How will we engage the community in our program and plan for its longevity?

What kind of curricular content will support this program?

What do we have and what do we still need to implement this program?

What kind of program can meet the EE needs of this community?

These community based EE guidelines were inspired by Cornell’s Civic Ecology Lab’s Environmental Education in Urban Communities fall 2012 course, as well as NAAEE’s Nonformal EE Guidelines. Our guidelines are inquiry based and challenge those interested in creating an EE program to consider the context within which their program is nested within as well as strategies for developing organizational logistics, thoughtful content, teaching practices and procedures for their EE program’s continued success. These guidelines were written with a broad audience in mind, for both the novice, grass-roots community organizer not familiar with the EE field, as well as the seasoned EE program coordinator looking for tools to evaluate and expand an existing program.
What kind of program can meet the EE needs of this community?

One of the first steps to creating an excellent environmental education program is identifying environmental issues that impact the community. You can gather this information through conducting an environmental assessment, focusing on community cultural, natural and human-made factors.

Key Questions to Identify EE Needs In the Community

- How healthy or accessible is the natural environment surrounding this community?
- What role does the environment currently play for this community?
- Are there existing and known environmental issues that the community is already trying to address?
- What important environmental issues in this community could you successfully address?
- Why is this environmental issue important?
- What kind of behavior change could improve the quality of the environment?
- If these potential environmental solutions are such good ideas, why aren’t people already implementing them?
- What cultural or economic factors are present within this community that could affect an EE program?

The purpose of asking these questions is to understand how environmental education and issues are related to the community at hand, what the community’s situation is like and how community needs are addressed. Doing some kind of community assessment is very important because it helps to strategize what kind of EE program will be most successful within an existing context.

Creating a Program Based on Community Needs

- Identify environmental issues that EE program will address using an environmental assessment, that considers economic, cultural and ecological factors.
- Are there existing EE programs that are already addressing these environmental issues?
- Involve community members from the formation throughout the implementation of the EE program. This ensures that the EE project/program will continue to be relevant to the community.
- Continue strategizing your EE program’s development around issues that have been identified as priorities.
- As an educator, align your teaching with what the community has to offer. Consider their strength, knowledge and skills as tools to solve the issues that concern the community.
- Remember to consider, who in the community can help. Who are the community leaders? Fully involve them in program’s process. This will increase your relevancy to other community members and increase the possibility that they will continue the program if you depart.
- Remember EE cannot address all the issues at once!

Suggested Resources:
- My Environmental Education Evaluation Resource Assistant http://www.meera.snre.umich.edu
- National Science Foundation http://www.nsf.gov/ehr/rec/eval_of_projects.jsp
- Online Evaluation Resource Library http://www.oerl.sri.com
- Outdoor Education Research and Evaluation Center http://www.wilderdom.com/evaluation.html
- Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative www.peecworks.org/PEEC/PEEC_Inst/S006D6299
- The Evaluation Center Western Michigan University http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists
- NYRP: What’s Good in My Hood workbook http://www.nyrp.org/Kids_Parents_TeachersWhats_Good_In_My_Hood_
What do we have and what do we still need to implement this program?

Once you’ve identified the need in your community, the next step is finding out what resources you currently have and what resources you need to acquire to develop the program.

For **pre-existing organizations** considering creating new programs, the following considerations are recommended:

- Make sure the program is consistent with your organization’s mission and goals.
- Determine whether your organization is the best organization to offer this new program. If not, are there other organizations in the community that are better equipped to do so? Or does it make more sense to offer the program in partnership with another group?
- Conduct an inventory of your organization’s resources and additional resources needed for the program. Do you have the resources needed? If not, how are you going to attain these resources?

For **individuals and groups that form in response to a need** for environmental education in their community, this step helps you determine your capacity for offering a new program. Below are a list of questions to help in your planning process:

- What is the philosophy or mission of your team and this program?
- What are your goals for the program?
- Who is the team that is going to offer this program?
- How are you going to fund it; or is it run with volunteers and in-kind donations?
- What resources do you have and which do you need, e.g. physical space, venue, site, personnel, equipment, transportation, data management tools, materials, etc?
- How will you go about getting the resources you still need?

