

askHRgreen.org

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



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ABSTRACT

The Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC) is one of 21 Planning District Commissions in the Commonwealth of Virginia and is a regional organization representing the 17 local governments of the Hampton Roads area. This report provides an overview of the askHRgreen.org regional public outreach program and campaign results for fiscal year 2024-2025. It also provides an overview of the individual initiatives and results from each of the four askHRgreen.org environmental education committees: Recycling and Beautification, Stormwater Education, Water Awareness, and Fats, Oils & Grease Education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the HRPDC staff in cooperation with the member localities. Preparation of this report was included in the HRPDC Work Program for Fiscal Year 2025, approved by the Commission in May 2024.

About askHRgreen.org

Launched in 2011, askHRgreen.org is more than just a robust website; it is an award-winning comprehensive public outreach initiative. The program combines traditional and social media with grassroots outreach efforts to not only educate but inspire residents of Hampton Roads to make changes that have a positive impact on the environment. By combining local expertise and leveraging economies of scale, the askHRgreen.org program is able to help local jurisdictions fulfill requirements of MS4 stormwater permits, groundwater withdrawal permits, and the state consent order to prevent sanitary sewer overflows. For citizens, it has become a “one-stop shop” to find answers, resources, and inspiration for a cleaner, greener Hampton Roads. From water-wise landscaping ideas and pointers for preventing water pollution, to recycling tips and simple ways to prevent sewer overflows, all you have to do is askHRgreen.org.

Financial support for askHRgreen.org is made possible by the following member localities and agencies: the cities of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg; the counties of Gloucester, Isle of Wight, James City, Southampton, Surry and York; the town of Smithfield and HRSD. Members of locality staff and HRSD comprise four askHRgreen.org committees who meet monthly to develop and implement the regional program.

Recycling and Beautification Committee - A coalition of local government staff members from across Hampton Roads who are working together to share ideas and pool resources for various education programs tailored towards community beautification, litter prevention, waste reduction, and recycling education. This group has been working cooperatively since 1981.

Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) Education Committee - A coalition of local government staff members working together with HRSD to protect wastewater infrastructure, reduce sanitary sewer overflows, and improve local water quality. The Committee shares both technical resources and educational strategies to prevent improper disposal of fats, oils, and grease. This cooperative effort has been underway since 2007 when 13 of the region's localities and HRSD entered into the Regional Special Order by Consent with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Water Awareness Committee - Regional public utilities staff members working together to educate citizens about aging infrastructure, the value of tap water, and the importance of water conservation. This cooperative effort assists localities in meeting education requirements of water supply and groundwater permits as well as increasing public awareness of the vital role water plays in the quality of life of Hampton Roads and the need to conserve it.

Stormwater Education Committee - A cooperative partnership of the region's 17 member jurisdictions which has served as a formal adjunct to the required public information component of the Virginia Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permits (VPDES) for Phase I and Phase II Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) since 1997. Local government staff members work together to share ideas and pool resources for various education programs and outreach initiatives tailored to stormwater pollution prevention.



A Year of Change

Fiscal Year 2024–2025 marked an important period of transition for askHRgreen.org as we moved to a new marketing partner, Davis Advertising Agency. While the mid-year transition required temporary pauses in some campaign activity to allow for onboarding and strategy development, it also provided an opportunity to refresh our approach and lay a strong foundation for the future. Building on the groundwork laid during this transition year, the program is poised to deliver more engaging campaigns, stronger community connections, and measurable results for the region.

2024-2025 by the numbers



5,514

students impacted by \$7,773 in environmental education mini grants



234,975 people

at community events with the opportunity to engage with askHRgreen.org



70,184

visits to the askHRgreen.org website



\$1.9 million

grant funding received for special projects and programs



4,030

participants in the Bay Star Homes & Bay Star Business programs

askHRgreen.org Website Analytics

The askHRgreen.org website continues to serve as the cornerstone of our outreach efforts, providing campaign news, event information, and resources to users across all devices.

In FY25, total website sessions declined, driven primarily by decreases in traffic from WAVY display ads, APPOpen ads, and paid search campaigns. Despite this, the overall quality of traffic improved significantly. Average time on site increased by 20%, indicating that users were more engaged with the content they accessed.

Website traffic reflected the collective marketing activity of all four askHRgreen.org committees, with several campaigns leaving a notable mark. Organic search traffic steadily increased from December 2024 through March 2025, signaling the effectiveness of initiatives such as the Grease Grinch, Great American Cleanup, and Clog Monster campaigns. The website's highest-traffic month was March 2025, with 8,502 sessions (12% of annual traffic), largely fueled by social media ads promoting the Great American Cleanup.

Traffic sources demonstrate strong brand awareness, with more than 65% of visits coming from organic search (36.5%) or direct traffic (28.1%). Paid search accounted for 16%, followed by social media (6.4%), referral (4.8%), and organic social (4.7%).

TOP WEB TRAFFIC SOURCES

Organic Search 36.51%

Direct 28.07%

Paid Search 16.04%

Social Media 6.4%

Referral 4.82%

Organic Social 4.65%

Top-performing pages included the Home Page (15.1%), Recycling Lookup (7.8%), Prevent Litter (7.4%), and the Great American Cleanup (3.8%). Collectively, the top eight pages accounted for 42% of total traffic, with recycling content continuing to be a leading area of interest for website visitors.

WEBSITE VISITATION RESULTS

	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21
Visits	70,184	95,604	166,589	144,282	88,544
Unique Visitors	59,650	79,236	155,636	130,929	77,212
Pageviews	92,324	135,675	206,511	188,867	125,529
Pages per Visit	1.55	1.72	1.24	1.31	1.42
Average Visit Duration	0:45	0:37	0:28	0:38	0:55
% New Visits	99%	83%	93%	90%	87%
Mobile Devices	54%	68%	75%	71%	57%
Desktop Devices	46%	32%	25%	29%	43%
Click Thru Rate (CTR)	9.76%	9.28%	9.28%	7.93%	4.28%

Search Engine Marketing

Please note: Fiscal Year 2024–2025 was a transitional year for askHRgreen.org as the program shifted marketing agency partners from Red Chalk Studios to Davis Advertising Agency. This change required a period of onboarding and strategy alignment, resulting in temporary pauses in campaign activity. As a result, some performance numbers reflect this transition period and should be viewed in that context.

The askHRgreen.org Search Engine Marketing (SEM) program employs Google pay-per-click advertising to increase traffic to the website. By bidding on select keywords and phrases, our ads direct search traffic to relevant content on the askHRgreen.org website.

In FY25, our search ads delivered 117,590 impressions and generated 11,413 clicks to the website, achieving a strong click-thru-rate (CTR) of 9.71%. These results reflect a temporary pause in campaign activity from January through mid-March 2025 due to the program's transition to a new marketing agency partner.

With Davis Advertising now managing the SEM program, new campaigns launched in March 2025 with a refined strategy. The campaign shifted from broad match to phrase match keywords, ensuring more relevant ads are shown to users. This change in strategy emphasizes quality over quantity, with the goal of driving high-quality traffic to the site rather than simply maximizing volume. Moving forward, the SEM program will continue to be optimized to strengthen performance and deliver meaningful engagement with regional audiences.

SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING RESULTS

	2024-25	2023-24	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
Impressions	117,590	211,072	216,247	274,428	376,459	342,690	210,695	169,140
Clicks	11,413	20,607	20,040	21,771	16,103	12,449	11,087	7,330
Click Thru Rate (CTR)	9.71%	9.76%	9.28%	7.93%	4.28%	3.63%	5.26%	4.33%

Please note: Search campaigns did not run during the period of January 1 - March 13, 2025

TOP KEYWORD AD GROUPS (by clicks)

	Impressions	Clicks	Click Thru Rate
Recycling – Intent	13,356	947	7.09%
Composting	5,045	411	8.15%
Battery	5,057	351	6.94%
Water Awareness	5,945	257	4.32%
FOG	2,524	196	4.97%
Recycling – Info	2,414	157	4.97%
Tap Water	1,348	90	8.15%
Fertilizing	833	47	5.64%
Conserving Water	330	11	3.33%

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Please note: Keyword performance metrics are for the period of March 13 - June 30, 2025 once the new SEM program launched with Davis Advertising.

Tap Water and Composting had the highest click-through rates (CTR) at 8.15%, well above industry averages (~2–5% for search). Recycling - Intent also had strong performance with a 7.09% CTR and the highest volume of clicks overall (947), indicating high interest and relevance.

Community Outreach

Part of the success of askHRgreen.org is the strong public engagement program that includes face-to-face interaction with community members. Each year, askHRgreen.org volunteers attend dozens of events across a wide variety of community sectors. From Earth Day celebrations to public festivals and farmers markets, there is always a reason to talk about what we can do to protect and preserve this great region. Often, the focal point of this participation is the askHRgreen.org educational trailer which has become its own attraction and is seen as a helpful resource by event organizers and attendees alike. The askHRgreen.org trailer is a benefit to have on site at a community event because it comes stocked with a variety of resources from all education committees, including informational brochures and eco-themed promotional items such as reusable shopping bags, sink strainers, shower timers, dog waste bag holders, and more. In FY25, askHRgreen.org participated in 29 community events across Hampton Roads, providing more than 234,000 residents with the opportunity to consider how their daily habits can contribute to a cleaner, greener region.

