



Request for Information Regarding Design and Procurement: Reusables in School Project

The State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality is gathering information to support the design and implementation of a new project, "Reusables in Schools," to promote reusable food serviceware in public schools, tribally-run schools, and public colleges and universities.

Request for Information Purpose

This Request for Information is intended to:

1. Offer the opportunity for all interested entities to provide recommendations on a future DEQ project to help schools shift to reusable food serviceware.
2. Inform DEQ about the interests and qualifications of organizations capable of implementing, or supporting implementation of, this new project. Nonprofit organizations and private sector firms are eligible to develop and implement a contract for a future Reusables in Schools project.

Disclaimer:

- DEQ may or may not issue a Request for Proposal related to the subject matter of this RFI.
- Responses provided to this RFI will be used only for general information purposes and will not be considered binding on any party.
- Prospective contractors do not need to respond to this RFI to participate in any future RFP, nor will responding confer any advantage in a future RFP process.
- Responses provided to this RFI will not impact any future RFP selection process.
- Respondents may reply to any portion of the RFI and are not required to respond to all questions.
- Under no circumstances will DEQ be responsible for any costs and expenses incurred in submitting a response to this RFI.

Background

Material Impact Reduction and Reuse Program (MIRROR)

Under Oregon's [Plastic Pollution and Recycling Modernization Act](#), obligated producers are helping to pay for many necessary improvements to the Oregon recycling system. Producers will also pay fees to fund a new program to reduce the environmental impacts of covered products (packaging, printing and writing paper, and food serviceware) through activities other than waste recovery. The [Material Impact Reduction and Reuse program](#) (MIRROR) will fund environmental impact reduction efforts including but not limited to waste prevention and reuse by catalyzing changes in how packaging, paper, and food serviceware are designed, produced, used, and managed. The program aims to create lasting benefits for our environment, economy, and communities.

2050 Vision and Framework for Action

Establishing the MIRROR program aligns with [Oregon's 2050 Vision and Framework for Action](#), the State's materials management plan that envisions an Oregon where people produce and use materials responsibly, conserve resources, protect the environment, and enhance wellbeing. Adopted in 2012, Oregon's 2050 Vision describes a future where Oregonians live within the limits of their sustainable share of the world's natural resources: materials and products, both made and used in Oregon, support human health, well-being, and healthy, resilient environments and communities.

Reusables in Schools Project

In the first phase of the MIRROR program, DEQ is considering launching a new project to help schools expand the use of reusable food serviceware.

Across Oregon, many schools rely on single-use food serviceware that can strain limited budgets and contribute to broader environmental and human health concerns. Replacing single-use food serviceware with reusables can reduce environmental and human health impacts when certain conditions are met. Some food serviceware products may also contain chemicals of concern that can migrate into food or persist in the environment, raising additional considerations for schools.

Through MIRROR, DEQ is considering an initial investment to help schools adopt reuse systems that reduce environmental impacts. The potential project would prioritize co-benefits such as environmental and human health, cost savings over time, social benefits, waste prevention, and broad access to reusable solutions. The project would aim to help Oregon schools transition from single-use food serviceware to durable, reusable food serviceware systems that reduce environmental impacts while advancing cost-effective and equitable solutions.

Reusable food serviceware and associated equipment can include trays, plates, bowls, cups, utensils, liquid dispensers (aka "steel cows"), dishwashers, racks, baskets, and dollies. Based on early input received from schools and partners, DEQ is considering a contract structure that would emphasize hands-on support and streamlined access to funding to better meet school needs, rather than a competitive grant program.

Proposed Project Purpose, Objectives and Outcomes

The Reusables in Schools project would provide coordinated support to schools to address operational, technical, and financial barriers to adopting reusable alternatives. It would enable schools to plan, pilot, and/or scale reusable food service systems.

Purpose

Through this potential project, DEQ is exploring ways to reduce the environmental impacts associated with single-use food serviceware, lower long-term costs for schools, and build lasting capacity within school districts to sustain reusable systems beyond the project period.

