



**WACO ISD EDUCATION FOUNDATION
COVER SHEET – PART II
Application for Grant:
2026-2027 Funding Cycle**

Assigned Grant Proposal #: _____

Project Title: _____

Grade Level(s): _____ # of Students DIRECTLY involved: _____

Subject Area(s): _____

Amount Requested: \$ _____

Grant Focus Area(s): In order to be considered, Waco Education Foundation Innovation Grant proposals must fall under one or more of the E4 focus areas: early childhood development, enhanced programming for advanced students, extended education for staff, and emphasis on student performance. NOTE: In addition to meeting one of the E4 focus areas above, grant readers are especially interested in creative and innovative grant requests that target fine arts, STEM, literacy, or enrichment.

(check all that apply)

Early Childhood Development

Enhanced Programming for Advanced Students

Fine Arts

Literacy

Extended Education for Staff

Emphasis on Student Performance

STEM

Enrichment

Grant Proposal

Grant Proposal # 75

Hidden Worlds, Big Learning

Project Description: Describe your project in 100 words or less.

Hidden Worlds, Big Learning will take students on an adventure to the Inner Space Cavern, in Round Rock, TX. Many of our students have never traveled outside of their neighborhood, let alone explored a natural wonder; such as these caves. This experience will bring Earth Science to life in a way that textbooks cannot. Students will learn about rock formations, fossils, and geology while building background knowledge that supports academic success. This trip will spark curiosity, expand their world, and give them an unforgettable learning opportunity that otherwise may never be fulfilled outside of school.

1. Rationale: Create a brief explanation of how the project relates to the funding focus areas of the Waco Education Foundation (creative classroom project, rewards for results, or district initiative). Also address how the project relates to the District and/or Campus Improvement Plans. Why is this project needed for your school and/or the district? Although we do not give grants BASED ON need, we would still like a clear picture of your needs/situation explained.

This project aligns with the Waco Education Foundation's focus on creative experiences by taking learning beyond the four walls of the classroom and giving students a hands-on science exploration that would be impossible to receive at school. It supports both District and Campus Improvement Plans by increasing student engagement, deepening content understanding, and providing equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities.

Our district serves a high population of Title I students, many of whom come from low-income families and have limited opportunities to participate in enrichment experiences such as visiting a cave. While need is not the basis for funding, it is the reality we face; without support, most of our students would never have the opportunity to witness real geological formations or explore the natural wonders that we teach about in the classroom. This project helps close that gap by giving every child—not just those with financial means—a chance to experience science in the real world.

2. **Goals:** Clearly explain what you intend to accomplish, including specific expectations.

The **Hidden Worlds, Big Learning** field trip aims to:

- Strengthen understanding of Earth Science TEKS, including rock formation, soil, fossils, and natural landforms.
- Build background knowledge that improves vocabulary, comprehension, and real-world connections.
- Foster curiosity, critical thinking, and a love of learning through hands-on exploration.
- Provide an enriching experience that broadens students' awareness of the world beyond their community.
- Give students memories and learning moments that spark long-term interest in science.

3. **Plan of Operation:** Write a description of the project, including activities, objectives, strategies, and school/community partners. A detailed timeline/calendar must be included. Specifically describe how parental involvement and/or community involvement will be included in your project.

Project Overview

This field trip will provide 3rd grade students with an immersive learning experience at Inner Space Cavern, focusing on the history and discovery of the caverns. Students will participate in a guided walk on a paved and lit trail to see the largest and most decorated rooms and formations.

Activities & Strategies

- **Duration/Distance:** 1 hour / 1 mile.
- **Starting Point:** Main building pre-call room for a safety briefing.
- **Preparation:** Ensure students use the restroom and tie their shoes before the tour begins.
- **Lighting & Wildlife:** Guides will turn lights on and off to protect bat habitats. Flashing lights serve as a signal for approaching groups.
- **Educational Stops:** Frequent stops will be made to explain various aspects of the cave system.

- **Science Exploration:** Students will focus on hands-on learning about rock formations, geology, soil, and natural landforms
- **Fossils and Historical Learning:** Exploration includes learning about fossils and the history and discovery of the caverns
- **Reflective Learning:** Students will complete observation journals, sketches, and discussions to deepen their understanding.

Objectives

- The students will be able to describe the journey that a water molecule takes on its way into a cave system and how water affects the cave. This will be done through a completion of “The Water Cycle” activity and discussion with their tour guide.
- The students will be able to explain that organisms in an ecosystem are interdependent by observing the conditions of that ecosystem and applying the information collected to the Food Web activity.
- The Students will foster environmental responsibility and appreciation for nature.

