



SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2022.** Please include this submission form with the electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Prince William County

Program Title: Prince William Public Libraries Sustainability

Program Category: Environmental

CONTACT INFORMATION

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SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Elijah T. Johnson

Title: Acting County Executive

Signature: 

Program Overview

Prince William Public Libraries (PWPL) implemented a comprehensive strategy to engage the Prince William community in programs and conversations that address the climate crisis and sustainability efforts. Two of our libraries – Haymarket Gainesville and Potomac – are now Climate Resilience Hubs, designated to help educate residents about extreme weather preparedness and other impacts of climate change. PWPL offers



environment-related programs and activities for all ages both in-person and virtually, five of our libraries have pollinator gardens and composters, and we just opened the first-of-its-kind outdoor library space Central Green, a designated area for hands-on environmental education at Central Library. The Urban Libraries Council recognized PWPL as 2021 Top Innovator for its "Resilient and Responsible Communities" initiative.

Executive Summary

PWPL believes in the importance of public libraries in conversations about current topics such as climate change and sustainability, therefore we set out to raise awareness about the value of protecting natural environments and sustainability and engage the community in these critical issues. PWPL's main goal is to offer an practice-oriented, memorable, and enjoyable educational experience that will ignite further interest and yield enhanced environmental stewardship.

PWPL was selected as one of 25 libraries to participate in the American Library Association's Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change grant initiative. Throughout 2021, PWPL presented the Sustainable Lifestyle series, providing patrons with ideas on how to make small but impactful lifestyle changes that reduce one's ecological footprint. In addition, two of PWPL's libraries became designated Climate Resilience Hubs providing public education and support during extreme weather events.

In addition, with the support of ChangeX grants, funded through Microsoft, PWPL launched programs that are interactive, engaging, and enjoyable, and consequently, enhance learning experiences and help community members become environmental stewards. We established pollinator gardens at four of our libraries and purchased composts to allow experiential learning for all ages, to mention only a few programs.

Perhaps the largest achievement was the opening of Central Green, our first-of-its-kind outdoor library space located at Central Library for interpretive environmental education with installations such as windmill, solar lights, weather station, and a Story Walk that couples literacy with exercise, promoting overall well-being.

The Urban Libraries Council recognized PWPL as the 2021 Top Innovator for its "Resilient and Responsible Communities" initiative, and we believe libraries throughout the nation will be inspired by our initiative to step forth to encourage and teach people to make lifestyle changes that will reduce their ecological footprint and support each other in maintaining these changes and sharing knowledge with others.



Program Description

Sustainability is the Future

Sustainability and renewable sources of energy are important topics in Prince William County where— for decades—the largest source of electric energy had been coal, later replaced by natural gas and petroleum. At the same time, offshore wind turbines are rising off the coast of Virginia and a neighboring locality just recently introduced electric school buses and an autonomous electric public shuttle to their fleet.

In 2021, Prince William County (County) created a Sustainability Commission to guide the County on energy efficiency, greenhouse gases and carbon emission reduction, and the County's 2021–2024 Strategic Plan included two new areas: Environmental Conservation, to “promote and expand the preservation and protection of natural resources and processes, and promote environmental justice,” and Sustainable Growth, to “establish the County as a leader in promoting sustainable growth that ensures the social, economic, and environmental health of the County.” In early 2022, the County established the Office of Sustainability and hired its first Environmental and Energy Sustainability Officer, whose main task is to facilitate the creation of the County's Energy and Sustainability Master Plan.

To put it simply, sustainability and renewable sources of energy resonate and PWPL has the resources and experience to be a contributing member of this movement.

The Role of Public Libraries

Public libraries play an important role in conversations about current issues. PWPL aims to raise awareness about natural environment and sustainability, and to encourage and inspire people to be environmental stewards. We are enhancing our physical and digital collections, making our programs interactive, engaging, and enjoyable, and expanding our collaboration with community partners. Our efforts streamline to support one goal: to better educate the community we serve about these topics, which will lead to bettering their lives and more responsible behavior benefiting us all.