The project would aim to:

- Provide design, outreach, technical assistance, and implementation support tailored to the diverse needs of Oregon schools (for example, differences in size, geography, staffing, and existing infrastructure);
- Advance equitable access to reuse solutions by prioritizing support for under-resourced schools and communities that may face disproportionate barriers to participation; and,

- Support the long-term establishment of reusable food serviceware as a standard practice in school meal programs across Oregon by helping develop durable reuse systems and sharing lessons learned.

Objectives

Through this potential project, DEQ is considering prioritizing the following objectives:

- Help schools plan for, transition to, and sustain reusable food serviceware systems.
- Build long-term capacity within school districts to design, implement and maintain reuse systems, including associated reuse infrastructure.
- Reduce barriers to participation and support equitable access to reuse solutions, particularly for under-resourced schools.
- Facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing between schools, local governments, and reuse and food service providers, including the joint development of guidelines for transitioning to reusable serviceware systems that best meet the needs of students, staff, and schools.
- Build and apply a shared, evidence-based understanding of reusable food serviceware materials, systems, and implementation approaches to reduce environmental and health impacts.

Outcomes

The project would work towards the following expected long-term outcomes:

- Students and staff gain equitable access to affordable, convenient, reusable food service systems.
- Schools replace single-use food serviceware with durable, reusable alternatives.
- Long-term, sustainable reuse infrastructure is established and becomes standard practice in participating school food service operations.
- Schools develop the operational skills, systems, and know-how needed to successfully implement and maintain reuse programs.
- Economic benefits are clearly demonstrated with reduced operational costs for schools over time.
- Collaboration and innovation increase, strengthening partnerships between schools, local governments, and reuse and food service providers.

Scope

Through the Reusables in Schools project, DEQ may support the following types of activities:

- Project development and coordination, including assessing how single use and reusable food serviceware are currently used in Oregon schools.
- Outreach, engagement, and support for participating schools and districts, including technical, operational, and/or planning assistance related to reusable food serviceware systems.
- Capacity-building activities that support long-term adoption and sustainability by schools and their partners (for example, formal and on-the-job training, development of practical tools and guidance, and peer learning).
- Grants (for example, to schools or their partners) to support local implementation. *Note that DEQ will not directly administer grants but may fund eligible entities to do so.*

- Data collection, evaluation, and reporting to monitor project outcomes.
- Equity and inclusion assessments to guide project planning and implementation.

Information Requested

DEQ is interested in feedback and comments on any of the following questions. To allow DEQ to review all responses, we ask that you please keep answers concise.

Questions – General

1. Please provide feedback on DEQ's preliminary project purpose, objectives, outcomes, and activities.
 - Are there key elements missing that should be included?
 - What objectives should DEQ prioritize to ensure this project reduces environmental impacts and delivers meaningful co-benefits (such as human health, social, and economic benefits)?
2. Are there geographic areas or community types that should be considered for targeted support to ensure the project is accessible to all, in line with DEQ's equity goals? Please explain.
3. DEQ is aware of the implementation challenges related to: space and infrastructure limitations, cost of additional staffing and equipment, concerns about loss of reusable serviceware, and alignment with local health codes.
 - What other implementation challenges most commonly arise during a transition to reusable food serviceware in schools?
 - How can this project help schools to manage implementation to reduce risk and disruption?
4. What barriers do under-resourced schools face in adopting reusable food serviceware systems? What project components are most effective in ensuring equitable participation and outcomes? How can DEQ design this project to avoid unintentionally excluding schools with limited administrative or staffing capacity?
5. The Reusables in Schools project is expected to include public K-12 schools as a focus. Other school types - such as private schools, pre-K and Head Start programs, and colleges and universities - often have different governance structures, food service models, and support needs. At the same time, including multiple school types may create efficiencies and other benefits.
 - Based on your experience, which school types should be prioritized for this project?
 - Please explain your rationale, including any key differences across these school types that may affect feasibility, implementation, or impact.
6. DEQ is identifying reusable food serviceware materials that are appropriate for reuse in school settings.
 - Please share any resources that identify specific materials or material attributes that should be discouraged due to documented environmental impacts or health impacts to children.
 - Examples of useful resources include evidence-based research, life cycle assessments, standards, guidance documents, or datasets. Please include citations or links to source materials.