2024-2025 OUTREACH EVENTS

			Estimated Attendance
7/1/2024	Plastic Free July at Norfolk Botanical Garden	Norfolk	1,096
7/10/2024	Plastic Free July at Norfolk Botanical Garden	Norfolk	637
7/17/2024	Plastic Free July at Norfolk Botanical Garden	Norfolk	486
7/26/2024	TGIF Concert at Bennett's Creek Park	Suffolk	1,500
8/2/2024	TGIF Concert at Bennett's Creek Park	Suffolk	350
8/6/2024	National Night Out	Suffolk	3,250
8/16/2024	TGIF Concert at Bennett's Creek Park	Suffolk	700
9/12 - 9/15	Isle of Wight County Fair	Windsor	34,415
9/28/2024	Virginia Beach Master Gardener Fall Gardening Festival	Virginia Beach	1,000
10/10 - 10/13	Peanut Festival	Suffolk	75,000
10/18 - 10/20	Poquoson Seafood Festival	Poquoson	48,000
10/18/2024	Fall Festival at Portlock Primary School	Chesapeake	500
11/2/2024	Mariner's Festival at The Mariner's Museum	Newport News	3,300
11/16/2024	America Recycles Day at Virginia Aquarium	Virginia Beach	300
1/18 - 1/19	Home & Outdoor Living Show	Virginia Beach	2,700
2/8/2025	The Story of Plastic Film Screening & Panel Discussion	Norfolk	250
2/15 - 2/16	Hampton Roads Home Show	Hampton	2,500
3/18 - 3/20	Virginia Marine Debris Summit	Norfolk	150
4/5 - 4/6	Daffodil Festival	Gloucester	25,000
4/19/2025	Virginia Living Museum Earth Day	Newport News	692
4/19/2025	Earth Day Celebration at Machicomoco State Park	Gloucester	400
4/22/2025	Earth Day Event at Christopher Newport University	Newport News	350
4/26/2025	Earth & Arts Festival	Suffolk	6,500
5/3/2025	Live Green Norfolk	Norfolk	179
6/3/2025	NASA Langley Research Center Safety and Health EXPO	Hampton	2,000
6/5/2025	Newport News Waterworks Safety Day	Newport News	220
6/27/2025	Picnic in the Park	Poquoson	3,500
6/28 - 6/29	Tidewater Comicon	Virginia Beach	20,000
Total			234,975



Bay Star Homes

A core message of askHRgreen.org is that small, everyday actions can add up to a lasting impact on the environment. The Bay Star Homes program helps residents put this principle into practice by encouraging them to pledge to implement environmentally friendly actions in and around their homes. These pledges range from implementing stormwater best management practices—such as installing rain barrels or rain gardens, redirecting downspouts, and planting native vegetation—to conserving water, recycling right, and keeping drains clog-free. Bay Star Homes participants also enjoy early access to special programs, including rain barrel workshops and Stormwater Awareness Week giveaways. The program entered its 10th year in FY25, adding 53 new households to the program, bringing the total number of Bay Star Homes in Hampton Roads to 3,953. Together, these households represent a growing network of local environmental stewards committed to protecting the region's waterways and natural resources.

BAY STAR HOMES IN FY25

FY25 Bay Star Homes Registrants	
City/County	Number
Chesapeake	8
Hampton	2
Isle of Wight	1
James City	1
Newport News	6
Norfolk	17
Portsmouth	2
Suffolk	10
Virginia Beach	3
Williamsburg	2
York	1
Total	53

Total Bay Star Homes Registrants	
City/County	Number
Chesapeake	189
Franklin	14
Gloucester	18
Hampton	145
Isle of Wight	15
James City	19
Newport News	316
Norfolk	2,587
Poquoson	21
Portsmouth	49
Smithfield	12
Southampton	4
Suffolk	169
Surry	3
Virginia Beach	291
Williamsburg	9
York	92
Total	3,953



Great American Cleanup

The askHRgreen.org Recycling & Beautification Committee hosted the Hampton Roads regional kickoff of the Great American Cleanup (GAC) on March 28-29, 2025, as part of its ongoing “Team Up 2 Clean Up” initiative. GAC mobilizes neighbors, school groups, faith communities, military commands, local businesses, and municipal staff to participate in litter cleanups and beautification projects across the region. Participation in GAC continues to grow year over year. In FY25, more than 3,400 volunteers representing 11 cities and counties joined forces to remove an estimated 68 tons of litter and debris—including 5,198 bags of trash and over 600 discarded tires—from roadways, neighborhoods, parks, illegal dump sites, and waterways. Volunteers also planted 20 new trees, further enhancing community spaces. The Great American Cleanup continues to be a successful strategy for inspiring action, fostering civic pride, and strengthening a regional commitment to litter prevention in Hampton Roads.

Great American Cleanup by the numbers



3,407+ volunteers
318 locations across 11 localities



5,198+ bags of litter



661 tires removed



**135,400+ pounds (68 tons)
of litter**



Recycling Education Through Art: The LOVE Sign

In addition to the askHRgreen.org trailer, the Start Smart, Recycle Right LOVE sign has become a beloved community touchpoint for recycling education across Hampton Roads. This vibrant installation features oversized metal letters filled with aluminum cans and plastic bottles, creating a colorful and eye-catching backdrop for photos while sparking meaningful conversations about the importance of recycling and reducing waste in local landfills.

Since 2023, the traveling LOVE sign has made appearances at events and public spaces throughout the region, offering a fun and interactive way to connect with residents about the importance of recycling. In FY25, the sign underwent a brief refurbishment to replace faded cans and bottles with freshly collected materials, restoring its brightness and ensuring the message stayed clear and engaging. Despite this short downtime, the LOVE sign continued to make an impact at key community events and venues, including Norfolk's Naro Theater, Christopher Newport University, the Virginia Marine Debris Summit, Norfolk Botanical Garden, Suffolk Earth and Arts Festival, Live Green Norfolk, Hampton City Hall, and the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission in Chesapeake.



The LOVE sign remains a creative and versatile outreach tool, combining art, education, and community pride to inspire residents to recycle right.

The New Face of askHRgreen.org

The askHRgreen.org outreach team welcomed a fun and engaging new addition in FY25: Hydro Joe, the region's official water drop mascot. Debuting in spring 2025, Hydro Joe serves as a champion for all things water in Hampton Roads—from highlighting the importance of clean, high-quality drinking water to promoting simple actions like fixing household leaks and preventing pollution in local waterways. To launch Hydro Joe, the public was invited to take part in a naming contest held during national Drinking Water Week in May, generating more than 180 creative name suggestions. Six lucky participants received Owala designer water bottles as prizes. Hydro Joe has already been busy connecting with the community at Earth Day at the Virginia Living Museum, the Suffolk Peanut Festival, and a variety of other local happenings. With an approachable and playful presence, Hydro Joe is ready to spark more important conversations about protecting and valuing our region's most vital resource.



Stormwater Awareness Week

During Stormwater Awareness Week, September 22-28, 2024, askHRgreen.org launched a special social media promotion designed to raise awareness about stormwater pollution prevention and encourage newsletter subscriptions. Residents were invited to enter a week-long giveaway featuring over \$800 in waterway-friendly prizes, including an electric mower, rain barrels, and gift cards to local garden centers and commercial car washes. Participants could enter once per day, with bonus entries awarded for engaging with askHRgreen.org's Facebook and Instagram posts.



The campaign featured seven daily educational posts on key stormwater topics such as "Where does the drain go?", the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (CBPA), best management practices (BMPs), pervious vs. impervious surfaces, and everyday actions like scooping pet waste, planting trees, and keeping gutters clear. Locality partners were also provided customizable graphics to co-brand materials to amplify the campaign through their own social media channels.

While overall participation was lower than in past years with 36 total entries, the promotion successfully generated community engagement and delivered important stormwater messages in a fun, interactive format. The contest also helped grow newsletter subscriptions and created shareable content that can be repurposed for future outreach.



Pet Waste Station Grant Program

The askHRgreen.org Pet Waste Station Grant Program is a practical and popular way to help communities combat nutrient and bacteria pollution in local waterways. By making it easier for pet owners to "scoop the poop," the program empowers neighborhoods to take direct action in protecting water quality.

Through the program, neighborhood associations, community groups, and property management companies can apply for free pet waste stations to be installed in their communities. In return, recipients commit to maintaining the stations by emptying trash bins and restocking bags as needed—ensuring long-term benefits for both residents and the environment.

In FY25, 39 new pet waste stations were placed across Hampton Roads, creating cleaner, healthier, and more enjoyable shared spaces while reinforcing the simple actions residents can take to keep pollution out of local waterways.

Pet Waste Stations in FY25

City/County	Stations
Hampton	4
Newport News	10
Norfolk	1
Suffolk	4
Virginia Beach	13
York County	7
Total	39



Student Outreach

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION MINI GRANT PROGRAM

askHRgreen.org is proud to provide hands-on environmental education opportunities for K-12 students in Hampton Roads. Through the Environmental Education Mini Grant Program, Hampton Roads teachers, youth leaders, and youth-centric organizations can receive up to \$500 per year to fund projects that connect kids with sustainability.

In FY25, askHRgreen.org received 20 applications for the mini grant program and funded 17 of them, for a total of \$7,773.12. These projects provided youth in Hampton Roads with expanded environmental learning opportunities, such as exploring environmental justice, beautification of school campuses, creating native pollinator gardens, composting, and more. These valuable experiences help nurture a connection between our environment and the future leaders of Hampton Roads. Overall, the Environmental Education Mini Grant Program impacted more than 5,500 students across the region in FY25. To learn a little more about these impactful projects, see Appendix A.

FY25 Environmental Education Mini Grant Projects

Project	Students	School/Organization	City/County	Grant
Going Green with Graphic Novels	57	Norfolk Public Library	Norfolk	\$228.00
Courtyard Beautification	23	Windsor Oaks Elementary	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Little Library	12	Menchville HS Student Live Well Group	Newport News	\$500.00
Parkway Panther Compost	250	Parkway Elementary	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Oyster Project	35	Norfolk Christian Schools	Norfolk	\$500.00
Notable Tree Project	75	Lynnhaven River NOW	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Education Fair	175	Nansemond River High School	Suffolk	\$500.00
Garden of all Seasons	20	Academy for Discovery at Lakewood	Norfolk	\$500.00
Native Pollinator Habitat Stewardship	1681	Cox High School	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Native Tree Project	80	Norfolk Academy	Norfolk	\$500.00
Outdoor Learning Project	805	Norfolk Christian Schools	Norfolk	\$500.00
Recycling Paper	640	Hampton City Schools	Hampton	\$300.00
Cistern Model	300	Williamsburg Community Growers	Williamsburg	\$500.00
Tarrant Recycling Project	680	Hampton City Schools	Hampton	\$500.00
Campus Recycling	11	Hampton Roads International Montessori School	Hampton	\$245.12
Interns take on EJ	20	Teens with a Purpose	Norfolk	\$500.00
Falcons Lead a Recycling Revolution	650	Yorktown Elementary School	Yorktown	\$500.00
				\$7,773.12



GREEN LEARNING GUIDES

askHRgreen.org produces Green Learning Guides for both third and sixth grade students across Hampton Roads, providing age-appropriate lessons that align with Virginia's Standards of Learning (SOLs). These guides are designed to make environmental stewardship relatable for students while supporting teachers with curriculum-based content.

In FY25, the third grade edition was updated with four new pages of content covering topics such as energy use and conservation, climate impacts and the environmental benefits of trees, composting, and waste reduction practices. These additions broaden the scope of the guide and connect classroom learning to simple, everyday actions students can take to care for their environment.

A total of 2,600 updated third grade guides were printed for distribution to classrooms and students across the region, ensuring more young learners are equipped with knowledge and inspiration to help build a greener Hampton Roads.

An illustration titled 'Pack A Waste-Free Lunch' featuring a central blue lunchbox with an orange handle. Surrounding the lunchbox are various food items: a sandwich, a water bottle, a container of yogurt with a spoon, a carton of milk, a red apple, a can of soup with a spoon, a fork and knife, a bag of chips, and a container of instant mashed potatoes. The background is a light purple color.

Trees Are Cool - Give 'em a Hug!

Why would we want to hug a tree? Trees provide so many benefits to our environment. They help clean our air, protect our water, and keep us cool.