Year 2021 was a year of progress and achievements in these efforts. Thanks to the support of many partners, PWPL launched innovative programs, offered experiential learning, built Central Green, the first-of-its kind outdoor environmental education area, and joined a nation-wide initiative encouraging public libraries to play a bigger role in environmental education and community support. PWPL managed to do all of this with the monetary support from grants and donations, with in-kind support from County agencies, local businesses, community groups, individuals, and, of course, librarians.

Innovative Projects and an Exemplar Community Collaboration

PWPL was selected as one of 25 libraries to participate in the American Library Association's Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change grant initiative. Throughout 2021, PWPL presented the Sustainable Lifestyle series raising awareness about natural environment and sustainability, providing ideas on how to make lifestyle changes that

reduce one's ecological footprint, and encouraging and inspiring people to be environmental stewards. People could attend a virtual program "Top 20 Zero Waste Swaps," watch "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind" movie, and during "Kitchen Secrets: Library Edition" explore eating habits that decrease their ecological footprint, save money, and lead to a more sustainable lifestyle.

As a part of this grant project, two of PWPL's libraries became designated Climate Resilience Hubs where staff provide public education and support during extreme weather events. Both libraries permanently host literature on climate preparedness and share and promote materials, presentations and workshops provided by Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW), a network of local leaders building grassroots climate resilience through inclusive and hands-on education, service, and planning.

With the support of ChangeX's "The Best Ideas for Your Community" grants, PWPL built pollinator gardens and composters at five of its libraries and offered topic-related programs. People of all ages could participate in composting activities and learn how to divert food waste, yard trimmings, and other organic matter from the landfill, and compost them instead. There were compost displays at libraries with fruits and vegetables in separate containers with see-through walls, thermometers to see the temperature change, and magnifiers for a closer look as the foods decompose. Children could vote for which fruit or vegetable they think will decompose the fastest. They could then pick up do-it-yourself kits with at-home activities. Adults could take home a countertop compost bin and information on how to get started. All kits were packaged in a reusable tote. PWPL distributed more than 1,000 compost kits to library patrons, schools, Boys & Girls Clubs, scout troops, and other community organizations. Other experiential programs included an "Upcycled Kitchen Composter" craft activities that upcycled milk jugs, coffee cans, and plastic snack jars into whimsical face planters and decorated kitchen composters.

The positive community response to these programs was immense. For the majority of programs offered at the libraries, attendance was at capacity. Such programs included: a local artist painting the indoor compost containers and Balls Ford Road Composting Facility, a public-private partnership between the County and Freestate Farms, hosting a tour for our librarians so they could expand their knowledge and share it with the public. In addition, library volunteers and Friends of Library members helped to assemble compost education kits.

An equally popular and engaging initiative was the establishment of pollinator gardens at PWPL libraries. This large-scale collaborative effort included: County Buildings and Grounds team built large planters and prepared ground planting areas, a local landscape designer drew a plan, a local farm donated soil, nurseries donated plants and trees, Master Gardeners from the Virginia Cooperative Extension provided their expertise, library volunteers and Friends of Library members helped to plant, water, and weed the gardens, and local beekeepers assisted



librarians with programming. In addition, PWPL donated leftover mulch to a community garden club. People of all ages came to observe the blooming and buzzing of the new pollinator gardens and participated in activities to learn more about the gardens and their benefits to the community. For example, children could pick up a Pollinator Kit containing a book on pollination, a pot, soil, and zinnia seeds for them to plant and grow their own pollinator plant. With the funds from Fairfax Water and in collaboration with Prince William Service Authority, PWPL launched