**Suggested Resources**

For developing **mission statements**:
- The Foundation Center
  [http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/establish/statements.html](http://foundationcenter.org/getstarted/tutorials/establish/statements.html)
- Idealist.org
  [http://www.idealist.org/info/Nonprofits/Gov1](http://www.idealist.org/info/Nonprofits/Gov1)

For developing **programmatic goals and objectives** (Remember to make your goals SMART -- Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound):
- University of North Florida
- Kansas State’s Department of Education:

For developing **resource list**:
- University of Wisconsin’s Situational Analysis
  [http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/progdev/sitanalysis.html](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/progdev/sitanalysis.html)
- Create the Future’s Assessment and Benchmarking toolkit:
  [http://www.createthefuture.com/CBtoolkit.htm](http://www.createthefuture.com/CBtoolkit.htm)

People Power

When faced with budget constraints that limited personnel expansion, The Watershed Project (Richmond, CA) utilized a resource that was readily available to them -- volunteers. They developed a robust internship program, which recruited talented undergraduates, graduates, and beginning professionals. With these additional volunteers, the organization was able to expand their environmental education program activities, as well as increase their operational capacity.
What kind of curricular content will support this program?

Once your EE program has an organizational structure that addresses community needs and available resources, the next step is to develop a relevant curriculum based on goals identified by program colleagues, partners and stakeholders.

**Things to Consider**

- What age group am I working with?
- What are the main ideas and skills I am trying to teach?
- How long do I have with program participants, both in individual classes and the length of the entire program?
- Can I organize what I’m trying to teach into themes or topics?
- What can the space I’m teaching in offer?
- Remember to consider who in the community can help. Who are the community leaders?

**Best Teaching Practices for EE Curriculum Content**

- Hands-on
- Place based
- Inquiry or project based
- Connected to participants lives and their communities
- Successful in providing outlets for action from increased knowledge of environment

Here are some great examples of in-depth and successful curriculum that could be adapted into your EE program

- **Project Learning Tree**
  
  http://www.plt.org/

  Project Learning Tree (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation that uses the forest as a window on the world, engaging the next generation of America’s thought-leaders and decision makers. They provide educators with peer-reviewed, award-winning environmental education curriculum resources that can be integrated into lesson plans for all grades and subject areas.

- **Foxfire Project**
  

  This curriculum honors the multicultural community base, connecting ethnic and elder elements of the community through cultural journalism and service learning projects.

- **Drew Gardens - Bronx, New York**
  
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4b4View0k6s&feature=youtu.be

  Curriculum that helps students, families and their communities understand, interact with and support school and community gardens, local farms and food systems.

- **Rocking the Boat, Oyster Restoration Project**
  
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M12tfjImRIU&feature=youtu.be

  This curriculum allows students to engage with the environment through local stewardship experiences, one example being restoration work.

- **Project Wet**
  
  http://www.projectwet.org/

  Project Wet promotes awareness of water resources empowering students to take action in their communities to help solve local water-resource issues. It provides training workshops on diverse water topics (watersheds, water quality, water conservation), organizing community water events, such as Water Festivals and publishes water resource materials.
How will we engage the community in our program and plan for its longevity?

Once your content has been developed, the next step is to reach out to potential EE program participants and encourage sustainable partnerships with the community. The goal is to build bridges between generations, socioeconomic levels, and cultures, create a sense of 'ownership' within the community and tap into new forms of financial support and community resources.

**Reaching out to Potential EE Participants**

With your EE program now developed enough to begin, consider these questions as you plan to offer it to your community:

- How are we going to gather participants for this program?
- What is a diversified marketing strategy that will get the word out?
- When is the best time to run this program? Are there any conflicting times/dates that might affect attendance to our program? Are there any other similar EE programs going on at our scheduled time in the community that could compete for attendance?

Some suggested tips for reaching potential EE program participants:

- Creating fliers, placing them in community shops or attending community events to hand them out.
- Holding a community event to help people know what your organization is about and get them excited to participate in a program.
- Using varied communication channels: an online newsletter, email groups, community meetings, having a blog, etc.

**Reaching out to Community Partners and Stakeholders**

Once you have enough community support to actually get people to come and engage in your program, think about ways to further embed your program within the community through making partnerships that will ensure its continued success.

- Identify and reach out to potential partners that reflect the diversity and culture of the local community.
- Identify common goals of the community partners.
- Assess which resources, such as financial, staff assistance, or materials, the partner can support you with.