Trees improve air quality by removing pollutants from the air. They also absorb carbon dioxide from the air, store the carbon, and release oxygen. The air is dry during the summer, so trees help to cool the air down.

Trees also play an important role in cooling our streets and cities. They provide shade for buildings and people. Trees are also important for producing and building. Trees help to make paper, and paper can be used to line the trash can or a compost bin, it prevents leaves from decomposing.

By soaking up rain and reducing runoff, trees help to prevent flooding. They also help to prevent soil erosion.

Trees also serve an important purpose in our food system. Many wild animals rely on the tree for food, shelter, and a place to live. If there were no trees, there would be no wild animals. If there were no wild animals, there would be no people. If there were no people, there would be no trees.

Read the thermometer for each section of the city. Write the temperature in the corresponding box.

Section	Temperature
A	70°
B	75°
C	65°
D	80°
E	72°

Which area is the coldest? _____ Which is the hottest? _____

What are the main differences between the two? _____

Which community would be the most likely to experience flooding in a heavy rain event? Why? _____

What are some of the other impacts, aside from increased temperatures, that we experience when we remove trees from our environment? _____

Based on what you learned in this activity, what areas in your community might have increased temperatures due to the tree removal? _____

EPA Recycling Education & Outreach Grant

In June 2024, the askHRgreen.org Recycling & Beautification Committee was awarded more than \$1.9 million through the EPA's Recycling Education and Outreach (REO) Grant Program. This three-year grant supports the Start Smart, Recycle Right campaign, which aims to amplify recycling awareness, educate residents on the benefits of recycling, improve access to recycling information, and encourage all residents to "recycle right" in Hampton Roads.

REGIONAL RECYCLING RESEARCH

In spring 2025, a multi-modal survey was deployed across the region to gather baseline data on recycling behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes. To complement the survey, six focus groups were held in both virtual and in-person formats to dive deeper into recycling habits and to test future campaign messaging. These focus groups included targeted audiences such as households with and without curbside recycling, neighborhoods involved in the Feet on the Street initiative, subscription-based recyclers, and underperforming recyclers. A full report of findings will be released in fall 2025 and will directly inform future media campaigns and outreach strategies.

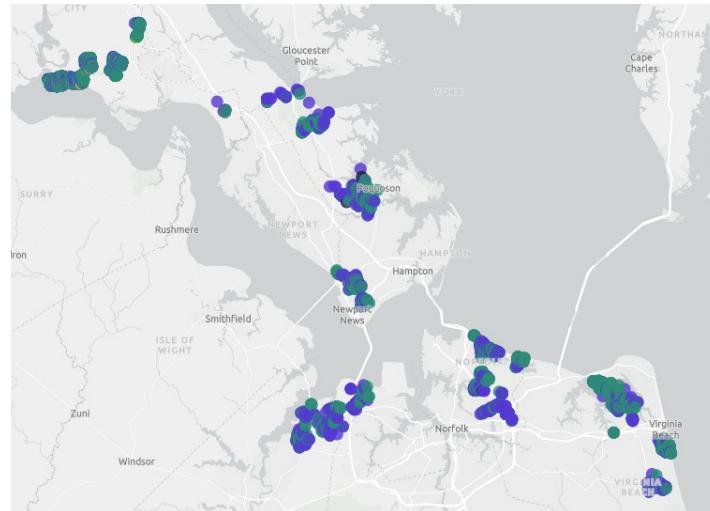
FEET ON THE STREET

With support from The Recycling Partnership, more than 32,000 households participated in the Feet on the Street (FOTS) cart tagging initiative across the following six Hampton Roads jurisdictions: James City County, Newport News, Norfolk, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and York County. The project began with audits at local materials recovery facilities (MRFs) to establish baseline contamination rates for a selection of the FOTS routes in each community. These audits were followed by a postcard campaign to educate households on what belongs (and what doesn't) in their curbside recycling carts. Trained cart auditors then conducted four rounds of inspections over eight weeks, issuing warning tags for first-time contamination and cart rejection tags for repeat offenders. At the project's conclusion, MRF audits were performed again to measure contamination rates post-FOTS implementation and a follow-up postcard was mailed to all participating households to reinforce the top contamination issues.

The initiative delivered measurable improvements as well as some key findings:

- **36% overall reduction in tagging occurrences**, with some neighborhoods achieving even greater success.
- **Contamination decreased between 4% and 50%** across project areas.
- **Average participation rate of 62%**, exceeding the state average (56%), though still below some Feet on the Street projects nationwide.
- **Plastic bags and bagged recyclables** were the leading contaminants, observed in 42% and 36% of contaminated carts, respectively.

These insights will guide the development of consistent, region-wide recycling education campaigns in FY26 and beyond.



WASTE WIZARD & WASTE SORTING GAME

Grant funding also supported the launch of two new interactive web tools: the **Waste Wizard** and the **Waste Sorting Game**.

The **Waste Wizard** is a searchable database that helps residents determine the correct disposal method for hundreds of household items. Beyond recycling, the tool directs users to alternative disposal solutions including household hazardous waste facilities, bulk pickup, electronics recycling programs, donation centers, and retail drop-off sites.

The **Waste Sorting Game** challenges players through five levels of recycling and disposal scenarios tailored to Hampton Roads' accepted materials, complete with imagery of the local landscape. This fun, interactive game is designed to educate both youth and adults on proper recycling and disposal practices while reinforcing positive behaviors.

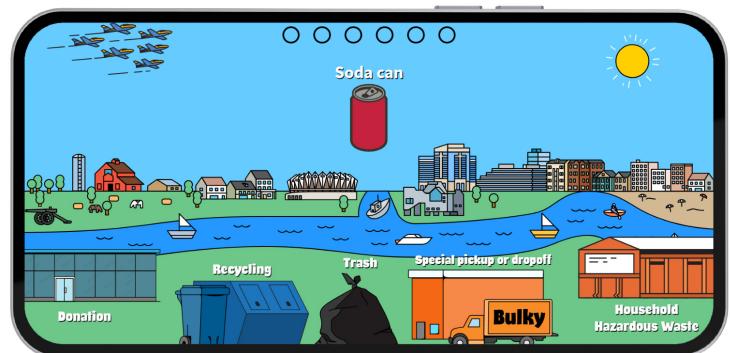
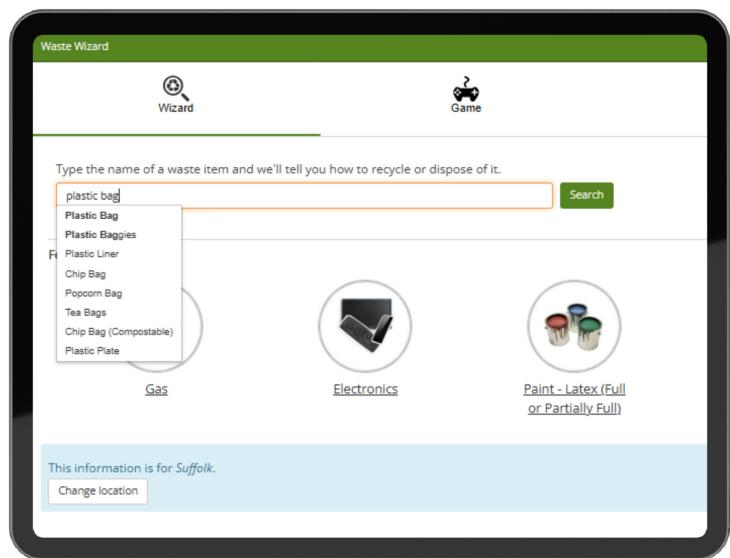
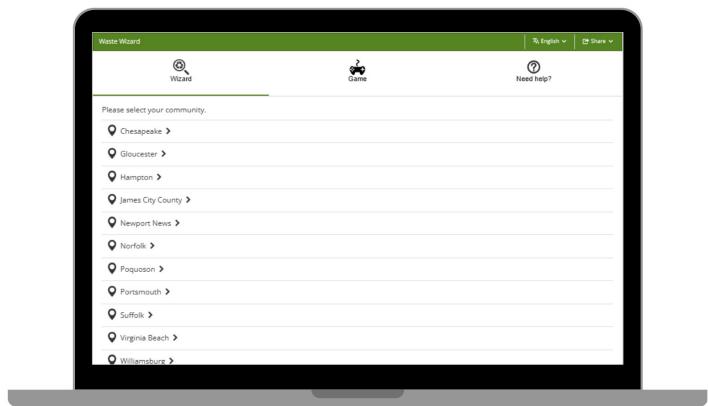
Together, these tools expand access to reliable recycling information, reduce confusion, and encourage residents to make the right choice when it comes to waste disposal.

Waste Wizard Usage

Materials Viewed	5,347
User sessions	2,232
First time visitors	2,082

Waste Sorting Game Usage

# of game plays	355
# of completed games (all levels)	165
Average engagement time	nearly 10 mins



Business Outreach

FOAM-FREE EDUCATION & OUTREACH

In FY25, Recycling & Beautification Committee launched the Foam-Free initiative to support restaurants and food service businesses in complying with Virginia's ban on expanded polystyrene (EPS) food containers, which took effect for larger chain restaurants in 2025 and will extend to small businesses in 2026. The program was designed to ease the transition away from EPS by providing free **Foam-Free Sample Kits** featuring a variety of eco-friendly alternatives such as containers made from sugar cane, paper, and recyclable aluminum.

Each kit also included educational and promotional materials to help businesses embrace and promote their commitment to waste reduction. Resources included "No Foam Zone" window clings for storefronts, "BYO To-Go" promotional materials to encourage customers to bring their own reusable containers, and "Waste Warrior" activity booklets for children to engage families in the conversation.

Restaurant owners can request a free kit and access additional information about the EPS phase-out through the campaign's central hub at askHRgreen.org/foam-free. This hands-on outreach helps local businesses test alternatives, share the foam-free message with customers, and take an active role in reducing single-use plastics in Hampton Roads.



FOAM-FREE ALTERNATIVES INCLUDE:

- PAPER & WOOD
- PLANT-BASED FIBER (SUGARCANE, CORN, WHEAT)
- FOIL OR METAL

DISCOVER FOAM-FREE OPTIONS - FOR FREE!
Our free sample kit showcases a selection of similarly-priced eco-friendly alternatives to EPS containers.

EXPLORE, COMPARE, CHOOSE WHAT WORKS BEST FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

SCAN OR VISIT ASKHRGREEN.ORG FOR YOUR FREE SAMPLE KIT.

IS YOUR BUSINESS READY TO GO FOAM FREE?

On July 1, 2025, Virginia began phasing out the use of expanded polystyrene (EPS), commonly referred to as Styrofoam™, by food vendors.

