New York/New Jersey Area
Common Application Form
Cover Sheet

Date of application: July 29, 2026

Name of organization to which grant would be paid. Please list exact legal name:
Christodora, Inc.

Purpose of grant (one sentence): Program support for Christodora's Community of Rising Environmentalists Program.

Address of organization: 1 East 53rd Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY, 10022.

Telephone number: 212-371-5225.Fax: Click here to enter text.E-mail: development@christodora.org

Executive director: Salma Muro

Contact person and title (if not executive director): Alexis Sanborn

Is your organization an IRS 501(c) (3) not-for-profit?: Yes X or No ☐

If no, please explain: Click here to enter text.

Grant request: $15,000

Check one (based on the organization's priorities and the funder's guidelines):

General support ☐

Project support X

Total organizational budget (for current year): $2,385,399.

Dates covered by this budget (mo/day/year): January 1, 2026 - December 31, 2026

Total project budget (if requesting project support):$228,996

Dates covered by project budget (mo/day/year): 09/01/2026 - 08/01/2027

Project name (if applicable): Community of Rising Environmentalists

Christodora Grant Proposal
To the Vidda Foundation
2026

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

Christodora is applying for a $15,000 grant from the Vidda Foundation to support our Community of Rising Environmentalists (CORE) program. This funding will cover operating expenses for a stewardship and leadership initiative for NYC middle and high school students. The program provides students with opportunities to build community, develop leadership, and engage in hands-on projects that benefit their city. We are requesting this grant because we have invested in staff training, increased student stipends, and dedicated more resources to grow CORE. Our efforts are successful, and the program is thriving. The $15,000 will help support students, staff, professional development, and rising fixed costs.

BACKGROUND

About Christodora

Christodora was founded in 1897 as a settlement house on the Lower East Side, initially helping immigrants, especially women, with housing, education, and self-sufficiency. As Christodora grew, it expanded its services to women and children, including youth programs, workforce training, and housing. In the 1910s, it offered outdoor education and camps for NYC students to explore nature and discover their potential. In the 1980s, the focus shifted to youth development, with the acquisition of land in the Berkshires to establish a nature education center featuring science, workforce programs, and junior jobs. In 2026, with board approval, we refreshed our mission to help it better reflect who we are and what our students experience. Our new mission is: “Christodora provides adventurous, nature-based learning experiences that stimulate curiosity and love of learning for underserved New York City students. Our programs empower young people with the confidence and character to help them to advance creatively in their future education, careers, and leadership.” Today, approximately 2,300 NYC teens participate in Christodora programs through NYC DOE schools, parks, and the Manice Education Center in Massachusetts, located in a protected 10,000-acre forest. These programs, which mainly support middle schoolers and many who continue into high school, foster knowledge and skills.

Our Community

Christodora primarily serves under-resourced neighborhoods and families, especially in the Bronx. About 80% of students annually come from economically disadvantaged communities, with 45% of summer program students in 2024 earning $45,000 or less. Programs like ours, rich in enrichment and nature-based learning, are often unavailable in public schools or near students' homes, due to barriers such as limited outdoor access. Christodora aims to remove these barriers through sliding-scale

discounts, scholarships, stipends, and logistical support such as transportation and gear. In 2024, 45% of summer students come from households with multiple children and incomes under $45,000. Demographics include 24% Black, 36% Hispanic, 12% Multiracial, 5% Asian, 3% White, 1% Indigenous, and 19% other.

The students we serve come from communities with systemic barriers to environmental access. They also live in the communities affected by climate change. For example, 40% of all our students come from the Bronx, the borough with the worst air pollution in the city. The Bronx also consistently has the city's highest Heat Vulnerability Scores (HVI) at level 4 or 5. This HVI score is due to a lack of investment in heat-absorbing green spaces or understory cover within the inner city infrastructure.[1] Our programs help students understand the factors contributing to these issues and learn how the environment can play an essential role in improving them.

Christodora has a long-standing track record of serving our students by fostering relationships with schools, families, and city parks. We partner with schools to provide in-class ecology lessons and organize field trips to our Massachusetts-based nature education center, helping students connect with nature close to home. With decades of experience working with families, we are a trusted organization; our staff regularly communicate with parents, share photos, and supervise children during activities. Additionally, we have maintained a strong partnership with NYC parks since the early 1990s. As a small, agile organization, we can quickly adapt and support park stewardship and maintenance efforts in ways larger groups may not.

Our Long-term Impact

Christodora programs offer students valuable experiences and enhance their college prospects through hands-on learning opportunities. Many alumni stay engaged, supporting current students. Over the years, a vibrant alumni community has formed, remaining involved decades after graduation. A recent survey of 1989-2016 graduates asked about their involvement and lasting impacts.

