



## SUBMISSION FORM

All submission forms must include the following information. Separate submission forms must be turned in for each eligible program. **Deadline: July 1, 2025.** Please include this submission form as the first page of your 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: Fostering Environmentally Responsible Communities  
Program Category: Agriculture, Environmental, & Energy

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Christopher J. Shorter  
Title: County Executive  
Signature: 

## Program Overview

With over two million annual visits, Prince William Public Libraries (PWPL) is a key government partner in serving residents, enriching their lives, and enhancing the community.

In 2020, PWPL committed to a more active role in creating a greener future. Since then, it has inspired thousands of people to collaborate on making positive changes and building sustainable environments in our communities.





## **Executive Summary**

Prince William Public Libraries (PWPL) believes in the importance of public libraries leading conversations about current topics and concerns. With over two million annual visits, PWPL has significant potential to improve the community by connecting residents to the power of information.

In 2020, PWPL committed to a more active role in creating a greener future. It launched a comprehensive strategy to become a more environmentally friendly organization, raise environmental awareness, and engage the Prince William community in protecting the natural environment. PWPL actively took steps to go green and inspired the public to become environmental stewards.

This endeavor evolved into exemplary community collaboration. Residents, county agencies, local businesses, and environmental organizations now come to libraries to help expand PWPL's efforts. PWPL became a driving force in fostering environmentally responsible communities.

From transforming unwanted plastic bags into new library benches, installing water bottle filling stations to reduce plastic waste, and establishing pollinator gardens to strengthen the local environment, PWPL engaged community members in environmentally friendly actions.

PWPL's efforts will have a lasting impact on nature protection and sustainability across the region and nationwide. Other library systems and organizations can replicate the programs and activities that PWPL is implementing to bring about positive changes in their communities.

## **Program Description**

### **Situation Faced by the Locality**

Like other localities nationwide and globally, Prince William County faces the impacts of climate change, including heat waves, flooding, storm surges, changes in water quality, and shifts in growing seasons. Therefore, the Prince William County Government (County) included focus areas of “Environmental Conservation” and “Sustainable Growth” in its 2021–2024 Strategic Plan, and in the new 2025–2028 Strategic Plan, promoted “Environment” as a Strategic Goal. The County also developed the Community Energy and Sustainability Master Plan and participates in the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality's Virginia Environmental Excellence Program.

PWPL strives to be a collaborative county agency. With over two million annual visits, it has significant potential to contribute to achieving these goals and improving the community.

### **Innovative and Practical Solutions**

PWPL has adopted solutions that have helped the environment and inspired people to make lifestyle changes that reduce their ecological footprint and have positive impacts on the environment.

PWPL has prioritized its environmental responsibility since 2013, when it received the Virginia Environmental Excellence Program (VEEP) certification. PWPL was the first—and remains the only—library system in Virginia to have this certification. PWPL has switched to LED lights to

conserve energy and began using “smarter chemical” cleaning supplies to eliminate hazardous chemical use. PWPL also installed water bottle refill stations at all library buildings. More than 200,000 plastic water bottles have not gone into area landfills thanks to people using the refilling stations.

In 2020, PWPL committed to a more active role in creating a greener future by engaging its patrons in becoming environmental stewards. To ensure the quality of the service and maximum reach and impact, PWPL started by joining established national initiatives. First, PWPL joined the American Library Association’s nationwide Resilient Communities: Libraries Respond to Climate Change initiative and became a partner of the Communities Responding to Extreme Weather (CREW), a network of local leaders building grassroots climate resilience. Thanks to these partnerships, PWPL could immediately offer high-quality programs that raise awareness about the natural environment, sustainability, and climate change preparedness, as well as provide tips on how to reduce one’s ecological footprint.

A year later, PWPL established its first three pollinator gardens, launched Community Compost programs, and began building Central Green, a large outdoor library area designed for hands-on environmental education. This area features a pollinator garden, a composter, solar lights, and a weather station.

PWPL also began collaborating with Prince William County Public Schools on a printer ink cartridge recycling collection program. Since October 2022, library patrons have donated 383 ink cartridges, conserving resources, reducing waste, and protecting the environment.

Another collaboration with NexTrex and their plastic bag recycling challenge allowed library patrons to recycle 4,479 pounds of plastic and turn it into four benches for the library's outdoor areas.

In 2022, PWPL's environmental activities were already recognized by the Urban Libraries Council, a professional library organization, with its Top Innovator award. This recognition, along with the community's positive response, propelled PWPL's efforts.

PWPL continued to transform its outdoor areas to be more environmentally friendly. Six libraries now have pollinator gardens, children's gardens, and a Community Kitchen Garden, offering opportunities for nature to thrive and for the public to enjoy and be inspired. PWPL's four Story Trails couple literacy with exercise, promote overall well-being, and encourage people to spend time outdoors and appreciate nature.

PWPL offers various programs throughout the year for all ages to raise awareness of the environment and sustainability. People can participate in composting, upcycling, and gardening activities. They can take home countertop compost kits, native flower starter kits, and a variety of seeds from Seed Libraries.

### **Exemplar Community Collaboration**

All these projects and efforts are a result of exemplary community collaboration and support. PWPL funded them with monetary support from grants and donations and implemented them with in-kind support from County agencies, local businesses, community groups, individuals,



and library staff. This approach minimizes the impact on taxpayers and provides opportunities for building and strengthening community relations.