JULY 1, 2025
LARGE CHAINS (20+ FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS) MUST COMPLY

JULY 1, 2026
ALL OTHER FOOD ESTABLISHMENTS MUST COMPLY

FOAM'S GOT TO GO. WHAT'S NEXT?
Request your FREE sample kit of alternative takeout containers and BYO-To-Go resources.

NOW'S THE TIME TO SWITCH TO SAFER, MORE SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES!

askHRgreen.org

HELP US KEEP OUR ENVIRONMENT CLEAN AS WE GO FOAM-FREE

BYO TO GO CONTAINER

SCAN TO LEARN MORE OR VISIT askHRgreen.org

Choose to Reuse
Many plastic items, like straws, water bottles and bags, are only used once or twice and then end up as litter in parks, oceans and landfills. Help protect the environment and choose reusable alternatives like cloth bags and reusable containers instead of plastic bags!

Find The Better Choice!
Put on the trail and circle the reusable items.

WORDS
H P G B Y
S T R A W
R T H U T
P M G A T
V J L O P
S M T E O
L L E U T
D S T H L
E R D L
R Y

WASTE WARRIORS
Color, Play & Help Save the Day

Container **Foam** **Plastic**

The Big Picture
+ Reuse items and containers that you only use once - and take forever to break down - can hurt the environment.
+ Materials that break quickly that's called biodegradable and compostable.
* Things we can use over and over again are best of all!

askHRgreen.org

CIGARETTE WASTE RECEPTACLE GRANTS

Launched in 2021, the Cigarette Waste Receptacle Grant Program is a joint initiative of the Recycling & Beautification Committee and the Stormwater Education Committee. The program provides free receptacles to businesses and facilities struggling with cigarette litter, helping address one of the most commonly littered items nationwide. Research from Keep America Beautiful shows that receptacles placed at transition points such as parking lots and building entrances are particularly effective in reducing litter. Since its inception, the program has distributed 223 cigarette waste receptacles to businesses across Hampton Roads.



Apply for a free Cigarette Waste Receptacle for your business.

Cigarette butts are The. Most. Littered. Items. When they're tossed on the ground, they damage your business's curb appeal and contribute to community litter and water pollution.

askHRgreen.org offers grants for a FREE cigarette waste receptacle to all businesses in Hampton Roads with the ability to install, monitor, and maintain the receptacle at their establishment.

Make it easier to properly discard their cigarette butts. Apply for a FREE cigarette waste receptacle for your business.

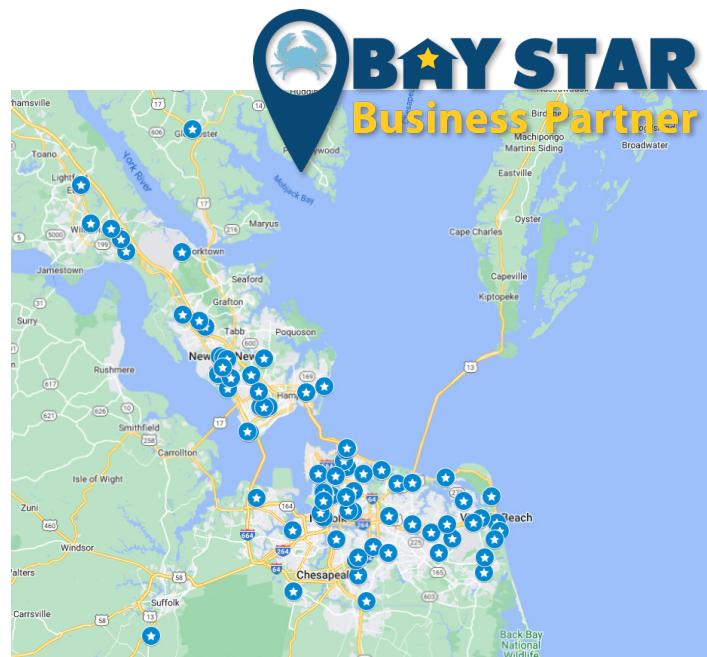
askHRgreen.org/cigarette-receptacle-grant

BAY STAR BUSINESS

The Stormwater Education Committee launched the Bay Star Business program in 2018 to engage the Hampton Roads business community in protecting local water quality through everyday environmental practices. Businesses join by pledging to take simple actions such as conserving water, recycling, cleaning up litter, and properly maintaining company vehicles. Participation is free, and businesses receive a tailored welcome packet with industry-specific resources and a Bay Star Business window decal to display at their office or on company vehicles as a visible commitment to clean waterways. Participating businesses are also recognized on the askHRgreen.org website and social media platforms. In FY25, the program welcomed five new businesses for a total of 82 active participants, after adjusting to remove four businesses that had closed.

Bay Star Businesses in FY25

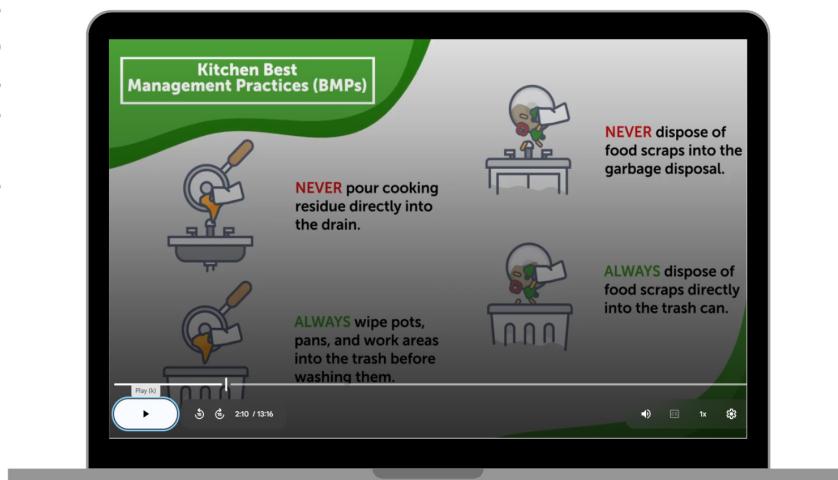
City/County	Number
Chesapeake	7
Gloucester	2
Hampton	7
James City County	2
Newport News	15
Norfolk	21
Portsmouth	1
Suffolk	2
Virginia Beach	21
Williamsburg	1
York	3
Total	82



FATS, OILS, AND GREASE TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

The regional FOG Training and Certification Program educates food service workers and grease haulers on how to prevent sanitary sewer backups caused by improper disposal of fats, oils, and grease. Many Hampton Roads localities require FOG certification, and the regional program provides this training free of charge through the HRFOG.com website.

In FY25, the FOG Committee launched a brand new HRFOG.com training website, transforming the program into a modern, interactive platform. Training now includes short instructional videos paired with quiz questions to increase engagement and retention. To make the program more inclusive, the Committee also began developing translated training materials in Spanish and Chinese for food service employees with limited English proficiency. These translated resources are expected to be available in early FY26.



Public Relations Activities

Date	Media Outlet	Topic	Link	Circ/Imp	PR Value
March 10, 2025	Broadcast TV: WAVY Hampton Roads Show	Great American Cleanup	Segment Here	19,562	\$1,500
March 20, 2025	Broadcast TV: WTKR Coast Live	Fix a Leak Week	Segment Here	4,691	\$1,000
March 24, 2025	Broadcast TV: WAVY Hampton Roads Show	No Wipes in Pipes	Segment Here	6,007	\$1,500
April 2, 2025	Broadcast TV: WTKR News Channel 3	Feet on the Street	Segment Here	2,500	\$1,000
April 3, 2025	Daily Newspaper: The Virginian Pilot	Feet on the Street	Article Here	211,579	\$12,200
April 3, 2025	News Website: WAVY.com	Feet on the Street	Online News Article Here	10,000	\$1,500
April 8, 2025	Broadcast TV: WTKR Coast Live	Only Rain Down The Drain	Segment Here	7,200	\$1,000
May 5, 2025	Broadcast TV: WTKR Coast Live	Drinking Water Week	Segment Here	9,179	\$1,000
					270,718 \$20,700

Follow along @askHRgreen



**3,109 followers
reach of 818,986**



**741 followers
reach of 434,247**



**7,057 Newsletter
Subscribers**

2024-2025 Promotional Media Campaigns



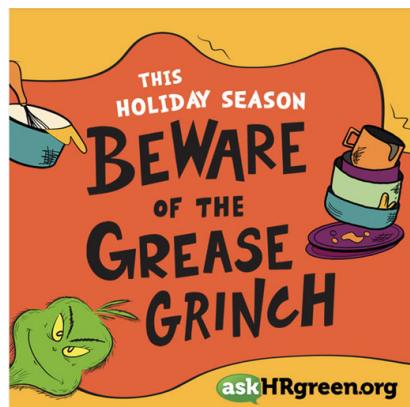
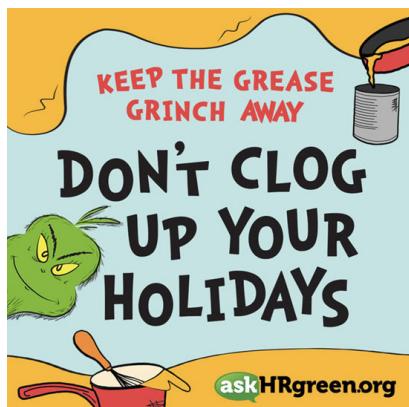
Campaign Summary

HOLIDAY GREASE GRINCH

December 23 - January 1, 2025

Budget: \$8,809

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	STREAMING	LINEAR TV
Impressions	406,935	12,341	50,030	402,650
Reach	280,418	-	16,164	183,934
Frequency	-	-	3.1X	2.2X
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$4.91	\$57.21	\$29.98	\$10.98
Clicks	466	720	-	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	\$4.29	\$0.98	-	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.12%	5.83%	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS		AVG CPM		
871,956		\$10.10		



Campaign Summary

FIX A LEAK WEEK

March 13 - March 23, 2025

Budget: \$14,600

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	E-BLAST	TV	COAST LIVE	YOUTUBE
Impressions	193,717	80,557	12,715 (Opens)	535,112	4,691	341,421
Reach	145,102	-	-	268,880	4,691	-
Frequency	-	-	-	2x	-	5.2x
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$4.13	\$7.01	\$39.32	\$12.05	\$127.90	\$5.85
Clicks	184	481	47	-	-	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	-	\$1.00	\$10.64	-	-	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.10%	0.60%	0.37%	-	-	-
Emails Sent	-	-	24,134	-	-	-
Open Rate	-	-	53%	-	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS				AVG CPM		
1,168,213				\$9.51		



Campaign Summary

GREAT AMERICAN CLEANUP

March 17 - March 26, 2025

Budget: \$4,000

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	HAMPTON ROADS SHOW
Impressions	235,528	75,531	19,562
Reach	110,395	-	19,562
Frequency	-	-	-
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$3.39	\$6.62	-
Clicks	969	410	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	\$0.82	\$1.17	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.41%	0.54%	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS		AVG CPM	
763,205		\$5.24	



