

BEAR GRANTS

Staff Innovation & Enrichment Mini-Grant Program

Bushy Park Elementary School PTA

Big Ideas for Our Cubs

1. Program Overview

1.1 Purpose

Bear Grants fund staff-led ideas, projects, materials, experiences, and initiatives that benefit Bushy Park Elementary School (BPES) students and/or strengthen the school community. Grants are PTA funds to be used for approved projects—they are not personal gifts, compensation, or unrestricted funds for staff.

1.2 Program Goals

- Encourage creative, student-centered ideas that may not otherwise be funded
- Provide equitable access for all staff
- Use clear, transparent, consistent application review and financial procedures
- Show families how PTA fundraising directly supports students and benefits the BPES community

2. Eligibility and Funding Priorities

2.1 Who May Apply

All staff regularly-assigned to Bushy Park may apply, regardless of job classification or PTA membership. This includes teachers, paraeducators, related arts and student-support staff, counselors, office staff, custodians, health staff, food-service staff, administrators, and other regularly-assigned staff.

- Individual and team applications are allowed.
- Collaboration is encouraged, especially when a project benefits multiple groups, grades, or classes.
- The PTA will use its discretion to decide how applications from staff serving multiple schools are handled.

2.2 Funding Priorities and Examples

- **Student Learning and Enrichment:** Examples include: literacy promotion, encouraging STEM/arts/music, offering after-school clubs, enhancing hands-on learning, and investing in books and/or educational games.
- **Student Well-Being and Belonging:** Examples include: enhancing sensory support, enhancing wellness, promoting inclusive recess, promoting mentoring and/or anti-bullying, and new-student support.
- **Innovation and Creativity:** Examples include: pilot programs related to one of the funding priorities, enhancing makerspaces, developing podcasting, technology, and/or new instructional ideas.

- **Equity and Inclusion:** Examples include: promoting accessibility, purchasing adaptive equipment, enhancing multilingual supports, promoting inclusive literature, and/or supporting underserved groups.
- **School Community and Culture:** Examples include: promoting family engagement, grounds and/or building beautification, environmental projects, enhancing leadership, developing traditions and/or shared experiences.

2.3 Eligible Expenses

Eligible expenses include reasonable materials, supplies, equipment, programming, and experiences directly tied to an approved student-centered project. Routine supplies may qualify only when integral to a specific project.

2.4 Ineligible Expenses

- Cash, bonuses, personal gift cards, clothing, rewards, or other personal benefits.
- Routine operating costs that should be covered by the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS).
- Purchases made before approval, unless specifically authorized in advance.
- Personal electronics, office furniture, or items mainly benefiting one employee.
- Alcohol, political campaign activity, personal entertainment, or anything inconsistent with BPES PTA, BPES, or HCPSS policy.

3. Grant Program Structure

3.1 Grant Levels

Grant	Amount	Best suited for
Bear Quick Grant	Up to \$150	Unexpected, small opportunities; expedited review
Bear Cub Grant	Up to \$250	Books, games, clubs, sensory resources, classroom enrichment
Bear Grant	\$251-\$750	Grade-level projects, programs, engagement, larger resources
Big Bear Innovation Grant	\$751-\$1,500	Collaborative, schoolwide, outdoor, STEM, or cultural initiatives

3.2 Annual Budget

The PTA will approve the annual Bear Grant program budget before applications open and reserve funds for later opportunities (approximately 60% of funds will be reserved for fall applications and approximately 40% of funds will be reserved for spring and rolling grants). This reservation of funds is subject to change based on applications received.

Example Allocation of \$10,000 Annual Program Budget: \$4,000 for applications received in the fall; \$3,000 applications received in the spring; \$1,500 for applications for Quick Grants throughout the year; and \$1,500 collaborative or schoolwide Big Bear Innovation grant.

3.3 Recommended First-Year Pilot Structure (2026 - 2027 School Year)

- Two formal application cycles, plus a separate Quick Grant pool.
- One short application that takes ~5-10 minutes for staff to complete.
- Maximum award of \$1,500.
- Five-person application review committee and one scoring rubric.
- The PTA will direct purchasing, whenever practical.
- Brief project follow-up and annual program review.