School & Community Partners

- **Inner Space Cavern Staff:** Provide guided tours, educational programming, and history and discovery of the caverns.
- **Local Environmental Organizations:** May contribute guest speakers or hands-on activities related to conservation.
- **Parent Volunteers:** Assist with supervision, logistics, and student engagement activities.
- **School Administration & Teachers:** Ensure curriculum alignment and oversee the learning experience.

Parental & Community Involvement

Parents will be invited to participate as chaperones, reinforcing learning through shared experiences with students. After the field trip, students will present their findings to parents and community members through the production of a showcase event.

Timeline

Date	Activity
May – June	Secure funding, confirm park reservations, and begin coordinating with Inner Space Cavern staff and community partners.
August – September	Recruit parent volunteers, finalize transportation logistics, and prepare pre-trip classroom lessons on Earth and Space and Organisms and Environments.
Early October	Conduct pre-visit activity- to prepare students for their visit to Inner Space Cavern or to supplement what they have learned, including lessons on
Mid-October (Field Trip Day)	Students visit Inner Space Cavern, engage in guided activities, and complete observation journals.
Late October – November	Post-visit activity, classroom discussions, student reflections, and a showcase event for parents and community members.

4. **Communication & Dissemination:**

To recognize the Waco Education Foundation's support, we will:

- **Invite Foundation Representatives** – Extend an invitation for Foundation members to attend the field trip, observe activities, and interact with students.
- **Photo & Media Opportunities** – Share photos and highlights from the trip with the Foundation, ensuring proper permissions, for use in newsletters, social media, and promotional materials.
- **Presentation & Acknowledgment** – Offer to present the impact of the grant at a Foundation meeting, showcasing student reflections and learning outcomes.

Dissemination Plans:

- **District & Staff Sharing** – Present key takeaways during staff meetings to encourage future outdoor learning initiatives.
- **WISD-TV & School Media** – Collaborate with district media outlets to feature the field trip, emphasizing its educational impact.
- **Community Showcase** – Host a post-trip event where students share their experiences through presentations, artwork, or writing.

5. **Evaluation:** Describe how the proposed project will be measured to determine if it was successful or effective.

The success of the **Inner Space Cavern** field trip will be measured using both qualitative and quantitative assessments:

1. **Student Reflections and Observation Journals**

Students will complete observation journals both during and after the field experience. Journal entries will document learning related to cave formation, geological processes, fossils, and the natural history of limestone caverns. Reflections will be reviewed for depth of understanding.

- ##### 2. **Teacher & Student Surveys** – Pre- and post-activity surveys will assess students' knowledge related to earth science concepts, including rock

formation, erosion, and natural landforms, engagement, and interest in history, and environmental stewardship. Teachers will provide feedback on curriculum alignment and student engagement.

3. **Classroom-Based Follow-Up Activities and Assessments**

Post-trip instructional activities, including discussions, writing assignments, science projects, and quizzes, will measure knowledge retention and students' ability to apply newly acquired concepts.

4. **Parental and Staff Feedback**

Feedback from parent chaperones and instructional staff will be collected to evaluate the organization, safety, and educational effectiveness of the field trip experience.

5. **Foundation Reporting** – A summary report with student testimonials, photos, and assessment results will be shared with the Waco Education Foundation.

By analyzing these data points, we will determine the extent to which the field trip enhanced student understanding of Earth Science standards, strengthened engagement in STEM learning, and fostered an appreciation for natural geological processes.

6. Long Term Implications: Explain plans for sustaining the project after the 2026-2027 school year, and/or include long-term impact for constituents.

The **Hidden Worlds, Big Learning** field trip will have lasting educational and environmental impact beyond the 2026-2027 school year. The benefits include fostering a deeper connection to nature, carrying forward an appreciation for Science, History, and Conservation. All of these factors will influence their future learning and decision-making.

To sustain this initiative:

- **Annual Field Trips** – We will seek continued funding and community partnerships to make this an annual experience for future 3rd graders.
- **Classroom Integration** – Lessons from the trip will be incorporated into the curriculum, ensuring long-term learning reinforcement.

- **Student Leadership & Mentorship** – Older students who attended the trip can share insights with younger peers, creating a culture of environmental stewardship.
- **Community Engagement** – We will strengthen partnerships with local parks, nature organizations, and historical societies to provide ongoing learning opportunities.