Campaign Summary

NO WIPES - CLOG MONSTER

March 21 - April 1, 2025

Budget: \$12,200

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	E-BLAST	TV	HAMPTON ROADS SHOW
Impressions	257,639	91,104	13,386 (Opens)	375,507	6,007
Reach	88,722	-	-	194,012	6,007
Frequency	-	-	-	2x	-
CPM Benchmark: \$5.00	\$3.88	\$8.23	\$37.35	\$24.23	\$99.88
Clicks	717	577	66	-	-
CPC Benchmark: \$2.00	\$1.39	\$1.10	\$7.58	-	-
CTR Benchmark: .35%	0.27%	0.63%	0.49%	-	-
Emails Sent	-	-	23,908	-	-
Open Rate	-	-	56.00%	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS			AVG CPM		
743,643			\$16.41		

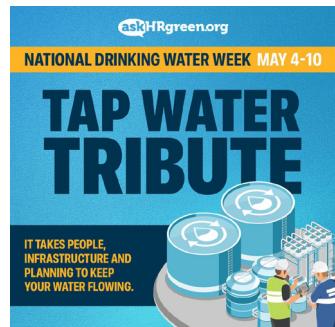


Campaign Summary

DRINKING WATER WEEK

May 4 - May 10, 2025
Budget: \$20,650

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	E-BLAST	RADIO	COAST LIVE	YOUTUBE
Impressions	381,567	65,107	13,683 (Opens)	770,700	9,179	270,311
Reach	267,026	-	-	310,156	9,179	-
Frequency	-	-	-	2.5x	-	4.2x
CPM Benchmark: \$5.00	\$3.56	\$9.22	\$36.54	\$9.73	\$65.37	\$9.25
Clicks	774	279	39	-	-	-
CPC Benchmark: \$2.00	\$1.76	\$1.83	\$12.82	-	-	-
CTR Benchmark: .35%	0.20%	0.43%	0.29%	-	-	-
Emails Sent	-	-	20,885	-	-	-
Open Rate	-	-	66%	-	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS				AVG CPM		
1,496,864				\$10.46		



Campaign Summary

ONLY RAIN DOWN THE DRAIN

May 12 - June 2, 2025

Budget: \$11,100

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	E-BLAST	YOUTUBE	COAST LIVE
Impressions	385,662	99,445	13,780 (Opens)	379,115	7,200
Reach	196,863	-	-	-	7,200
Frequency	-	-	-	3.3x	-
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$3.11	\$10.06	\$36.28	\$13.19	\$83.33
Clicks	1062	436	20	-	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	\$1.13	\$1.95	\$25.00	-	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.28%	0.63%	0.15%	-	-
Emails Sent	-	-	20,276	-	-
Open Rate	-	-	68.00%	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS			AVG CPM		
885,202			\$12.54		



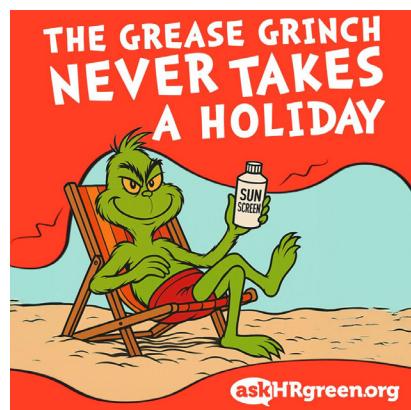
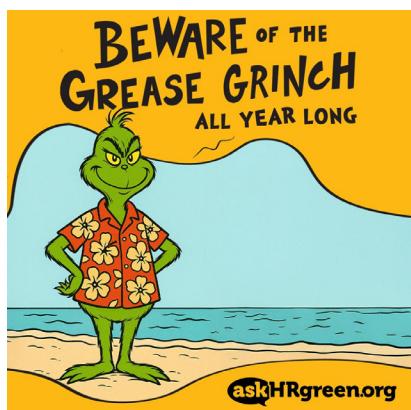
Campaign Summary

ALL SEASON GREASE GRINCH

June 11 - June 30, 2025

Budget: \$15,000

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	STREAMING	CABLE	YOUTUBE
Impressions	419,792	184,406	81,844	15,628	196,479
Reach	248,696	-	31,858	9,414	-
Frequency	-	-	2.6x	1.7x	2.4x
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$3.57	\$4.07	\$30.55	\$255.95	\$12.72
Clicks	516	233	-	-	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	\$2.91	\$3.22	-	-	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.12%	0.13%	-	-	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS			AVG CPM		
898,149			\$16.70		



Campaign Summary

SCOOP THE POOP

June 11 - June 30, 2025

Budget: \$13,000

METRICS	SOCIAL	NEXTDOOR	OUTDOOR
Impressions	374,467	168,381	1,925,152
Reach	224,123	-	-
Frequency	-	-	-
CPM <i>Benchmark: \$5.00</i>	\$4.01	\$4.45	\$3.12
Clicks	571	288	-
CPC <i>Benchmark: \$2.00</i>	\$2.63	\$2.60	-
CTR <i>Benchmark: .35%</i>	0.15%	0.17%	-
TOTAL IMPRESSIONS		AVG CPM	
2,468,000		\$4.36	



Appendix A



Summary for FY25 Environmental Education Mini Grants

Total Projects Funded in FY25: 17
 FY25 Mini Grant Budget: \$15,503.33
 Total Grant Funds Awarded: \$7,773.12

Name of Project	Number of Students	School/Facility	City/County	Awarded
Going Green with Graphic Novels	57	Norfolk Public Library	Norfolk	\$228.00
Courtyard Beautification	23	Windsor Oaks Elementary	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Little Library	12	Menchville HS Student Live Well Group	Newport News	\$500.00
Parkway Panther Compost	250	Parkway Elementary	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Oyster Project	35	Norfolk Christian Schools	Norfolk	\$500.00
Notable Tree Project	75	Lynnhaven River NOW	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Education Fair	175	Nansemond River High School	Suffolk	\$500.00
Garden of all Seasons	20	Academy for Discovery at Lakewood	Norfolk	\$500.00
Native Pollinator Habitat Stewardship	1681	Cox High School	Virginia Beach	\$500.00
Native Tree Project	80	Norfolk Academy	Norfolk	\$500.00
Outdoor Learning Project	805	Norfolk Christian Schools	Norfolk	\$500.00
Recycling Paper	640	Hampton City Schools	Hampton	\$300.00
Cistern Model	300	Williamsburg Community Growers	Williamsburg	\$500.00
Tarrant Recycling Project	680	Hampton City Schools	Hampton	\$500.00
Campus Recycling	11	HRIMS	Hampton	\$245.12
Interns take on EJ	20	Teens with a Purpose	Norfolk	\$500.00
Falcons Lead a Recycling Revolution	650	Yorktown Elementary School	Yorktown	\$500.00

Projects continued from FY24

Name of Project	Number of Students	School/Facility	City/County	Awarded
Recycling in the Classroom	1766	Bethel High School	Hampton	\$500.00
Beautifying Woodside	20	Woodside High School	Newport News	\$500.00
Children's Garden	150000	Virginia Living Museum	Newport News	\$500.00

Project	Going Green with Graphic Novels
Recipient	Norfolk Public Library
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$228.00

Project Description: Norfolk Public Library's new pop-up program, Go Green with Graphic Novels, is aimed at educating college-aged/emerging adults about the consequences of our lacking stewardship over our waterscapes. We are requesting funding to purchase 57 copies of the first issue of the new sustainably minded, sci-fi series, "The Last Mermaid" by Derek Kirk Kim, as well as water sustainability-themed snacks and drinks.

The snack will consist of mini landscapes made of pudding, cookies, and gummy candy. The drinks will be themed after different bodies of water.

For engagement, we will invite students to contribute to a Community Garbage Patch by bringing clean, recyclable garbage, such candy wrappers, coffee cups, etc. By doing this, we will illustrate the amount of waste that we produce and how important it is that this waste does not end up in our waterways. We will also invite students to donate their used books, CDs and DVDs for our Express Book Nooks.

Norfolk, Virginia is a city overflowing with water. With 144 miles of shoreline along rivers, lakes and the Chesapeake Bay, few environmental issues are more relevant to us than water cycle disruption and water waste. A single piece of paper can take 3 gallons of water to produce. Multiply that number by the pages in a book, and it becomes clear that buying a new book every time a person wants to read something is using a lot of water.

We are committed to providing free used books, DVDs and CDs to the community through our Express Book Nook project at community centers across the city. Users are encouraged to "take a book, leave a book" to build their home libraries and/or participate in an ongoing cycle of reading, listening and watching. Instead of buying a new item, reading/watching/listening to it once and getting rid of it, users can give their books, DVDs and CDs a far longer shelf life.

Project Outcome: We had 45 college students engage in Going Green with Graphic Novels. On the library side of things, we had 19 people sign up for library cards, and nine people sign up for the Norfolk Public Library eNewsletter. This gave them access to the Norfolk Public Library's collection of items that can be used over and over again, as well as our Seed Library. We also promoted our upcoming environmental library programs and resources.

In addition, the garbage patch activity went even better than expected. We invited students to create a garbage patch with us to illustrated how much waste we create, and, due to being located in Old Dominion University's Student Center, meant that we were placed near multiple food locations (including Starbucks), so there was plenty of garbage to be added. Students also asked to take some of the garbage with them to recycle into their own art projects and composting.

We gave out free copies of "The Last Mermaid" by Derek Kirk Kim, and set up a book display of other graphic novels with a focus on environmental themes, and we had multiple discussions with different students about their experiences with the environment and books that they thought everyone should read.

Finally, we partnered with Old Dominion University's Environmental Justice Club for this event, and they brought out a collection of pamphlets and a large trifold display to discuss environmental issues in Norfolk.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? The students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to create their own trash island, and, of course, receiving a copy of the sustainability-focused graphic novel, "The Last Mermaid" was also met with a lot of enthusiasm. The book display of environmental graphic novels also encouraged a lot of discussion amongst the college student, both about environmental justice in general, and about other environmental books (graphic novels and otherwise) that everyone might be interested in checking out.

How could a similar project be improved? Although, the pop-up program went well, and we had a good amount of people who joined us, more promotional materials may have helped bring in even more people. I also would have loved to add more signage to explain what the activities we brought were. Once they were explained, they were well received, but having it clear from the beginning probably would have encouraged more people to interact.



Project	Courtyard Beautification
Recipient	Windsor Oaks Elementary
Locality	Virginia Beach
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Windsor Oaks Elementary would like to beautify their courtyard and turn it into a sensory garden that attracts pollinators. Currently the courtyard is bare with only a few overgrown weeds. The students would be able to enjoy a beautiful courtyard while learning about pollinators and different flowers and plants and how to care for them.

