



Indy Thriving Schools Challenge

Earth Charter Indiana's program Indy Thriving Schools Challenge program is now in its fourth year. The inaugural year of the Indianapolis Thriving Schools Challenge (ITSC) certified 53 green schools from all corners of Marion County, while granting funding for 31 schools totalling 51 unique sustainability projects. In 2019/2020 the Challenge certified 29 schools and granted 20 schools for 37 varying projects.

In 2020, the program was able to become a year long program with 2 application periods.

In 2021, ITSC piloted going statewide with its first school outside of Marion County, in Danville, Indiana.

Every year we learn, grow and readjust our focus to best serve our Indiana Schools in becoming the community hubs they deserve to be. All the while, this program is centered on youth engagement, circular economy and civic engagement in the world of sustainability.

Students, educators and parents are engaging with sustainability education and forging climate resiliency solutions - equipping our community with the knowledge and tools most needed today and in the future. If you haven't yet joined the challenge, we hope you will this year.

Program Overview

The Indy Thriving Schools Challenge is a green schools grants program for Indiana K-12 schools, with precedence given to schools in Marion County and underserved rural communities. Project funding is available to schools in need of financial support, maximizing the opportunity for all schools in our community to participate in tackling sustainability. Selected schools will be eligible for up to \$5,000 in funding to implement up to 3 new projects, as well as to improve upon or expand existing projects. The dedicated teachers and staff who champion the implementation of new projects at selected schools will receive a stipend of up to \$1,000 with no strings attached.

For projects that have multiple Champions, decisions regarding how to split the stipend is at the discretion of the school.

- Projects must be within the 3 Pillars of the ITSC program: School Gardens; Energy & Waste Reduction; Climate & Sustainability Curriculum Creation.
- Priority consideration will be given to: projects emphasizing circular economy and civic engagement; schools within historically underserved communities based on the percentage of students receiving Free and Reduced Meal assistance, demographics of the student body, median household income, proximity to grocery stores and more.
- All schools must have students involved with ideation and implementation, generally known as a Green Team, but can also be but not limited to an afterschool garden club, individual classroom, entire grade or entire school. **Youth involvement is mandatory.**

All ITSC cohorts will have to attend and exhibit details of their project(s) at one or both of the following events or their virtual equivalent. **Participation is mandatory** in either:

- Eco Science Challenge on April 22, 2022 at the Indiana State Museum
- Thriving Schools Fall Festival in October of 2022.

All schools chosen to be ITSC cohorts are required to submit soil and dust samples through the *Thriving Schools Lead Screening Project*. Sample submission is **mandatory** no matter what project funding is received for.

Program Benefits

Education in sustainability engages children and young adults around important topics like environmental stewardship, climate resilience, social responsibility, waste reduction, circular economy, systems thinking, place- and problem-based learning, and resource conservation. Creating new projects will provide students, educators, and parents alike with hands-on implementation experience. Through project-based learning, students will exercise critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills in the context of creating authentic, meaningful projects. These skills and knowledge will be crucial to the development of innovative solutions to the challenges of the 21st century.

For projects that have multiple Champions, decisions regarding how to split the stipend is at the discretion of the school. (could cut this or keep it -- I copied and moved it up)

Guidelines

All Marion County Schools are eligible to apply for certification and project funding through the Indianapolis Thriving Schools Challenge. There are two opportunities to participate in the Challenge:

- Application 1 is open October 1- November 1, 2021 with participation for the 2022 calendar year. Program runs January 2022- December 2022.

- Application 2 is open May 1- June 1, 2022 with participation for the 22/23 school year. Program runs August 2022- July 2023.

All participating schools will receive a Thriving School decal to display their achievement on the school and digital graphics to use in digital documents or the school website. The use of these materials is at the discretion of each school.

All applications must be submitted online. **Application 1 will be open October 1- November 1, 2021. Application 2 will be open May 1- June 1, 2022.**

Champions

Schools seeking certification must have a dedicated school Champion(s). This individual (or individuals) will be the driving force behind the project's planning, implementation, and classroom incorporation. One individual will serve as a point of contact to ITSC organizers.

Recognition and a stipend of up to \$1,000 will be awarded to school champion(s) selected for project funding. The stipend amount will depend on the complexity, duration and classroom incorporation of selected project(s). Stipends will be disbursed in January 2022 for Round 1 Applications and July 2022 for Spring Applications.

Champions will be asked to attend a virtual half day orientation to acquaint themselves with the program and participate in a brief ITSC training. This will be mandatory, so there will be multiple dates available to ensure everyone can attend. This applies for all ITSC champions, no matter if they are a new or past ITSC cohort.