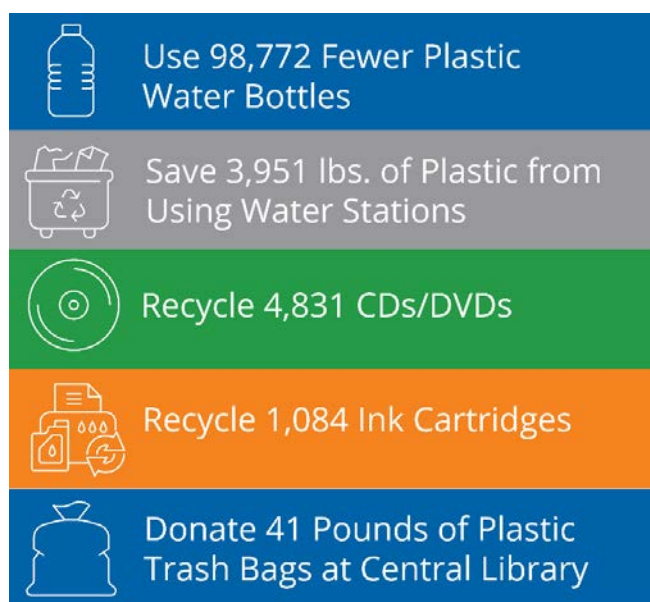
H2GO Kids program at its libraries. This program introduces children to the exciting world of water and teaches them why it is important to conserve the water and keep it clean. Children created a miniature, solar-powered water cycle system; built a mini filter using household materials to simulate the drinking water treatment process; and constructed miniature “sewers” in containers and learned about flushable and non-flushable items.

The largest project was taking place at PWPL's Central Library where, throughout the year, the first-of-its-kind outdoor library space was taking shape. PWPL was awarded two large environmental grants from Community Foundation for Northern Virginia and Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation to create hands-on environmental education opportunities for the public. Studies have proven the importance of hands-on learning, especially for children. Similarly, there is no shortage of studies that show the benefits of being outdoors. Central Green now encourages the exploration of nature and conservation activities, interaction with nature and the outdoors, allows for experiential learning, provides for greater understanding of the importance of conservation, and enhances environmental stewardship. Children and adults alike enjoy the natural community space, exploring the beauty and importance of pollinator garden, participating in composting, observing the power of the wind and sun, learning about the clouds and rain while walking and reading along the story walk, and paying attention to weather patterns while setting up a weather station. While the project was funded by grantors, the work was completed by librarians and community partners. The County Building and Grounds Department assisted with the transformation of the space and installation of the educational features, and the Department of Public Works, Solid Waste Division and Environmental Education Division assisted with programming. PWPL teen volunteers planted the plants, and an Eagle Scout built the Story Walk.

These efforts were a continuation and a culmination of a larger initiative. In 2013, PWPL was the first – and is still the only – library system in Virginia to receive the Virginia Environmental Excellence Program (VEEP) certification. VEEP encourages and assists facilities and organizations that have strong environmental records to go above and beyond their legal requirements. PWPL has also been committed to Prince William County's Smarter Chemical Program, a strong pollution prevention program that ensures only safe and effective products are used at our sites, and waste is eliminated.

PWPL encourages its patrons and employees to compost, recycle and eliminate the waste and provides them with opportunities to do so.

PWPL's libraries have water stations for both the public and staff to use, they recycle CDs, DVDs, and ink cartridges, and – since December 2021 – PWPL is, in collaboration with Keep Prince William Beautiful, part of the Trex plastic bag recycling challenge aimed at reducing plastic bag waste in the County. When 500 pounds or more of plastic bags are donated,



Trex will donate a bench made from recycled materials to PWPL. In just five months, members of the community have donated 250 pounds of plastic trash bags at Central Library.

Top Innovator Award

While the positive response of the community to PWPL's environmental efforts is the gold standard, PWPL was honored to be recognized by a professional library organization, the Urban Libraries Council, with its Top Innovator award. The award recognizes transformative programs that address current issues. PWPL's "Resilient and Responsible Communities" program was selected by a panel of expert judges from more than 250 submissions in 10 categories that showcase creative thinking and imaginative applications of library resources. PWPL won in the category of "Wellness, Safety, and Sustainability," with award winners being recognized for their level of inventiveness, the outcomes achieved, and the ability for other libraries to adapt and implement their work.