7. Are there any additional considerations, risks, opportunities or lessons learned, based on your experience, that DEQ should be aware of as it designs a potential Reusables in Schools project?
 - This could include factors related to implementation, equity, operations, costs, health or environmental impacts, engagement, or long-term sustainability that are not fully captured in the other questions.

Questions – For organizations qualified to provide services to implement the Reusables in Schools project.

8. What type of organization are you (e.g., nonprofit, consulting firm, private company, etc.)?
 - What roles are you well suited to play in this project?
 - Are there roles your organization is not well suited to fill?
9. What geographic area can your organization effectively serve (e.g. urban, rural, regional, or statewide?)
 - What challenges do you face serving rural communities?
 - What approaches have you found effective for serving rural areas?
 - Are there organizations in the market that are well positioned to serve rural communities and how can DEQ best engage with them?
10. At what scale could your organization reasonably deliver services over a five-year period (for example, number of school districts or schools)?
 - What factors limit or enable that scale?
 - What types of partnerships would expand your organization's reach?
 - Do these partnerships exist or could they be developed?
11. What types of staff skills or expertise are needed to deliver a project like this?
 - How available are those skills in the current labor market?
 - Do organizations typically have these skills in-house or would they need to hire or partner to deliver this work?
12. What types of partnerships (e.g., with food service providers, reuse vendors, nonprofits, local governments) would be necessary or beneficial to deliver this program successfully?
 - What existing partnerships does your organization have that would be beneficial to delivering this program?
 - What partnerships would your organization need to develop?
13. Are there gaps in the current market (for example, skills, geographic coverage, or organizational capacity) that could pose risks to successful implementation of this project? If so, please describe the nature of the gaps and how DEQ should take them into account when designing a future solicitation.
 - What actions, resources, or program features would help your organization submit a strong, competitive proposal for a future RFP for this program? For example, partner networking opportunities, pre-proposal info sessions, templates, or proposal timelines and other elements of the solicitation process.

14. What other information would be useful to DEQ in shaping the Reusables in Schools project and future scope of work?

How to Submit Your Responses

Responses are requested by Friday, April 3, 2026 at 2 p.m. PT.

Responses may be submitted via email as Microsoft Word or PDF documents (with Optical Character Recognition). Please keep responses to a maximum of ten (10) pages, including the cover page. Supporting materials may be included as attachments or hyperlinks. Responses should include the following:

1. Cover page, not to exceed one (1) page, that includes:
 - a. Organization name and address
 - b. Point of contact name, email, and telephone number
2. The questions you are responding to identified by question number, not to exceed nine (9) pages.

Submit all responses **via email only** to:

Roopa Karia

MIRROR Program Coordinator

DEQ Materials Management Product Stewardship Team

mirror@deq.oregon.gov

Once submitted, comments become a public record and cannot be edited or retracted.

Webinar

DEQ will host an informational webinar to provide an overview of the RFI and answer questions from interested organizations. The Q&A will be made available to all respondents and posted on the [MIRROR website](#):

- Tuesday, March 17, 2026 at 10 a.m. PT: [Register](#)

For further information: Visit the [MIRROR website](#) for more information and to sign up for updates and program announcements. MIRROR program contact: Roopa Karia, MIRROR@deq.oregon.gov

Non-discrimination statement

DEQ does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, sex, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status in the administration of its programs and activities. For translations or alternate formats, visit DEQ's [Civil Rights and Environmental Justice page](#).