- 82% of Alumni say Christodora programs influenced their careers.
- 88% agree it offered a positive peer group.
- 91% say it built leadership and teamwork skills used in their careers.
- 94% agree it provided positive activities not otherwise available.

Significance

One of the goals of our work, which blends youth development and environmental education, is to foster the next generation of leaders. The students we serve come from communities with systemic barriers to environmental access. National studies repeatedly find that young people are interested in the environment; however, forming a deeper connection with nature is inequitable due to systemic barriers to access. Studies corroborate that natural experiences are critical for young people to thrive, finding that children experience improved health and cognitive functions, reduced stress, and enhanced social skills.[2] Young people who spend more time in nature tend to perform better on standardized tests, demonstrate more enthusiasm toward school, and have fewer attendance problems.[3] Christodora helps bridge “the nature gap” by providing low-income students access to nature.

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[1]Environmental and Health Data Portal, Interactive Heat Vulnerability Index, https://a816-dohbesp.nyc.gov/IndicatorPublic/beta/key-topics/climatehealth/hvi/, accessed November 2023.

[2]Wells, N. M. (2000). At Home with Nature: Effects of “Greenness” on Children’s Cognitive Functioning. Environment and Behavior, 32(6), 775-795. https://doi.org/10.1177/00139160021972793

[3] Wells, et. al.

Program Overview

Christodora programs are accessible through NYC DOE Schools, NYC Parks, our wilderness camp in Savoy Mountain State Forest, Massachusetts, and various outdoor program partners. In 2024-2025, over 2,300 students participated. A dedicated group of middle and high school students regularly returns, some progressing to college-level involvement. For instance, the CORE program boasts a 60% return rate, and our Manice summer programs have similar statistics, with half of the summer staff being alumni. Christodora provides a community where young people engage in transformative learning in environmental sciences, gaining skills that can foster careers in science and education. All students develop strong leadership qualities and enjoy joyful, rigorous learning experiences that set the stage for a promising future.

- **Winter Ecology Program:** The WEP reaches approximately 1,900 DOE students annually through partnerships with 20+ middle schools, from November to April over 7 weeks. Schools select curricula aligned with NYS standards, covering themes such as Earth Systems, Plant Life, and Animal Life. Lessons, delivered by trained staff, are fun and interactive, with hands-on activities.
- **Community of Rising Environmentalists (CORE):** This program offers 96 hours of science and environmental training over two semesters to 20-40 students, many of whom join from WEP. Students meet weekly for 12 weeks, working on environmental projects in NYC parks, developing research and presentation skills while earning stipends and volunteer hours.
- **Manice Education Center Overnight Field Trips:** Located in Savoy Mountain State Forest, MA, the MEC hosts NYC school trips for 40 students over three days, offering immersion in nature—including camping, canoeing, and wildlife observation—and leadership-skill training. Staff handles all logistics and instruction.
- **Manice Education Center Summer Camp:** Each summer, 4–5 groups of 40 students spend 5–14 days at MEC, engaging in camping, canoeing, and environmental lessons. With a 1:7 staff-to-student ratio, the camp promotes close connections and leadership development. In summer 2024, 148 students participated.

Recent Accomplishments

- An increase from 30 to 50 students in our Saturday stewardship/leadership program, CORE.
- Our most notable accomplishment of 2025-26 was the creation of a four-year CORE curriculum, supported by $25,000 in funding from the William T. Grant Foundation.
- MEC and CORE staff received more training in art and nature by guest teaching artists, along with additional professional development.
- Piloting a new aspect of the CORE program, “Science Research and Mentoring,” where a CORE student partners with a professor to participate in a year-long research project.

Organizational Structure

Programs are overseen by the Vice President of Programs and include urban programs (Community of Rising Environmentalists (CORE), Science Research Mentoring, and Winter Ecology Program (WEP)) and country programs (Manice Education Center in the Berkshires). The urban team comprises a city program director and an outreach coordinator, who are responsible for CORE implementation and Manice recruitment. The city director also oversees a 4-person team of environmental educators for the Winter Ecology Program. The Manice Education Center, our camp in the Berkshires, is run by our director, with support from an office administrator, an assistant director, and grounds/maintenance staff. Every summer, seasonal educators are hired, some of whom become WEP educators. Our development and finance managers handle grants, fundraising, and administrative activities. The organization is

governed by a 23-person board and committees, including development, program, nominating and governance, risk management, and finance.

Partnerships
Christodora was founded as a settlement house, a community-based organization that thrived on partnerships throughout New York City. We maintain this spirit of collaboration across all our programs: in our school-based Winter Ecology Program, we have maintained relationships with schools for 20 years, as well as with many individual teachers who have taken their students on field trips to Manice, regardless of their school of residence. The CORE program is built on partnerships - first with the New York Botanical Garden, and now, post-COVID, across the city with local parks, green space partners, and non-profits. Every year, we add new organizations we work with, and we continue to deepen trust and understanding with our current partners. We continue to build partnerships in new ways, too, like:

- Raking our students to the Mianus River Gorge every year to help support old-growth hemlock forests
- Making connections with a university to launch a science research mentoring program
- Collaborating with museums to take our students to discover “art and nature”
- Visit a farm down the road from our environmental education center to help with the harvest.

