

ENVIRONMENTAL LEADERS FUND 2026

Entry criteria

The Environmental Leaders Fund (ELF) aims to support schools and early childhood centres to increase their students' passion, knowledge and action for the environment.

In responding and adapting to a changing climate, projects that improve biodiversity, reduce our impact on te taiao (the environment), and care for the earth's resources will help us build a climate-resilient future.

Rules of entry

- Applicants can be schools, early childhood centres and homeschooling settings that are based in Northland
- The 'Northland' region is defined by the Northland Regional Council boundaries, which can be viewed here: <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/living-in-northland/about-our-region/>
- By entering, you agree to participate in any marketing and promotional activities should your application be successful
- Only one project can be entered per school, early childhood centre, homeschool setting
- Applicants must demonstrate that their project aligns with at least one of the categories outlined below
- Winners must submit a project completion report by 31 December 2027. The report must include photos of the completed project and answers to our provided questionnaire.

Funding allocation

The total amount of funding available for the ELF is \$35,000. Each project/contribution must fit into one of the six categories to be considered for funding with the aim of maintaining an even spread of funding across the categories. The 'Growing kai' and 'Rethinking waste' categories have been oversubscribed in previous funding rounds. To improve your chances of receiving funding, we encourage you to consider applying in one of the other categories.

Applying

You must complete your application online [here](#).

In submitting your application, you'll need to provide the following information:

Provide a summary of the project:

- Who is involved in the project, including involvement from whānau, hapū, iwi and/or the wider community?
- What is the purpose and what are the objectives?
- What are the expected environmental outcomes? Explain how they will be achieved
- How does it consider te ao Māori (Māori worldview)?

Judging process

- When assessing applications, the panel may take into consideration any/all of the following:
 - Geographic spread of projects
 - Balance of projects in each category
 - Whether the project can be completed if only partially funded
 - Whether the applicant has received ELF funding in recent years.

Project categories

You will need to clearly describe how your project meets **at least one** of the following categories. You can choose more than one category for your project, but you must identify one main category.

Judges reserve the right to consider an applicant in a different category, if they deem that to be more appropriate.

Educating climate and environmental champions

At the heart of meaningful climate and environmental action is teaching young people why it matters and how they can lead the change. By supporting hands-on, inspiring learning experiences, we help students become informed and passionate climate and environmental champions.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Climate Fresk workshops
- On-site learning where students explore greenhouse gas emissions and real-world sustainability efforts
- Solar panel or wind kits for exploring alternative energy
- Climate action learning modules.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should help students become climate and environmental champions, and show measurable impact in reducing emissions and/or building climate resilience in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. number of learning experiences, energy savings in kWh).

Using sustainable transport

Driving and vehicle use are among the leading contributors to greenhouse gases today. By supporting sustainable transport options, we can significantly reduce our environmental impact while promoting healthier, more active lifestyles.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Installing bike and scooter racks or a bike library to encourage active and sustainable travel options
- Developing a school-wide sustainable travel plan
- Providing safety equipment and protective clothing for walking school buses and cyclists
- Creating a bike repair workshop to maintain and support cycling initiatives.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should demonstrate a clear commitment to using sustainable transport methods and show measurable impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or building resilience to a changing climate in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. number of bikes or alternative transport resources provided, number of students using alternative transport options, estimated fuel savings achieved through alternative transport use).

Project categories

Protecting native life

The variety of plants and animals in our natural environment (also known as biodiversity) plays a vital role in keeping ecosystems healthy and balanced. These living systems provide us with essentials like clean air and water, food, and climate regulation. By protecting native species and restoring natural habitats, we help ensure a thriving environment for future generations.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Native restoration and riparian planting
- Dune health restoration
- Weed eradication
- Eco-sourced native plant nurseries
- Marine or freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should demonstrate a commitment to protecting, restoring, or enhancing biodiversity, while showing measurable impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or building resilience to a changing climate in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. number of native trees planted, hectares of pest plants controlled, number of five-minute bird counts completed, number of fish surveys undertaken).

Please note: Animal pest-control projects are not eligible for this fund.

Please contact our Education team directly if you are interested in pest control funding.

E: education@nrc.govt.nz or P: [0800 002 004](tel:0800002004)

Rethinking waste

Instead of throwing things away, we can find ways to reuse, fix, or recycle them. This helps cut down on waste going to landfill, lowers greenhouse gas emissions, saves natural resources, and keeps our air and water cleaner.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Composting and worm farming
- Setting up recycling stations around the school
- Organising repair workshops for clothes, bikes or electronics
- Creating a second-hand uniform or book exchange
- Replacing plastic with natural or bio-degradable alternatives
- Encouraging reusable containers and packaging in school lunches.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should demonstrate a commitment to reducing the amount of waste sent to landfill, while showing measurable impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or building resilience to a changing climate in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. percentage of waste diverted from landfill, number of repair workshops held, number of items repaired or reused through workshops, percentage decrease in plastic packaging in school lunches, number of compost bins, worm farms, or recycling stations installed).

Project categories

Protecting and preserving water

Wai (water) is essential for life, and a changing climate will impact water availability, water quality and all living things that depend on it. Protecting freshwater ecosystems and finding smart ways to conserve and access water are essential.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Rainwater harvesting and storage for onsite gardens
- Transforming concrete spaces into rain gardens to reduce runoff and maintain soil moisture
- Water conservation and efficiency projects
- Riparian or wetland planting projects
- Marine or freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration
- Monitoring equipment, such as SHMAK kits for water quality testing.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should demonstrate a commitment to protecting and improving water resources, while showing measurable impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or building resilience to a changing climate in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. litres of rainwater collected and reused, number of trees planted, improvements in water quality indicators such as pH or erosion reduction, increased counts of native aquatic species over time).

Growing kai

Foods bought from shops travel an average of 2,400 km+ before being eaten. Processing and transporting food generates greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. Food that is grown locally travels a shorter distance to get to your plate and often doesn't come with all the unnecessary packaging resulting in fewer carbon emissions.

Some examples of projects we can support include:

- Working with your community to develop a shared garden
- Sharing excess kai through food banks or your school community
- Creating a seed library or seedling swap
- Planting a local food forest.

Project impact and outcomes:

- Projects should demonstrate a commitment to increasing local food supplies, while showing measurable impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and/or building resilience to a changing climate in Taitokerau
- Evidence may include student participation, learning outcomes, environmental impacts, and key data (e.g. number of garden beds or greenhouses established, amount of food grown and harvested, number of meals or food parcels shared with the school or wider community, estimated reduction in food miles through local food production).