Some suggested tips for creating community:

- Take field trips to local watershed associations, community gardens and food co-ops to build relationships.
- Invite a guest educator from the community to share a local story, skill or resource.
- Host a multi-ethnic community food festival in partnership with other community organizations and businesses.
- Partner with local schools, businesses and civic groups to develop an interconnected EE Program that connects with and serves the entire community.
Community Environmental Education: Guidelines for Excellence

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Introduction

The following guidelines for Community Environmental Education were compiled by Team 3 of the Environmental Education in Urban Communities course. The team used Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence as a guide and is recommended for educators working with an urban community. The goal of these guidelines are to assist instructors in building a foundation for excellence in environmental education.

Key Characteristic 1: Organization

Guideline 1.1: Program Quality

Look for:

- Identify core mission, standards, and educational framework that informs the institution’s goals and objectives
- Transparency: Responsible and held accountable for fostering an empowering work and learning environment for staff, participants, community members, and ecosystem
- Effective sharing of goals and objectives with not only staff members, but with community members and participants as well

Guideline 1.2: Relevancy

Look for:
- Diversity: Commitment to engage diverse groups and communities to engage in EE and create an inclusive learning environment for all parties involved
- Reach and Influence: Identified populations served to inform organization’s social and environmental responsibilities to these communities
- Provides continuing professional and personal growth opportunities beyond program's duration to participants, staff, and community

**Organization Highlight:**

**4-H Camp Ohio Youth Education Center - St. Louisville, OH**

The 4-H Camp Ohio Youth Education Center is nestled along the Rocky Fork Stream approximately ten miles east of Utica, Ohio. It is situated on more than 500 acres in the beautiful rolling hills of of Northern Licking County, Ohio. Approximately 10,000 youth camp here annually. These youth are primarily from 4-H and school groups. In addition, 4-H Camp Ohio provides a wonderful retreat and workshop setting for civic organizations, businesses, scout groups, family reunions, and others. The program goals of this camp encourages leadership skills, cognitive, physical, emotional and social youth development.

**Key Characteristic 2: Community Assessment**

**Guideline 2.1: Meets Needs of Target Audience**

Look for:

- Buy-in from community groups: Work with when designing program to ensure that community needs are met.
- Program participants are identified
- If programming is at a specific location (ex.nature center, zoo, public park), transportation is available.

**Guideline 2.2: Assess Community Resources**

Look for:

- Identify local parks, green spaces, refuges, zoos, aquariums, and nature centers where programs can occur.
- Obtain permission to use these green spaces if it is required
- Identify potential neighborhood and community partners
Organization Highlight:

Delaware Nature Society - Wilmington, DE

The Delaware Nature society has organized a community advisory committee for the DuPont Environmental Education Center in Wilmington, DE. Residents from a variety of community groups, as well as residents, take part in the development of programs at this urban nature center. Program partners are often identified before a new program is created or marketed. The direct contact with community members ensures that the needs of the community are being met.

Key Characteristic 3: Program & Curriculum

Guideline 3.1: Placed-based Programming

Look for:

- Program highlights local issues and are taught by members of the community.
- Case studies, peer stories, community leaders are utilized when appropriate to include the cultural context of the community

Guideline 3.2: Balance of Teaching Goodness and Science-inquiry

Look for:

- Activities are hands-on, exciting, and exploratory.
- Programming connects to what students are learning in the classroom and provides a real-world connection to classroom lessons.
- Science, language arts, and math state standards are used when writing curriculum.
- Programming is age-appropriate.
- Multiple learning styles are addressed.
- Student expectations are clearly expressed
- Students are given a say in what they learn

Guideline 3.3: Resources Available

Look for:

- Program utilizes local parks, gardens, or other natural areas
- Teacher/student ratio low
- Longer term projects with the same group of students

Organization Highlight:

Bensinger, Castellanos, Fulcar, Jackson, Lawson, & Vallejos 3
A series of 4 programs (2 outreach programs and 2 field studies) were created for several local after school organizations in the city of Wilmington, DE. The first outreach focused on urban wildlife: “Nature in Your Neighborhood” and was followed by “Animals of the Marsh”. Students then visited the Russell W. Peterson Urban Wildlife Refuge for 2 hands-on field studies: “Marshy Adventures”, a biodiversity study and “Fantastic Fish,” an anatomy and fish survey of a marsh pond. The program was placed-based, hands on, exploratory, and age appropriate.

