discuss the best brands to address your needs. Equipment-based proposals must also demonstrate a plan for integrating equipment and equipment training into classroom learning goals.

Innovative projects

We live in an era in which scientific thinking is increasingly in demand and scientists increasingly depend on publicly generated data to test their hypotheses. Birmingham Audubon strongly encourages innovative MiniGrant proposals that get students collecting bird- and habitat-related data and/or working to restore and monitor local habitats. Consider ways you can integrate citizen-science tools like eBird.org or iNaturalist.org into your project proposals. Interested in finding a local scientist with whom you can collaborate? If so, our staff may be able to facilitate useful partnerships. Contact the Outreach Director (anselpayne@birninghamaudubon.org) for more ideas on how to integrate real science into your proposal.

A final checklist

So you've written your proposal, and you're almost ready to send it in. Now's a great time to double check each of the following points prior to pressing "send."

- Does your requested funding amount to \$1,000 or less?
- Is your budget clearly defined?
- Are your project goals clearly described?
- Does your project have a strong environmental component that includes a bird focus?
- Have you addressed how you will recognize Birmingham Audubon should funding be awarded?
- Are all sections of your application complete?
- Did you sign your application? Did your principal/executive director also sign?
- Is the final document saved as a PDF?
- Have you addressed how you will recognize Birmingham Audubon should funding be awarded?