Project Outcome: With the grant, we were able to plant 2 large flower beds, 2 medium flower beds, and one small flower bed in the courtyard. We used lilies, lavender, primrose, and multiple other perennial plants. The flowers are blooming nicely.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Students are able to see the garden as they pass through the hallways or as they browse books in the library. Many classrooms overlook the courtyard and students are able to see the garden from their classes. For positive behavior incentives, students are able to purchase courtyard picnics with the stars they have earned.

How could a similar project be improved? Many items we attempted to purchase were blocked by the Virginia Beach School district. We intended to purchase a pack of flower beds that were much cheaper than the ones we ended up purchasing. This would have given us more space to plant, more coverage of the courtyard, and more money to spend on dirt, flowers, and paint for the mural. The district, however, blocked this purchase for unknown reasons and we were forced to purchase more expensive flower beds and did not get as many as we had hoped. As a result, we were unable to complete a mural that was part of the original plan. Students were not allowed to assist with this project at my school. I asked multiple times for a fundraiser to be sent out for students to bring in flowers they could plant but administration never approved the flyer, or sent it out, despite saying they would. A student had designed the flyer for me and the class was very excited to help with the project. They were disappointed when they were not allowed because admin would not respond. Admin would not allow me to make a purchase online with the grant money and said they would do it themselves. It took 4+ weeks for the purchase to be made. As a result many of the bulbs that had been purchased were unusable due to rot. I asked if students could volunteer to stay out of PE to help plant flowers that were purchased but I was never answered and therefore my husband, myself, and our 13 year old daughter did the project on our own after school hours. It was very disappointing that admin showed a lack of care for the beautification of the school and would not allow the students to participate despite saying they would send the fundraiser and allow the students to plant their flowers. They also attempted, without permission, to give my grant funds to the art teacher to paint an unrelated mural with the art club.



Project	Little Library
Recipient	Menchville Student Live Well Group
Locality	Newport News
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Little Library sponsored by Menchville Student Live Well Group - this will be for the community as well as school aged children/young adults. This is a great program and Newport News does not have as many of these free little libraries as other cities. Menchville Student Live Well Group and I will check on every week, fill up with books as needed, and to take out anything that is not supposed to be in the library, examples, trash, and maybe inappropriate books, will try to keep the this little library family friendly.

Project Outcome: SUCCESS! The students collaborated, and worked on the grant, and when it was approved, the task really set in - became a reality. The students had to work together, budget the items, and agree on how the library would be painted and what designs to include.

From being in a club at the beginning, to becoming friends and creating a project for the community, the students really bonded with one another over the year from working on this little library project.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Seeing the project coming together, and seeing what they had envisioned, becoming a reality.

Planning it out, each step along the way, from writing the grant proposal, to ordering the items, staying on budget, working through a design outline, and seeing the end result and knowing that children in the community will benefit from what they created.

How could a similar project be improved? Try sticking to a timeline more... with the weather, school activities, and then end of year testing and certification testing... took longer than expected to finish the library.



Project	Parkway Panther Compost
Recipient	Parkway Elementary
Locality	Virginia Beach
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: The Compost Project at Parkway Elementary aims to introduce elementary school students to the concepts of sustainability, waste reduction, and organic gardening through hands-on composting. This initiative will teach students how to recycle organic waste, such as food scraps and yard trimmings, into valuable compost that can enhance the school's garden and reduce overall waste.

By engaging students in the composting process, the project will foster environmental awareness and responsibility, promoting a cleaner and healthier school environment while aligning with educational goals in science, environmental studies, life skills, and global goals.

Project Outcome:

What did the students enjoy the most about this project?

How could a similar project be improved?

The new completion date is August 1, 2025. This project will be rolled over to FY26.

Project	Oyster Project
Recipient	Norfolk Christian Schools
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Monthly field work for small groups of students to be involved in monitoring oyster growth, collecting data, checking water quality, and exploring the creatures that live within our water systems. Field work will be done on the docks at the Cavalier Yacht and Country Club. The teachers will work with the students in advance to learn their “jobs” for the field work. Students will wear life vests while on the docks and all safety precautions will be followed by students and volunteers. After the field work in class, graphing, reading, writing and discussions will help the students learn more about the oyster growth process and about oyster restoration and the environment around them.

Project Outcome: Students raised oyster spat over the span of 6 months to determine growth size, see the types of animal life that live among the oysters, and water conditions at the site of their oyster float. These project support the student mastery of SOL standards within 4.1, 4.3, 4.7, and 4.8

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? I think the students enjoyed the hands-on experience of using real scientific equipment and being able to see the progress that the oysters made in regards to growth over the course of the 6 months. The reading and background knowledge that they experienced in the classroom came to life as they stepped out into the classroom on the docks of a local business, where the oyster float was kept.

How could a similar project be improved? We would like to start the project earlier in the school year and potentially the teacher would get the oysters this summer to put them in the water before the school year starts. We also will have a smaller group of students next year that will get them more hands-on experience as the scientists.



Project	Notable Tree Program
Recipient	Lynnhaven River NOW
Locality	Virginia Beach
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: The Virginia Beach Notable Tree Program was founded in 2017 by a Virginia Master Naturalist as a means to locate, identify, evaluate, memorialize, and protect our old growth trees. To date over 1,000 trees have been nominated and evaluated with the assistance of students and student interns. In this process the students learn the extraordinary importance of our old growth forests and why we need to protect them. Student involvement includes discovery, nomination, examination, evaluation, and declaration of qualified trees to be declared Virginia Beach Notable Trees.

Project Outcome: I purchased the Notable Tree signs with your grant money and have been using the signs, but that batch of signs will last me at least a year. This isn't a "one-and-done" type of endeavor. As trees are nominated, I go out and measure them to determine if they qualify for Notable Tree status. My intern and I affixed the sign in the attached photo this past week.

I have two more trees to measure this week and will affix the plaques to them should they qualify for Notable Tree status.

The signs are affixed to the Notable Trees after they are measured and certified. There are over 200 Virginia Beach Notable Trees.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Finding the trees, measuring the trees, and passing by them and knowing they are certified as Virginia Beach Notable Trees.

How could a similar project be improved? No suggestions. The VBNT Program was awarded Coastal Virginia Magazine's award as the best new environmental program in its Best of Virginia Edition.



Project	Education Fair
Recipient	Nansemond River HS
Locality	Suffolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: For three years now, Nansemond River High School Students have conducted a learning fair where students pick an environmental topic to create a display poster for along with a carnival game for their peers to play and win tickets. Tickets are then exchanged for environmentally friendly prizes, which have included reusable tote bags or aluminum water bottles. Community organizations like askHRGreen, the Izaac Walton League, and Chesapeake Bay Foundation have attended in the past as well to share their missions and volunteer opportunities. The fair is open to all students during their lunch times and hosted by the oceanography students on or near Earth Day.

Project Outcome: Oceanography students at NRHS created fair games and informative posters to highlight environmental concerns and conservation efforts. We welcomed over 500 students into the fair to play the games to win prizes with an eco-friendly slant (reusable canvas bags they could personalize, reusable water bottles, earth day stickers). We also welcomed outside organizations to highlight their volunteer opportunities including Evelyn's Wildlife Refuge, KeepSuffolkBeautiful, Nansemond River Preservation Alliance, and the Izaac Walton League.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Oceanography students loved the opportunity to showcase their learning and share their games that they built using "found" objects like trash and recyclables. Students who attended enjoyed playing the games, signing up with our community guests for volunteer opportunities, and learning about local and global issues. Our outside presenters said they had a high level of engagement at their tables.

How could a similar project be improved? We offer the fair during our lunch block and students are welcomed to come in and participate during this time. This means that students really only have about 23 minutes to enjoy the fair and having some more time to wander and engage would be much more helpful.



Project	Garden of all Seasons
Recipient	Academy for Discovery at Lakewood
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Restoration of our school garden will include a winter crops garden that will conserve soil and allow our spring pollinator garden to flourish. Ground cover, winter crops, mulching and soil amendment will be the focus. Students will research pollinators and the best plants to help them thrive as well as maintaining a garden in the winter.

Project Outcome: The garden is a success! The butterfly bushes were planted and are thriving. I have started seeing more butterflies in the garden. We were able to supplement all of the garden beds with rich, organic soil and compost as well as purchase new watering cans to keep the garden watered during dry times. The herbs and other plants are in place and are also doing well. Students planted tomatoes and pumpkin seeds as an experiment simply to explore gardening techniques and possibilities. Students also spent a lot of time weeding the garden beds. But our main objective was to invite butterflies and other pollinators to our garden with Yasso and lantana.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? I think the students enjoyed the planning together and seeing different organisms in the soil, identifying them, and also getting to take home crops, such as cabbage in the winter and mint in the spring.

How could a similar project be improved? Finding a solution for the weeds would help this project a lot. We also realized that rosemary did not transplant well from another area.



Project	Native Pollinator Habitat Stewardship
Recipient	Cox High School
Locality	Virginia Beach
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: This project is to provide native plants to pollinators such as bees and butterflies and teach students through hands on learning the importance of protecting these species in our community. Plants will be purchased locally. Resources such as shovels, trowels, claws, buckets, and composter have already been donated. The school district will provide water and mulch. Long term maintenance will be provided by the student Garden Club.

Project Outcome: Cox Garden Club High School students learned how to weed, plant, and maintain eight raised concrete beds located on school property. Students collaborated and creatively designed native plant gardens. Students learned the difference between perennial and annual plants, invasive plants, companion planting. They identified host plants for monarchs, black swallowtail butterflies.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Students enjoyed collaborating by taking on specific jobs such as weeder, bucket carrier (to compost bin), mulcher, hose waterer. They enjoyed designing the garden by choosing native, perennial plants, blooming throughout the year. They enjoyed identifying plants vs weeds.

How could a similar project be improved? We learned that mulch and landscaping material are not effective to reduce weeds. Students pulled these up and put down newspaper, covered by mulch to reduce weeds. We learned that we may need signs to remind students to throw their trash in trash cans, not the garden.



Project	Native Tree Project
Recipient	Norfolk Academy
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: 4th grade students will pot up bare root seedlings of red bud and buttonbush purchased from the Virginia Department of Forestry. We will care for these potted plants from Spring of 2025 until students take them home in Spring of 2026. Both of these species are native to our area and both are caterpillar host plants for 25 species of butterfly or moth in our area according to the National Wildlife Foundation Native Plant Finder website. Students will learn about the benefits of native plants during this one year project that spans their 4th and 5th grade years.