**Key Characteristic 4: Staff**

**Guideline 4.1: Properly Trained**

Look for:

- Hold comprehensive staff training sessions
- Create clear program objectives and goals.
- Encourage staff to remain up to date on current community needs
- Encourage staff to remain up to date on current Environmental Education trends, practices, and research.

**Guideline 4.2: Cultural Competency**

Look for:

- Staff members that are familiar with the community demographics
Staff members that are familiar with community needs to help create effective programming.

- Language translators provided when needed
- Staff members that are flexible and willing to continually adapt their programs to meet the needs of their audience.
- Make curriculum relevant to the experiences of the identified audience.

Guideline 4.3: On-going Professional Opportunities

Look for:

- Collaboration opportunities between supporting organizations
- Create clear program goals and objectives
- Update and modify programming when necessary
- Support staff interest in professional development workshops and other opportunities related to their Environmental Education programming.

Organization Highlight:

*Rosamond Gifford Zoo - Syracuse, NY: Animal ABC’s Family Literacy program*

Animal ABC’s is a family animal themed literacy program that was created in collaboration with the Literacy Coalition of Onondaga County in Syracuse, NY. The Literacy Coalition designated two zip codes in the city of Syracuse, NY as areas of high need for literacy skill building programs to increase kindergarten readiness. The program occurs once per month at a local public library in each designated zip code. This enables the program to be more accessible to the participants it is aimed to serve. Many participants are able to walk to the program instead of needing to find transportation to the zoo itself. The Rosamond Gifford Zoo also collaborated with a variety of social service agencies including a local refugee agency to advertise this program. After several programs the zoo staff noticed that many of the program participants were Burmese refugee families with limited English speaking skills. In order to ensure that all participants were benefiting from the program content the zoo now hires a Burmese interpreter to assist with participant sign in, content translation, and story translation. This unique demographic attends these programs regularly and comprise the majority of program participants. It was determined that translation services have been fundamental in the success of these literacy programs.
Key Characteristic 5: Student

Guideline 5.1: Student-centered Learning

Look for:

- Program topics are derived from observed student interests
- Inquiry based programming
- Foster interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to guide students to their own exploration of issues
- Encourage hands-on, experiential exploration and learning
- Make use of instructional materials such as visual, audio, and tactile items to complement program topics

Guideline 5.2: Transference

Look for:

- Encourage exploration of local neighborhoods when possible
- Utilize free-play in local green spaces
- Provide opportunities for students to explore and learn with family members

Guideline 5.3: Student Empowerment

Look for:

- Make students aware of simple steps for community improvement
- Promote student participation in community projects
- Provide opportunities for young people to develop the competencies they need to become successful, contributing members for their communities
- Allow students to be able to honestly express their opinions
- Students and community members should be able to experience and exercise power

**Organization Highlight:**

*Buffalo Zoo - Buffalo, NY: Science Magnet School Program*

This program provides animal/zoo instruction to students of an early childhood center (Pre-K through 2nd grade) within the city of Buffalo, NY. An employee from the Buffalo Zoo travels to the school throughout the school year, conducting an average of 25 instructional periods for each classroom. Students participate in a wide variety of activities, including Powerpoint presentations, viewing of videos, books, games, scientific experiments, etc. An outdoor courtyard (NWF Certified Wildlife Habitat), which is adjacent to the classroom, is often utilized for learning opportunities as well. Topics for investigation vary based on the interests of individual classrooms, which are assessed at the beginning of the school year. The program is centered around the project approach to education, and students choose their own learning paths, and decide for themselves the best way to represent the knowledge they have acquired. Each instructional period includes an interactive live animal experience, in which students encounter small animals from the education department of the Buffalo Zoo. Also, each classroom is allowed several field trips to the zoo throughout the school year. The mix of experiential and instructional teaching methods, along with the student-centered nature of the program, lead to enthusiastic student participation and the development of more positive attitudes about the environment.

**Key Characteristic 6: Evaluation**

*Guideline 6.1: Reflective Measurable Outcomes*

**Look for:**

- Identify program’s desired goals and outcomes and formulate a thoughtful evaluation to measure success
- Apply qualitative and quantitative evaluations to map improvement strategies based on program-specific data
- Utilize peer-coaching, mentor relationships, program evaluations, self-assessments, and student assessments to ensure a thoughtful and meaningful learning and work environment

*Guideline 6.2: Program Effectiveness and Resilience*
Look for:

- Resiliency: Implement introspective assessments to create a cogent program that is able to adapt and thereby thrive as an institution
- Assess program outcomes internally within the organization and externally throughout the populations served
- Deliver program that is relevant to participant’s perspective in order to foster an effective and intentional learning environment
- Can the program’s scope extend beyond its immediate learning environment to foster students to continue to explore and be empowered to approach interpersonal, local, and global issues?

