

Alabama Audubon MiniGrants for Education Advice for Applicants

Mission statement

Alabama 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 alaudubon.org/minigrants.

Basic submission guidelines

All signed, completed applications must be saved as PDF documents and emailed to info@alaudubon.org no later than **30 October 2021**. If you are unable to email a PDF of your documents, please mail your **completed application** to our Birmingham office, 3720 Fourth Avenue South, Birmingham, AL 35222. For mailing in applications, the post-mark date must reflect either the day of or before the grant closing date. 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. 1.

Alabama Audubon accepts Education MiniGrant applications from individuals representing schools and educationally oriented nonprofits throughout Alabama. Eligible organizations must be tax-exempt nonprofits 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. Please be aware that the application process now requires detailed budgets, evaluation synopsis, and lesson plans. All information should be properly cited and documented in the application.

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, including chimney swift towers
- purchases of classroom birding equipment
- innovative, student-led projects with community-science or habitat-monitoring components
- select field trips to visit significant public bird areas

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 chimney swift towers (alaudubon.org/swifts) or 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 three feet away from a bird-safe window outside your classroom (see alaudubon.org/window-collisions for tips on bird-friendly windows). 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 (alaudubon.org/native-plants). 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.

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, Alabama 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 reviewing the attached guidelines for purchasing binoculars. If you anticipate completing an application for binoculars, please contact us (info@alaudubon.org) *prior to submitting your proposal* to discuss additional questions or concerns. 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. Alabama 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 community-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.

Field trips*

There's no better way to get students excited about birds than to take them out into the field. Alabama 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

All proposals for field trips should be cleared with Alabama Audubon's Office Manager (alliemarie@alaudubon.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 Alabama Audubon education committee.) MiniGrant funding cannot be used to pay for stipends, salaries, indirect costs, or interpretive programs.

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? Did you provide exact amounts and detailed information of sources?
- Are your project goals clearly described? Did you include a lesson plan and detailed timeline?
- Does your project have a strong environmental component that includes a bird focus?
- Have you addressed how you will recognize Alabama Audubon should funding be awarded?
- Are all sections of your application complete?
- Did you sign your application? Did your principal/executive director also sign? Did you include the EIN?
- Is the final document saved as a PDF?

Once you've submitted your completed application, you will receive an email notifying you that your application has been received. Following the due date **30 October 2021**, the Education Committee will meet to review and determine award grant recipients. You will be contacted by Alabama Audubon staff once the awards have been decided. If for any reason you need to retrack your application, please contact us (info@alaudubon.org) as soon as possible.