Project Outcome: The Elizabeth River Project provided additional funds for our tree nursery and garden projects. Their contribution paid for a delivery of compost and perlite. I received the shipment of bare-root seedlings from the Virginia Department of Forestry on March 26. Eighty-eight 5th grade students potted 50 bare-root buttonbush and 50 Eastern redbud tree seedlings into 1-gallon planter pots on March 28, 2025. We mixed agricultural perlite into the compost to lighten it up, enhancing aeration and draining. We kept these plants outside. We brought them inside on two nights when we had the possibility of freezing temperatures. We planted six of the bareroot seedlings in Miracle Grow potting mix and kept them in the greenhouse. Of the 94 seedlings that we planted into our mix of compost and perlite, only two leafed out. Five of the six seedlings that we planted in Miracle Grow potting mix leafed out. After talking to the Dept. of Forestry, we believe that the compost was too acidic, causing the mass mortality. A Kelway soil pH meter showed the compost had a pH of 6.2 while the Miracle Grow was 6.8. I have done this project many years over my 20 years of teaching. I had a mass seedling mortality several years ago with another askHRgreen grant. We attributed this to leaving the plants out during a late season freeze, thus I had my eyes out for a freeze this year. In retrospect, both of these failures were due to using compost instead of regular topsoil as I had done in previous years. We used remaining money in the grant to purchase 25 more buttonbush seedlings and planted them in a soil from our raised bed gardens with some compost and perlite mixed in. All 25 of these plants have leafed out. My students and I now have first-hand experience with soil PH. I do not like failing or wasting money, but I do appreciate learning from mistakes, which I have highlighted to the students is part of the scientific process.

I would have asked my school to help purchase more than 25 replacement seedlings, but my confidence was rocked by the failure and I wanted to try out regular soil with just 25 seedlings instead of 50 / 75 or another 100. We will use all of the compost as well as reuse the planter pots provided by this grant in future plant projects.

We will care for and monitor the 31 surviving bushes for 1-year and then send them home with students who have a signed form stating that the home has a place to plant the bush. I will highlight the benefits of native vegetation to the students, and planting the buttonbush in the right spot.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Students enjoy getting to pot the trees and help the Earth. I review all of the many ways that trees help the environment and get them very excited for the project. Students are always excited to 'get stuff', and they look forward to taking a bush home. The surviving seedlings in our school courtyard are a great visual reminder of doing something to help the environment. It's one thing to talk about how to help environmental issues, but far better to do something to help.

How could a similar project be improved? As I have written above, I have learned the hard way that compost is a soil additive and not to be used as 100% planting media itself. I have never had pH issues in my gardening career, so I kind of believed it wasn't an issue. I love the Tree Nursery Project because trees help with so many environmental issues. I am excited to see how the native buttonbush grows and performs. We plan to plant several of them on school grounds to see how they do. I hope to expand our tree nursery in the future to include a variety of native species that we would distribute to people who have a proper place to plant them.



Project	Outdoor Learning Project
Recipient	Norfolk Christian Schools
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: The "NCS Outdoor Learning Project", aims to reimagine the unused areas surrounding the Norfolk Christian Upper Schoolcampus for maximum student benefit and includes a pier, amphitheater, outdoor pavilion, educational gardens, and plenty of community green space. The phase of

the project we are requesting funding for is the groundbreaking project in wetlands restoration and protection, working in conjunction with the Elizabeth River Project, students, and faculty to design a restoration plan for the school's Lafayette River shoreline that will protect natural wetlands, prevent erosion, and provide a thriving habitat for important animal and plant species. The project will create a sustainable and resilient shoreline for the school and its waterfront neighbors, while making a dramatic and positive impact on the Lafayette River ecosystem.

Project Outcome:

What did the students enjoy the most about this project?

How could a similar project be improved?

This project will be finished in the upcoming school year. It will be rolled over to FY26.

Project	Recycling Paper in Our School
Recipient	Hampton City Schools
Locality	Hampton
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: I would like to order recycling bins to continue the program we started two years ago. We used boxes the first year. Last year we received 20 recycling bins from Hampton Clean City Commission through my work with School Pride in Action. I would like to have 20 more this year, so more teachers will participate in recycling the paper in their classrooms so it does not go into the garbage. The National Junior Honor Society will be in charge of running the project.

Project Outcome: Our financial officer was able to secure recycling bins at a cost-effective price of \$4.82 each, which allowed us to purchase 60 bins. As a result, every classroom, office, copy room, the library, technology room, and cafeteria received a dedicated recycling bin.

The National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) students played a central role in implementing the project. They collaborated to develop a pick-up schedule, coordinated with custodial staff, and ensured that the large rolling bins were placed out on time for collection. Through this process, students strengthened their teamwork, leadership, and organizational skills.

Staff members have been highly complimentary—not only about the convenience of being able to recycle paper but also about the professionalism and efficiency of the NJHS students managing the collection process.

This project successfully addressed several Virginia Science Standards of Learning, including:

6.8 – Students investigated and demonstrated how human actions impact the environment and how individuals can contribute to environmental quality.

LS.11 – Students explored how ecosystems and communities respond to change, reinforcing the dynamic nature of environmental systems.

Overall, the project fostered environmental awareness, civic responsibility, and real-world problem-solving skills among our students.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? What the students enjoyed most about the project was the opportunity to take ownership of their learning and share it with others. To spark their excitement, a representative from the Hampton Clean City Commission visited to teach the importance of recycling through engaging and educational games. The students were immediately motivated to take action and enthusiastically distributed recycling bins to every classroom throughout the school.

They later had the chance to extend their impact beyond the school by participating in the Earth Day Celebration at Bluebird Gap Farm. There, they led an interactive recycling game for the community, guiding participants in sorting items into trash or recycling bins. The students provided immediate feedback, offering praise for correct choices and teaching moments for incorrect ones. They also proudly showcased a sample bin to demonstrate how recycling is practiced at our school.

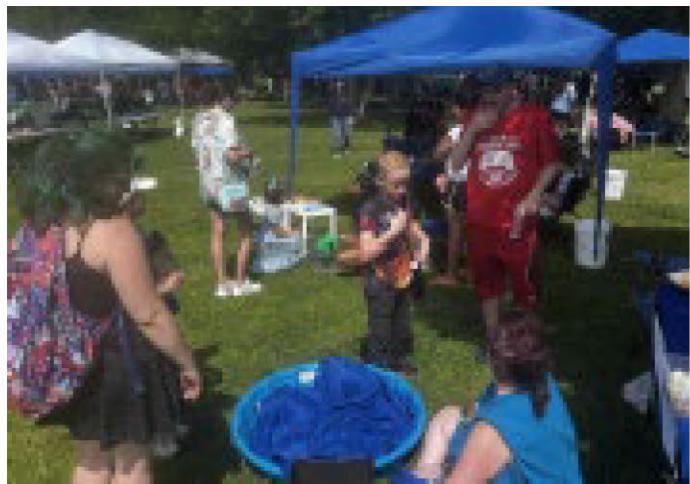
This hands-on involvement, both within the school and in the broader community, made the project especially meaningful and enjoyable for the students.

How could a similar project be improved? Looking ahead, the NJHS coordinator plans to begin the project earlier in the school year to allow for more consistent implementation and broader student involvement. While a core group of NJHS members participated this year, the goal is to engage all members in the recycling initiative moving forward.

One notable success was the collaboration with the custodial staff, who were very supportive and adapted quickly to incorporating the recycling bins into their routine. Their involvement proved essential to the project's overall efficiency.

This year, the focus was solely on recycling paper. For next year, the NJHS coordinator is exploring the possibility of expanding the program to include water bottles and aluminum cans. This addition would enhance the environmental impact of the project and provide further opportunities for student learning and leadership.





Project	Cistern Model
Recipient	Williamsburg Community Growers
Locality	Williamsburg
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Williamsburg Community Growers seeks funding to build a functional cistern model that will serve as a hands-on learning tool for high school students, as well as provide educational outreach to younger learners. The cistern will be used to demonstrate water conservation practices and the intersection between water management and sustainable farming, which is central to WCG's mission to promote healthy, sustainable lifestyles and environmental stewardship. The model will be an interactive exhibit at our community garden space, as well as a learning tool for outreach programs in local schools.

Project Outcome:

What did the students enjoy the most about this project?

How could a similar project be improved?

The project timeline is Fall 2025. This mini-grant will be carried over to FY26.

Project	Tarrant Recycling Project
Recipient	Hampton City Schools
Locality	Hampton
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Currently, our school doesn't have a recycling program. Through this project, we'll set up a school-wide recycling system by placing 65 recycling bins throughout the building, reaching every classroom and shared space. These bins will be monitored and collected weekly into larger city provided bins.

Project Outcome: At this time, we are ready to launch our recycling program for the 2025-2026 school year. We now have recycling bins for every classroom and shared spaces, flyers to help keep students informed about proper recycling practices, and a scale to track how many pounds of recyclables we keep

out of the landfill. While the program hasn't officially started yet, all the materials and systems are in place. I would consider this a success in progress – our goals are on track, and we're set up for strong implementation at the start of the new school year. This project also supports key Virginia SOLs, including LS 11 and LS 13, by helping students understand human impact on the environment and how those impacts can be reduced, and CE 1 by encouraging responsible citizenship through student leadership and involvement in the recycling process.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? My students enjoyed feeling like their voices were being heard. During our Human Impact unit in 7th grade Life Science, many of them expressed real concern about the state of our world and wanted to do something that mattered. They're excited to return as 8th grade leaders next year to help launch and quite the recycling program. For our final class of the year, they created posters that will be displayed around the school to help educate younger students on the importance of recycling. Several students also took the lead on designing the flyers that will be attached to each bin. With just a few small edits, those flyers are now ready to go. It's been great to see students not only take ownership of the project, but also find pride and purpose in it.

How could a similar project be improved? One thing I learned is that having the materials is only part of the process – getting systems in place early for student roles, storage, and routine expectations is just as important. In the future, I would build in more time or training the students leaders and setting up a regular schedule for collection and tracking from the beginning.





Project	Campus Recycling Project
Recipient	HRIMS
Locality	Hampton
Award	\$245.12

Project Description: This project begins a school wide recycling program. This grant would allow us to provide a recycling bin for each classroom and one in the staff work room, to decrease the amount of trash created by the school and increase the amount recycled. The Lower Elementary class is ready and eager to create signage and present information to the other 5 classrooms in the building to increase awareness and knowledge of the importance of the 3Rs; reduce, reuse, recycle, and share information on how to properly use the new recycle bins.