Project Funding

All Indiana schools are eligible to apply for up to \$5,000 in project funding to support the implementation of up to 3 new projects, or to expand, improve upon, or sustain an existing sustainability project. A lack of existing sustainability initiatives does not disqualify schools from applying for project funding. All proposals for project funding must have the support of the school leadership (i.e. principal, but also, when appropriate, head custodian, cafeteria manager, groundskeeper, etc.).

Each project, regardless of category, requires a pre- and post assessment of impact. To illustrate, all energy related projects will require the completion of a before and after energy use comparison and all waste management projects will require the measurement of waste before and after project implementation.

All project funding recipients must commit to participating in the 2021 Eco Science Challenge, April 22, 2022 at the Indiana State Museum or the ITSC Fall Festival in October 2022. Schools are welcome to participate in both events.

At the minimum, a small group of Green Team students can create a display about their Thriving Schools Challenge project, but preferably an entire class could present on a variety of environmental-related subjects. Note that it is not necessary for the funded projects to be completed by the Eco Science Challenge.

Green Teams

All schools receiving project funding must start a Green Team or Club, made up of students along with a teacher, administrator, staff member, and/or parent. If your school already has a sustainability-focused team or club, there is no need to start a new, separate, club.

The idea behind the Green Team is that we believe students should be leading the process of planning and implementing new projects. A Green Team may be a classroom or a multi-age student/teacher/parent group, and they can meet either during or after school.

Champions will be taught a systems thinking activity during the ITSC Orientation, that they will be asked to do with their green teams at the beginning of the project and at the end. Results of both will need to be shared with our Resilient Schools Coordinator.

Important dates

- ***ROUND 1 cohorts program begins January 2022***
- ***Let's Talk:ITSC*** monthly discussions (virtual) ONGOING
 - Every month ITSC champions, Green Teams and more will be invited to attend discussions on various topics pertinent to sustainability in schools; these discussion will be a space for cohorts to share best practices, ask questions and be in community together; participation is not mandatory but highly recommended
- ***Indy Thriving Schools Launch Event*** January 9, 2022 10-2pm at Indiana State Museum
 - Champions & Green Teams will be honored and celebrated by city leaders with ample time to explore the Indiana State Museum
- ***ITSC Orientation*** Jan 15 or 22, 2022 10-2pm (virtual)
 - Champions will receive updates on ITSC program; meet with each other; learn how to facilitate systems thinking activity to be used with green teams; meet Program Evaluator
- ***Eco Science Challenge*** April 22, 2022 10-2pm at Indiana State Museum
 - ITSC cohorts will be asked to present on their ITSC projects; projects don't need to complete but can report on decision making process and/or findings to date; cohorts are welcome to present multiple projects on various topics with only one needing to

be directly about ITSC project(s); Participation in ESC or Thriving Schools Fall Festival is mandatory; Cohorts are welcome to participate in both

- *Indy Thriving School Challenge Round 2 Application* open May 1- June 1, 2022
- *JUNE Report for Round 1 cohorts* due June 24, 2022
 - ITSC Champions will need to submit a report no matter where they are with their projects. Champions will have access to the Report Submission Form on June 1, 2022.
- *Youth Master Gardener Program* June-August details to come
- **Round 2 cohorts program begins August 2022**
- *Indy Thriving School Challenge Round 2* cohorts announced & half day orientations August 2022
 - IMPORTANT DATES FOR 2023 WILL BE ANNOUNCED CLOSER TO DATE OF APPLICATION
- *Thriving Schools Fall Festival* October 2022 at ITSC school location (tbd)
 - ITSC cohorts will be asked to present on their ITSC projects; projects don't need to complete but can report on decision making process and/or findings to date; ; Participation in ESC or Thriving Schools Fall Festival is mandatory; Cohorts are welcome to participate in both
- **Round 1 cohorts program ends December 2022**
- *Final Report for Round 1 Cohorts* due December 7, 2022
 - ITSC Champions will need to submit a report no matter where they are with their projects. Champions will have access to the Report Submission Form on November 16 , 2022.

IMPORTANT DATES FOR 2023 WILL BE ANNOUNCED CLOSER TO DATE OF ROUND 2 APPLICATION

Project Guidance

Schools selected for project funding will work with Tatjana Rebelle (they/them), the Resilient Schools Coordinator of Earth Charter Indiana, throughout the process of planning and implementing new projects. Tatjana will serve as a mentor to Champions and Green Teams who wish to receive support and guidance as they go through the program, whether that be to ask questions, talk about potential partners, community resources available, or anything else that comes up. Earth Charter Indiana has worked in this field for almost a decade - and has been mentoring schools since the program's inception.