**Organization Highlight:**

*NatureBridge - Yosemite, CA: Residential EE Program*

After six months of employment, NatureBridge in Yosemite requires field science educators (FSE) to complete a self-evaluation for a full day of instruction to indicate room for improvements and strengths. Below is the rubric for FSE performance.

A. Professionalism & Diplomacy

B. Knowledge Base & General Teaching Skills

C. Group Management

D. Types of Instruction:
   
   i. Thematic Teaching
   
   ii. Student-Centered
   
   iii. Inter-disciplinary
   
   iv. Inquiry-based Learning
   
   v. Critical Thinking

E. Assessing Student Learning

F. Transference/Relevance to Community

G. Risk Management

H. Overall strenghts

I. For Improvement
Community Environmental Education

supports communities in achieving social and environmental goals, serving as an asset that helps develop community capacity and leadership, health/wellness, awareness, and public participation.

A distinguishing characteristic is emphasis on collaborative goal-setting within the community; Community EE addresses shared community goals and its success is measured in terms of the community’s needs and expectations. Community EE practitioners view themselves as part of a larger constellation of community programs, leaders, and constituencies that work toward collaborative impact to improve quality of life.

Community EE is “underpinned by an environmental education framework aimed at educating communities and empowering them with the skills, values, knowledge, and awareness to critically assess and take action over local environment issues” (Blair, 2008), and it must ensure the community has a robust voice in decision-making and democratic processes, as well as in promoting environmental justice.

The Community Environmental Education Guidelines presented here are intended to complement the NAAEE’s series of guidelines for environmental educators. Community EE programs are a form of nonformal environmental education, and therefore many of the key indicators listed in the Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence apply. However, the nonformal EE guidelines are more applicable to established programs with parent organizations that already have defined missions, goals, and objectives. Programs such as these find opportunities to provide their educational curriculum in appropriate venues, such as schools and neighborhood forums. In Community EE, the participants identify what the problem is and agree on what the shared mission, goals, and objectives will be. The participants also determine the process of resolution and operating principles they will follow. Thus, the Community EE guidelines below reflect the unique nature of Community EE and the key themes Community EE should emphasize.
Community environmental education begins with identification of community assets and can build on these to address needs. In approaching environmental issues, there can be a tendency to focus on what is wrong; however, every community has strengths and assets that are important to recognize in order to motivate members to participate, to capitalize on key resources, to avoid reinventing the wheel, and to increase potential for sustaining the program as well as to contribute to a more resilient community.

What to look for:

1.1 Building on community assets
Does the program recognize natural, social, cultural, and economic assets of the community? Does the program identify existing community leaders to contribute and serve as role models? Does it tap into local knowledge, values, and energy?

1.2 Addressing community needs
Does the program have a process for soliciting input on and prioritizing community needs? Does it address issues and topics that are relevant and important to community members?

1.3 Fostering inclusivity
Does the program explicitly state and demonstrate a celebration of and respect for diversity? Does it seek to include program staff, volunteers, and adult and youth participants who reflect the diversity of the community?

1.4 Nurturing partnerships
Does the program partner with community businesses, agencies, organizations, and individuals to share in their expertise, energy, resources, and facilities? Do partners have shared goals and values? Do partners complement one another to expand the reach of the program and to support and sustain it?

1.5 Representing the authentic voice of the community
Is the authentic community voice reflected in community engagement, ownership and ongoing commitment? Does the program utilize an iterative process of asset and needs assessment, as well as other characteristics mentioned above, such as inclusivity and partnerships, to foster the expression of this authentic voice?

See Sherry R. Arnstein’s “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” for more on levels of involvement
Community environmental education provides participants with meaningful opportunities for civic engagement. An environmental education program designed to benefit an entire community serves as a catalyst of community capacity in the arena of environmental action. Its structure and programs provide community members with knowledge, skills, and support to take an active role in civic dialogue and decision-making around environmental issues that affect the community.