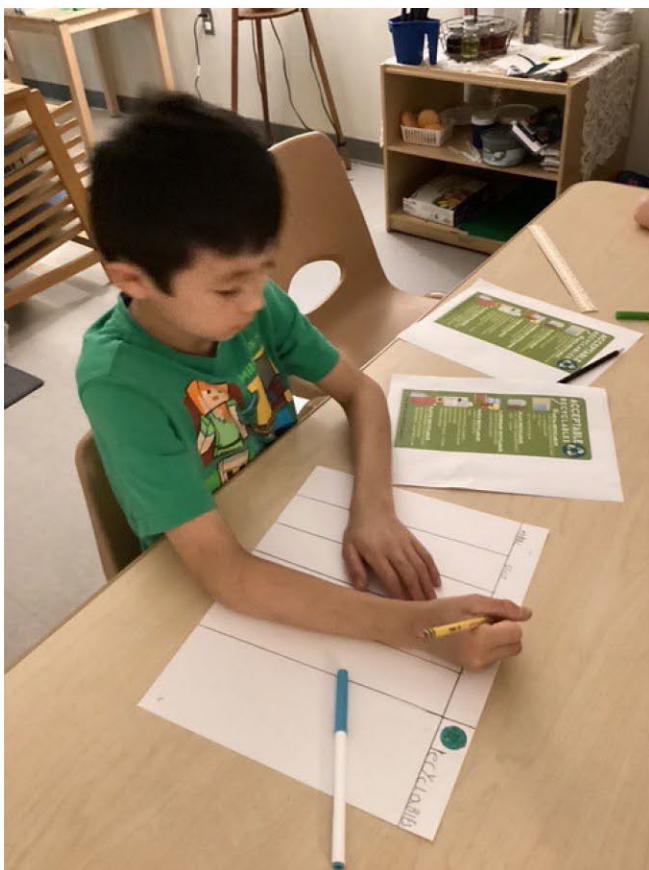
Project Outcome: For this project, the students learned all about waste management in the US and other countries across the world. They became passionate about recycling and the 3Rs, taking pride in being able to reduce the amount of waste going to the landfill. They have been sorting the trash in their own classroom while waiting for the classroom bins the school ordered to come in. Through their presentations to the other classes, they practiced teamwork, writing, drawing, and public speaking skills. On their posters they included a variety of drawings, fun facts, and information about recycling, educating the entire school population on why recycling and the 3Rs are important and how to properly sort recycling.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? The students very much enjoyed creating their posters, taking pride in their work. They worked in teams of two to create and present these. They also enjoyed learning facts about waste management, and were shocked to learn how much waste goes to the landfill, how little plastic actually gets recycled, and how different these systems are in other countries.

They were engaged in our conversation about being agents of change and brainstorming ways to reduce waste, and they feel good about being able to introduce a recycling program to the school and make this happen.

How could a similar project be improved? Our biggest lesson learned with this project was a timeline one. We learned we need to start big projects like this earlier in the year. Due to delays in shipping our classroom recycling bins have not arrived, while the school year has come to an end. The bins will be here ready to use in the coming school year and the students are excited to be able to use them.





Project	Interns take on EJ
Recipient	Teens with a Purpose
Locality	Norfolk
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: The HIPTERN Green initiative is a youth-led environmental education and action project engaging teens in hands-on learning through beautification, upcycling, and waste-reduction projects. Interns assist in modeling healthy cleaning and waste reduction habits at Purpose Park, a community garden and oasis in the center of Norfolk Public Housing communities Youngs Terrace and Calvert Square. Teens will continue to install recycled art pieces and native plants in neglected areas to improve green space and reduce litter.

Project Outcome:

What did the students enjoy the most about this project?

How could a similar project be improved?

The project timeline is Summer 2025. This mini-grant will be carried over to FY26.

Project	Falcons Lead a Recycling Revolution
Recipient	Yorktown Elementary School
Locality	Yorktown
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: Yorktown Elementary School, a Title 1 elementary magnet school, which focuses on science, technology, and environmental education, is initiating a comprehensive recycling program. Through data collection on our waste, we've discovered that a significant portion is recyclable, particularly paper. Despite having an external recycling bin, we lack adequate indoor bins to facilitate classroom recycling. To address this, we propose the acquisition of forty small recycling bins for paper in each classroom and three larger bins for cans and bottles to be placed in central locations. The principal and lead custodian are fully supportive of this initiative, ensuring smooth implementation and maintenance.

Project Outcome: The recycling initiative at Yorktown Elementary School has been a resounding success. With the installation of recycling bins in every classroom and central locations, students and staff have embraced a culture of sustainability. The project directly supported Virginia Science SOLs by engaging students in real-world applications of environmental stewardship, particularly around conservation and recycling. One of the most exciting outcomes has been the formation of our Green Team, a student-led group that helps monitor and promote recycling efforts. The enthusiasm has even inspired other teachers to explore additional renewable and eco-friendly projects, expanding the impact beyond the original scope.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Students were most excited about the opportunity to make a real difference in their school. They took pride in helping to "convince" the principal to implement the program, which gave them a strong sense of ownership. If only you could have been there to hear their shouts of excitement when I delivered the recycling bins to classes! Now, they not only use the bins consistently but also hold each other accountable—reminding classmates to recycle and celebrating their collective impact. The project empowered them to see that their voices and actions matter, and that they can be agents of change in their community.

How could a similar project be improved? One key lesson learned was the importance of including all areas of the school in the planning phase. Initially, we overlooked the need for recycling bins in offices and specialized classrooms like art and STEM, which generate a significant amount of recyclable material. Fortunately, the school was able to fund additional bins to fill these gaps. In the future, a more comprehensive needs assessment at the start of the project would ensure that all spaces are equipped and that the program is as inclusive and effective as possible.



Project	Recycling in the Classroom
Recipient	Bethel High School
Locality	Hampton
Award	500.00

Project Description: Our school does not currently have a school-based recycling program. We would like to add bins to the classrooms that are eager to recycle. The SPED students are recycling plastic film (TREX) currently and would like to add curbside collection to the list. We have 18 SPED students total between two functional classes that will participate in this program. Teachers have already submitted their input to order recycle bins for their classrooms. So far, 32 teachers have responded and are willing to take part in this pilot program

Project Outcome:

What did the students enjoy the most about this project?

How could a similar project be improved?

This project will be finished in September 2025.

Project	Beautify Woodside
Recipient	Woodside High School
Locality	Newport News
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: The Beautifying Woodside project implements native Virginian plants in a garden outside of the school. This initiative provides a welcoming atmosphere outside the school and educates the youth on the planting project 100% student-led.

Project Outcome: This project was the brainchild of one of our Woodside students. She asked if we could do something with native plants, and we made it happen with support from HRgreen and the Newport News Master Gardeners (NNMG)! It was a very successful partnership with the NNMG, as they met with our students to plan and install the garden. Our students planned the layout of the garden and chose the plants (with advice from the NNMG). Another huge success was that our students wrote and earned the grant from HRgreen. Finally, we purchased plants and materials, obtained a generous donation of gravel from the Newport News Landscape Supervisor to create the pathways, and worked to install the garden. Next steps are to install two trellises in the fall.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? Students told me that they enjoyed being the ones who planned the garden. They loved that it was student-led, and they completely enjoyed working with the NNMGs. Angel loved being given the chance to write the grant.

How could a similar project be improved? One of the work days, we had fewer students working with us that I would have liked. We had five students on the planning committee. Perhaps getting more students involved in the process. Also, we tried to get more donations of materials from local hardware stores. Perhaps having students approach the stores would have been more effective than submitting a letter. Finally, we did not think to have a few students meet us at the local plant sales when we purchased the plants. This would have been more effective, as we could have potentially received more donations, stretching our purchasing power.



Project	Children's Garden
Recipient	Virginia Living Museum
Locality	Newport News
Award	\$500.00

Project Description: In its various gardens, the Virginia Living Museum displays an extensive collection of native plants to provide wildlife habitat and support pollinators, educate about 250,000 guests each year about Virginia's plant species, and beautify the environment to create a welcoming experience for the community.

While they focus on spring and fall annual plant sales, the museum's Horticulture staff rely on volunteers to help maintain a variety of native plant gardens on the Museum's 23-acre grounds. The Children's Garden, which provides an interactive outdoor play space for preschool-age children, has become overgrown and has not been actively maintained in recent years.

The museum's "Green Teen Conservation Leaders" - a group of high-school-age volunteers - have developed an interest in horticulture and want to learn more about native plants and gardening through collaboration with the Museum's Horticulture staff. They plan to spearhead a group project, beginning in the summer of 2024 through the 2024-2025 school year, to revitalize the Children's Garden area by planting sensory-friendly plants and developing a rainwater collection area with rain barrels to facilitate the garden's long-term maintenance.

The Children's Garden, originally planted in 2013, was intended as an area for children to discover nature and native plants through sight, touch, and smell. In addition to plants, it includes a Nature Playground where kids can pretend to get trapped in a spider web, hop on mushroom shapes and whisper through talking tubes, and explore a play Hobbit House. Kids can use a watering can to give flowers a drink or just sit on a bench and watch for hummingbirds, bees, or bugs.

To renew and re-plant the garden, the Green Teens will spend the first half of the year learning about native plants under the guidance of the Museum's horticulture staff, researching which plant species would best fit in the garden to appeal to children's senses while attracting pollinators like birds, butterflies, and caterpillars. They will also learn about rain gardens and design a rainwater collection area adjacent to the Children's Garden (e.g. using rain barrels or another method of collection). In the fall, they will work with staff to remove overgrown plants, re-potting existing plants to be used elsewhere, and preparing the soil for spring planting. In the early spring of 2025, the Green Teens will complete the actual planting and will develop or install the rain collection area. Later in the spring, the teens will install new signage and continue to maintain the garden as it opens for children to enjoy.

Project Outcome: Sensory Garden. Featuring pollinator-friendly plants native to Virginia, the garden invites young visitors to explore the natural world through touch, smell, and sound. It furthers the museum's educational and conservation mission by encouraging children to connect with plants and nature in a more immersive way. Rather than just observing nature from a distance, young visitors can now:

- Touch various plant textures, from velvety leaves to rough bark
- Smell aromatic herbs and fragrant flowers
- See a variety of brightly colored flowers and other plants
- Listen to the natural sounds created by rustling plants and seed pods as seasons change

This multi-sensory approach to learning about plants creates an engaging and accessible experience for children of all ages and abilities and will be enjoyed by the more than 100,000 children and student groups who visit the museum annually.

What did the students enjoy the most about this project? The project was spearheaded by the museum's Green Teens Conservation Leaders - high school volunteers who donate their time, energy, and passion to make a tangible difference in their community. Through hands-on projects, the Green Teens develop valuable skills in leadership, problem solving, and STEM while fostering a deeper connection to the natural world. The program not only benefits the museum with enthusiastic volunteer support but also

shapes the next generation of environmental stewards by providing meaningful experiences that connect classroom learning with real-world conservation efforts.

The teens enjoyed the guidance of the museum's Horticulture Curator, Courtney Crenshaw, who helped guide and advise the teens in their plant and design choices for the garden.

How could a similar project be improved? The garden project was planned and implemented according to the original timeline, with planning and research on native plant species taking place in the fall of 2024 and ground preparation and planting in the spring of 2025, as well as new signage installation.