4. Application and Timeline

4.1 Application Process

The Bear Grant program will use a short form available to every eligible staff member. The form will request the project idea, student need, beneficiaries, amount, itemized budget, funding priorities, and intended impact. See Appendix A.

4.2 Application Schedule

Cycle	Applications	Review	Awards	Implementation
Fall	Sept. 1-30	Oct. 1-14	By Oct. 15	October-end of school year
Spring	Jan. 15-Feb. 15	Feb. 16-28	By March 1	March-end of school year
Quick Grants	Year-round, if approved	Expedited	As funds allow	By approved deadline

4.3 Strategies Used to Promote Equitable Access

- Announce that all regularly-assigned BPES staff—not only classroom teachers—may apply.

- Use multiple communication channels and repeat reminders.
- Offer help turning an idea into an application without influencing review.
- Use plain language and avoid unnecessary grant jargon.
- For larger grants, the application review committee may remove applicant names during first-round scoring to reduce favoritism.

5. Application Review and Approval

5.1 Application Review Committee

Recommended Committee Members: (1) PTA president or designee, (2) PTA treasurer, (3 + 4) two parent/community PTA members, and (5) one school administration representative in an advisory or nonvoting role.

5.2 Application Review Workflow

- Screen applications for basic eligibility.
- Have committee members score eligible applications independently using Appendix B.
- Compile scores and discuss project merits.
- Ask BPES administration to confirm project feasibility and policy compliance.
- Recommend awards within the approved budget.
- Obtain PTA approval under the bylaws and financial procedures.
- Notify applicants and begin purchasing.

5.3 BPES Administration's Role

Administration should confirm that proposed projects are safe, feasible, compatible with school systems and facilities, and consistent with HCPSS requirements. Administration may flag duplicate resources, maintenance costs, or required approvals.

5.4 Review Committee Conflict of Interest

Any reviewer with a personal, family, financial, or other significant conflict involving an applicant or project must disclose it and abstain from scoring, discussing, or voting when appropriate.

5.5 Approach for When Requests Exceed Funding

- Fund the highest-scoring eligible applications.
- Consider partial funding only when the project can still be completed meaningfully.
- Ask the applicant to accept or decline the revised amount.

- Do not reduce every request by the same percentage.

6. Project Purchasing, Item Ownership, and Project Follow-Up

6.1 Purchasing

Preferred Purchasing Method: PTA direct purchase. The recipient supplies links or vendor information; the PTA purchases the approved items, retains receipts, codes the expense to the specific grant, and arranges delivery.

Reimbursement may be used when direct purchase is impractical. The expense must be approved before purchase, and the recipient must submit the receipt and required reimbursement form. No receipt means no reimbursement except in rare, documented circumstances allowed by PTA procedures. There will be no cash advances or unrestricted checks.

6.2 Ownership of Items Purchased for Approved Projects

- Consumables may be used for the approved project.
- Durable items remain for the benefit of BPES students and the applicable school program, even if the applicant transfers.
- When required, the applicant and the PTA will follow BPES and HCPSS donation and/or property procedures.

6.3 Award Notice and Project Completion Report

Award notices will include the project name, amount, conditions, purchasing steps, spending deadline, reporting expectations, and contact information.

Applicants will be required to complete a brief completion report using the questions below. They should collect a photo or story only when appropriate and with required permissions.

- What did the Bear Grant allow you to do?
- Approximately how many students benefited?
- What impact did you observe?
- When appropriate, share one photo or short story the PTA may use to show program impact.

7. Communication and Evaluation

7.1 PTA Impact Communication

Using the completion reports, the PTA will share what students gained from the projects funded and publish an annual summary of grants awarded, dollars invested, grades or groups reached, and project categories supported.

7.2 Annual Summary Elements

- Applications and dollars requested versus awarded.
- Applicant roles, grades, departments, and first-time recipients represented.
- Project types and estimated students reached.
- Whether the application and review process were manageable.
- Whether grant limits, timelines, or policies should change.
- Whether any staff groups were underrepresented or the rubric favored large projects.