By embedding outdoor learning into our school's culture, we aim to inspire lifelong curiosity, scientific literacy, and environmental responsibility.

7. Key Personnel: List the responsibilities and qualifications of individuals who will carry out the project.

Project Coordinator (Lead Teacher)

- **Responsibilities:** Oversee planning, logistics, and curriculum alignment; coordinate with park staff, school administration, and volunteers; ensure student engagement and safety.
- **Qualifications:** Certified elementary educator with experience in science and history instruction; background in outdoor or experiential learning.

Participating Teachers

- **Responsibilities:** Prepare students with pre-trip lessons, supervise activities, facilitate discussions, and guide post-trip reflections.
- **Qualifications:** Certified elementary teachers with expertise in science, history, or environmental education.

Inner Space Caverns Guide

- **Responsibilities:** Lead guided tour, historical presentations, provide expert knowledge on ecosystems, history, geology, biology, paleontology, and conservation.
- **Qualifications:** Trained cavern guides who are knowledgeable in geology, cave formation, local history, and cave conservation.

Parent & Community Volunteers

- **Responsibilities:** Assist with supervision, student engagement, and logistical support; reinforce learning during activities.
- **Qualifications:** Approved school volunteers with an interest in education and environmental awareness.

School Administration

- **Responsibilities:** Support project implementation, approve logistics, and assist with grant management and reporting.
- **Qualifications:** School principal or instructional coordinator with experience overseeing field-based learning initiatives.

8. Budget and Budget Narrative/Justification:

The funds requested for this project will cover transportation, student admission, and instructional materials connected to the educational visit to Inner Space Cavern. Each expense directly supports student learning and ensures that all students can participate in this experience regardless of financial circumstances.

Transportation: Line 41

District-approved bus transportation will be required to safely transport students and staff to and from the cavern. This cost ensures that all participating students have access to the experience.

Student Admission: Line 40

Admission fees allow students to participate in a guided educational tour led by trained cavern guides. These tours provide hands-on learning about geology, fossils, rock formations, and the natural history of the region, directly supporting grade-level science standards.

Teacher/Chaperone Admission:

Teachers and approved chaperones are necessary to provide supervision and support student learning during the trip. Their presence ensures safety and allows students to fully engage in the experience.

Instructional Materials: Line 7

Supplies such as student journals, reflection sheets, and project materials will be

used before and after the trip to help students record observations, reflect on their learning, and connect their experience to classroom science standards.

First Aid Kits: Line 8

Basic first aid supplies are essential to ensure student safety during the field trip. Kits will include band-aids, antiseptic wipes, gauze, and other minor medical necessities to address any small injuries or insect bites.

For many of our students, opportunities to explore places like Inner Space Caverns are simply not possible outside of school. Our district serves a large population of students who face financial hardships, and experiences like this will help open their eyes to the natural world beyond their community.

This project is not just about a field trip. It is about giving students the chance to see science in action, to ask questions, and to experience something they may remember for the rest of their lives. By providing this opportunity, we hope to inspire curiosity, build confidence, and help students see that learning can extend far beyond the classroom.

Waco Education Foundation				Assigned Proposal #	75	
Grant Budget Form				Project Title:	Hidden Worlds, Big Learning	
				Number of Students Served by Grant:		75
Qty	Budget Item	Verify Vendor (Y or N)	\$ Requested from the WISD Foundation	Other Secured Source	\$ from Other Source (if applicable)	Total Amount
Consumable Supplies						
3	Mini Journals	Y	\$ 83.97			\$ 83.97
7	First Aid Kits	Y	\$ 69.93			\$ 69.93
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Consumable Supplies			\$ 153.90		\$ -	\$ 153.90
Technology						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Technology			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Long-Term Supplies / Equipment (items that will last beyond the grant year)						
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Long-Term Supplies			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Contracted Services						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Contracted Services			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Personnel						
						\$ -
						\$ -
total Personnel			\$ -		\$ -	\$ -
Travel / Other						
75	Inner Space Cavern Entry	N	\$ 750.00			\$ 750.00
2	Bus	Y	\$ 860.00			\$ 860.00

75	Gem Panning	N	\$ 400.00			\$ 400.00
						\$ -
total Other			\$ 2,010.00		\$ -	\$ 2,010.00
Totals		Total Requested from the WISD Foundation	\$ 2,163.90	Foundation Cost Per Student	Total from Other Sources	Total Cost of Project
				\$28.85	\$ -	\$ 2,163.90