A diversity of partnerships, just like a diverse ecosystem, is vital to our sustainability.

FUNDING REQUEST
A grant from the Vidda Foundation would fund staff and student stipends for our Saturday program, Community of Rising Environmentalists (CORE), serving middle and high school students in NYC. The program emphasizes community, science research, leadership, and stewardship. Founded in 2001 and hosted for years at the New York Botanical Gardens, CORE became a mobile initiative after the pandemic, visiting various parks across the city. From 2021 to 2026, students have participated in enrichment activities in stewardship, science, and ecology in our city's green spaces. Since 2024, the program's popularity has grown, with over 50 students enrolled each semester and an average of 40 attending on Saturdays. Students earn a stipend based on their attendance, and recent years have shown a marked increase in attendance and engagement.

Support from the Vidda Foundation will help us to pilot our new curriculum, the development of which was one of our goals in the previous year. The new CORE curriculum has been in development over the past year, thanks to support from the Vidda Foundation and the William T. Grant Foundation. The dynamic curriculum follows a four-year cycle, ensuring that students who participate in CORE for up to four years will have new content and experiences each year. We look forward to celebrating, learning about, and supporting NYC green spaces as part of this curriculum. The learning domains across all four years will include: Environmental Literacy: understanding ecological systems and human impact; Cultural Relevance: connecting environmental issues to local communities and identities; Career Awareness: exposure to green jobs and mentorship; 21st-Century Skills: collaboration, problem-solving, communication; Stewardship & Action: service projects and civic engagement. The four-year track includes:

- Year 1: Water in the City (Watersheds, water cycle, NYC water system, marine ecosystems, stormwater management, citizen science)
- Year 2: Plants and their Ecosystems (Urban ecology, native vs. invasive species, pollinators, green spaces, community gardens)

- Year 3: Citizens of a Resilient City (Climate change impacts, urban design, biodiversity, waste systems, transportation)
- Year 4: Sustainability and Green Workforce Development (Environmental justice, green tech, workforce skills, mentorship, Green jobs, renewable energy, leadership, student-led projects)

The past five years we have spent building green-space partnerships across the city have laid the foundation for this expansive vision. The program will be supported by the Christodora staff, including our outreach coordinator Milena Mojica. As part of CORE, 2-3 part-time staff members will assist Milena in implementing the program. In the 2026-2027 season, we are also introducing a student intern position to help support our growing program and the administration and documentation of CORE. Additionally, our Vice President of Programs, Jake Kreuzer, oversees our urban programs (WEP, CORE) and Manice operations, forging relationships with new partners. Jaret Gonzalez, who led CORE/NYC for many years, serves as urban program manager and will oversee Milena and the curriculum. Alexis Sanborn, our development and communications director, helps CORE by securing new partnerships and opportunities and coordinating with the board to schedule public volunteer days with the CORE team. Salma Muro, our executive director, supervises the entire New York City team. We also have additional program staff at the Manice Education Center. Overall, we have 8 full-time staff across city and country programs, with up to 30 seasonal or part-time staff depending on the time of year.

Sustainability
Much of our support comes from individuals and private foundations. Across our programs, our local school partners may face cuts, which could have downstream impacts on our work. Our Winter Ecology Program and Field Trip Program may have fewer schools enrolled than in previous years. Thus far, we have not had any immediate impact on our budget and funding, and we do not anticipate this year.

EVALUATION
CORE is evaluated through various methods during the program and at the end of each semester, including formal reflection. Every Saturday, students gather in a raccoon circle to reflect on that day's activities, teamwork, favorite moments, and areas for improvement. At semester's close, students collaborate on presentations that summarize their learning, celebrate achievements, and share environmental observations. Additionally, as part of NYC activities, we informally assess students' social-emotional learning (SEL). As students grow to trust and embrace the Christodora experience, they encounter SEL opportunities that foster confidence and social-emotional development. Once termed “soft skills,” SEL is now recognized as a key predictor of young people's success, especially post-COVID. Monitoring growth in social-emotional skills reveals developmental progress in resilience, determination, teamwork, and connecting with nature.

CONCLUSION:
Christodora programs foster leadership and curiosity, helping youth build the essential skills and knowledge they need to thrive. Funding from the Vidda Foundation would support opportunities for NYC youth to learn, grow, and prepare for the workforce. With help from the Christodora team, we guide young people in navigating less accessible pathways, offering personalized care in a supportive learning environment. Thank you for your support of our work.