"Community Building and Community-Responsive Enrichment are two strategic goals of the library and providing environment-related programs and activities are critical to meeting these objectives," remarked PWPL Director Deborah Wright. "The impact of this program is bringing more awareness to the community on environmental issues, letting them know about the resources that are available to them through our libraries."

Results Achieved

PWPL achieved these results:

1. Enhanced environmental education: PWPL has an increased capacity to provide effective education about environmental issues, and community members have access to free, unique environmental education that makes the learning easier, more enjoyable, memorable, and effective.
2. Better understanding of and stronger connection with nature: The hands-on exploration of nature and conservation activities makes learning and understanding of nature, conservation, and

lifestyle changes easier and more welcoming to wider audience. More people learn have a better understanding of how their actions can create change, which enables them to connect with and care more about nature.

3. Increased environmental stewardship: The enhanced environmental education strengthens PWPL's ability to motivate people to make positive changes in their lives. The hands-on activities and the opportunity to test-try at the library encourage more people to adopt the lifestyle changes at home. More community members discover ways of reducing their impact on the environment, saving money, and living a more sustainable life.

4. Strengthened collaboration of community members: The cooperation among PWPL and other community partners on implementing these programs, and the public attention it attracts, encourages further participation and collaboration of individuals, community groups, and businesses on promoting actions that will have a beneficial effect on the health of the natural environment and local economy.

5. Enhance well-being of community members: The community members have access to welcoming community spaces where they can learn, relax, read a book, converse, and strengthen their community interaction and understanding, creating a stronger sense of community.

6. Strengthened participation in library programs: The enhanced programs and outdoor areas underscore the library's significance. They increase interest in the library and reinforce the institution as a relevant and current community asset.

7. Enhanced people's experience at the library: PWPL has been renovating its libraries to create more open and inviting spaces for programming and general enjoyment. Now, PWPL extended these improvements beyond its library walls to include green spaces and outreach efforts and enriched the way it serves the greater Prince William community.

8. Provided space for creative programming: The Central Green and pollinator gardens not only enable for effective environmental education, but also enhance other library programs, such as story times for children and book clubs for adults that can be held outside.
9. Inspired young people: The enhanced environmental education with its hands-on activities engages and inspires children and teens. Future scientists and engineers can explore, investigate, and be inspired to devise impactful solutions to environmental problems.
10. Contributed to the beauty of the neighborhood: Central Green and pollinator gardens contribute to the beauty of their neighborhoods.
11. Met the need of the community: PWPL has long been receiving requests from patrons for outdoor programming. This call to action became even more profound during the COVID-19 pandemic. These projects not only meet the needs of the community, but also alleviate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on indoor library programs.

The Next Steps

PWPL will continue to expand its efforts in collaboration with community members who have participated in these programs and activities to continue its commitment to bringing greater awareness to the climate crisis. We aim to inspire more people to become environmental stewards and inspire more libraries to step forth and encourage and teach people to make lifestyle changes that will reduce their ecological footprint and support each other in maintaining these changes and sharing our knowledge with others.

Year 2022 already continues in the successes of 2021. PWPL is building two more pollinator gardens and its programming schedule includes many environment-themed programs. The popular upcycling Take and Make programs, H2Go Kids activities and experiments, and a video program, "The Top Two Ways You Can Personally Fight Climate Change," are scheduled

for summer 2022. PWPL is also implementing additional initiatives and programs to ensure that the pollinator gardens and Central Green will be busier and more widely utilized than last year. For example, a local Girl Scout Troop will create bee baths for our flower beds at no cost to the library, while providing them with community service opportunities.

The evidence of community members using the outdoor library spaces, recycling, composting, attending library programs, expressing interest in environmental programs, and collaborating with PWPL in promoting environmental stewardship prove the success of this initiative. While some data and statistics are already available, other will evolve over years to come. PWPL is committed to enhancing this initiative and supporting its growth in the future.