Reporting

ITSC cohorts will be responsible for submitting 2 reports: one after 6 months and a final report after 12 months. Report submission will be done via a link issued to champions weeks prior to the due date. Champions will be expected to report on attendance of green teams; results of a systems thinking

exercise given to Green Teams at the beginning and end of project(s); an itemized budget; data from project implementation and more. It is highly encouraged to share photos or videos of your progress. You will have space to share those with your reports but are welcome to share those at any time with the Resilient Schools Coordinator via email.

Please provide permissions/media releases associated with those photos or videos, so we know we can use those images.

Note that the report you submit may be used as testimonial content for promoting the Thriving Schools Challenge project.

Report dates are as follows:

Round 1 ITSC cohorts: June 2022 & December 2022

Round 2 ITSC cohorts: February 2023 & August 2024

Schools are required to maintain contact with Tatjana Rebelle of Earth Charter Indiana, particularly during project milestones via email. If you share your progress on social media, be sure to use the hashtags - #IndyThrivingSchools, #EarthCharterIndiana and #ThrivingSchoolsThrusday.

Selection Criteria

It is strongly encouraged that new projects be student-led, increasing the project-based learning benefits. Schools applying for project funding must demonstrate that at least 1 project will provide hands-on, educational opportunities for students. Selected schools must start (or already have) a Green Team or Club, made up of students along with administrators, teachers, staff, and/or parents.

Due to the alignment of the goals of the Thriving Schools Challenge and our primary funders, we will be particularly interested in projects that emphasize and illustrate the benefits of circular economy and/or civic engagement

Circular Economy: *A regenerative system in which resource input and waste, emission, and energy leakage are minimized by slowing, closing, and narrowing energy and material loops; this can be achieved through long-lasting design, maintenance, repair, reuse, remanufacturing, refurbishing, recycling, and upcycling. This is in contrast to a linear economy which is a 'take, make, dispose' model of production.* — Definition courtesy the UN Climate Change.

Civic Engagement: *Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy.* - Courtesy of the American Psychological Association

Additional selection criteria used:

- ☐ Consideration of equity
- ☐ Environmental Impact
- ☐ Educational component
- ☐ Impact to community
- ☐ Ability to sustain into the future

How to Apply

There are two separate application periods a year for the ITSC program.

Round 1 Application is open October 1- November 1, 2021

Round 1 Cohorts program is for a calendar year from January 2022- December 2022.

Round 2 Application is open May 1- June 1, 2022

Round 2 Cohorts program is for a school year from August 2022- August 2023

Submissions will only be accepted online by filling out the form on the program website. Note - we are using a new application platform and you will be able to save your progress and return to it before final submission. We still recommend reviewing the PDF version of the application beforehand and have your responses prepared before starting the online application form. Set aside plenty of time and use a reliable internet connection. If you have any concerns about submitting an online application please contact us.

Please review guidelines and FAQ thoroughly before applying. Schools receiving project funding must commit to participating in the 2022 Eco Science Challenge, taking place at the Indiana State Museum or the 2022 ITSC Fall Festival at a tbd location. Participation in both is welcome but not mandatory.

NEW for 2022

Indy Thriving Schools Lead Screening Program: In partnership with the Center for Urban Wellness all ITSC schools (no matter what projects) must submit soil and dust samplings for lead. Results will be shared with schools and become part of the Map My Environment Program. Schools with dangerously high lead contamination will receive assistance free of charge from the Indiana Department of Health.

Half Day ITSC Orientation: Champions must attend a half day (10-2pm EST) virtual orientation event. This event will be a chance for champions to meet each other, learn what's expected as an ITSC cohort, take part in a systems thinking activity that is to be given to Green Teams at the beginning and end of their project(s) and meet the new ITSC Program Evaluator. There will be more than one opportunity to take part in orientation and champions will be given dates when notified of their acceptance in the program.

Visits: Our Resilient Schools Coordinator and our new ITSC Program Evaluator will be visiting with all the ITSC cohorts during the duration of the program. These visits will be our opportunity to assist and witness your projects first hand. The Program Evaluator will be conducting interviews when possible. Our Resilient Schools Coordinator will be available to assist with program implementation or meeting with Green Teams. Both are prepared to do this in person or virtually.

Thriving Schools Fall Festival: The Fall Festival will happen in October 2022 and be an opportunity for our cohorts to meet, have fun and discuss their projects. This festival will serve as another space for ITSC cohorts to display their findings, similar to the Eco Science Challenge. The Fall Festival will take place at an ITSC school and will be open to the public. More details to come in summer 2022.

The deadline for Round 1 application is November 1, 2021.