The Community Foundation for Northern Virginia, Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation, Sentara Health, ChangeX, Amazon, County Building and Grounds Department, Department of Public Works, Solid Waste Division, and Environmental Services Division, Fairfax Water, Prince William Service Authority, schools, Eagle Scouts, library volunteers, Friends of Library members, local beekeepers, wildlife ambassadors, Master Gardeners from the Virginia Cooperative Extension, and Keep Prince William Beautiful – they all contributed their time, expertise, and funding to advance PWPL’s goal of educating the community and building environmentally safer future.

And the list keeps growing. In 2024, the Garden Club of Montclair received a grant to expand Seed Libraries at PWPL. Through a collaborative partnership between the Garden Clubs of Montclair, Lake Ridge, and Centennial Garden Club, the Master Gardener Program of Prince William County, and five PWPL branches, they are now expanding Seed Libraries to further promote environmentally sound horticultural practices based on research.

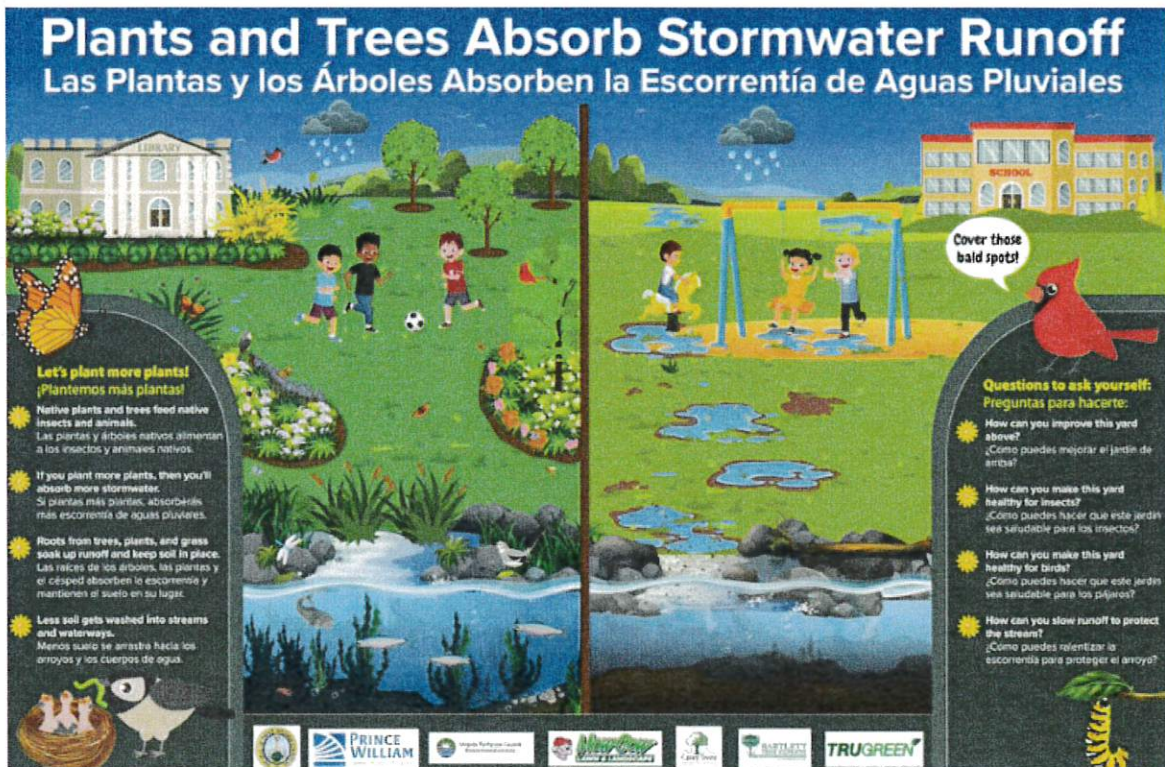
In spring 2025, several community partners got together to enhance Central Green with more trees and a stormwater garden.



Virginia Cooperative Extension Prince William is with Prince William County Government, Virginia and Prince William Public Libraries. · Follow

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Thanks to everyone who turned out for Central Library's Spring Fest. Central has recently received trees for their outdoor garden area courtesy of the Virginia Turfgrass Council and their Green Industry partners. Spring Fest also saw the dedication of the new stormwater education poster designed by Prince William County Environmental Services..



## Results Achieved

The evidence of community members using the outdoor library spaces, recycling, composting, attending environmental programs, and collaborating with PWPL on promoting ecological stewardship proves the success of this initiative.



PWPL's goal has been to raise awareness of environmental issues, promote sustainable practices, and foster a connection with nature. Through its programs, PWPL educated and empowered individuals to take actions for the protection of nature. More people have adopted sustainable practices and participate in environmental protection efforts. Hopefully, some children have been inspired to pursue careers as environmental scientists.

Although PWPL tracks some of its sustainability efforts, such as the number of people attending programs and the number of water bottles saved from being thrown into landfills, what truly matters is the overarching result – creating a greener future. These results are not measurable by the public library and may not be visible for years. However, the increased community engagement in nature protection efforts guarantees a greener future – a success of PWPL's efforts.

PWPL believes that this success will inspire other libraries and organizations to encourage and teach people to make lifestyle changes that reduce their ecological footprint, support one another in maintaining these changes, and share knowledge with others.

### **The Next Steps**

What began as an environmental education initiative has evolved into a community-wide effort and collaboration. It has momentum, and PWPL will continue to serve as a driving force in fostering environmentally responsible communities and to be a strong contributing partner to the County and other organizations and agencies that strive to promote and expand the preservation

and protection of natural resources and processes, strengthen environmental equity, and promote sustainable growth that ensures the social, economic, and environmental health of all.