What to look for:

2.1 Developing civic engagement skills
Does the program introduce participants to key civic skills such as organizing, planning, and communicating with diverse groups? Does the program involve participants in authentic projects in which they can practice these skills in the context of real community issues?

2.2 Supporting collaborative action
Does the program encourage participants to identify issues of concern and determine a course of action as a group? Does it support them to work to influence decision-making on these issues?

2.3 Building leadership capacity
Does the program help community members to take a leadership role in the dialogue and decision-making process around environmental issues? Does it organize service learning, career exploration, and leadership training activities to foster effective, ongoing involvement from within the community?

2.4 Creating empowerment and longevity
Do program participants take on leadership roles in the program as they gain knowledge and skills? As the program becomes well established, does the community have the capacity and desire to sustain its operations well into the future?

Community EE In Action

Urban Ecology Center: Milwaukee, WI

The Urban Ecology Center began with a community of concerned neighbors who wanted to take back their neighborhood park and make it safe again. Riverside Park, which had been neglected for years, had become crime ridden, full of litter and invasive plants. Neighbors came together and formulated an idea – could they replace crime and litter with learning? In 1991, they organized park cleanups and dog-walking schedules, and started to use the park to teach neighborhood students about nature and science. What hatched as an idea around a neighbor’s dining room table grew into a non-profit with a couple staff members in a trailer parked in an urban park.

In 2004, after years of operating out of that double-wide classroom trailer, the Center opened a new community and education center in Riverside Park. The award-winning facility has themed classrooms designed especially for the school programs. In addition there is space dedicated to the community for potlucks, meetings, lectures and recreational activities. Call it an Environmental Community Center.

Today, the Urban Ecology Center has branched out into two other Milwaukee neighborhoods. The Washington Park branch opened in 2007 and serves communities and schools on Milwaukee’s west side in a 135-acre Olmstead-designed county park. The newly-opened third location on Milwaukee’s south side is helping transform 24 acres of urban brownfields into a freshly planted outdoor learning area. It is a vibrant and growing organization, serving 77,000+ people each year and protecting and restoring urban green spaces in Milwaukee.
Key Theme 3: Community Environmental Educator Skills

Community EE programs often address complex issues that can only be solved when people at the heart of the problem work peacefully together to develop a shared understanding and come up with a creative solution. Environmental educators can have a unique role to play in this process; one which departs from the traditional delivery of instruction and materials. This role in its broadest sense is called facilitation. It is about “creating and holding the space in which interaction between people can take place; it is the role and function which works towards making processes effective at achieving their aims, focusing on the quality of the process itself, rather than the content of the process. As such, it is a distinctive role which demands particular skills and attributes of those involved in performing it.” (Wageningen University CDI, 2012)

What to look for:

3.1 Educators as facilitators
Do the educators know how to facilitate a stakeholder process? Are they skilled in stimulating constructive dialogue among community groups and fostering exchanges where people suspend judgment, listen to each other, and understand what is being said, even though they may not agree?

3.2 Cultural Competency
Are the educators knowledgeable about the demographic and cultural characteristics represented in the community, and do they take these characteristics into account when they are facilitating the process?

3.3 Awareness of power dynamics
Are the educators aware of the existing power structure in the community and alert to the risk of stronger elements preempting the process, thereby marginalizing disadvantaged and disempowered groups?

Community EE In Action
Eco-Schools USA

Eco-Schools USA serves K-12 schools throughout the United States. Participants come to the program from a wide variety of settings (urban to suburban to rural) and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Eco-Schools USA guides participants through the process of “greening” the school building, grounds, and curriculum. Schools devise their own timeframe and choose which program areas to focus on (such as energy, water, biodiversity, transportation, or food). Decisions are made by a diverse team of students, teachers, administrators, facilities staff, parents, and community volunteers. The result: Each school comes up with a unique and creative way to implement the program, one that is based on what feels most feasible, relevant, necessary, and inspiring in their particular community.

For example, United High School in Armagh, Pennsylvania, is in a rural district in the heart of coal country. Launching an Eco-Schools program required a delicate touch to avoid concern about threats to the livelihood of local citizens. The county had a recycling center but no pickup services, and the school began a recycling program as part of their Eco-Schools work. The school’s busing company volunteered the use of a truck to haul recyclables to the county facility, and students began encouraging their families to recycle. With large renovations in the school’s future, they hope to include a recycling drop-off site to serve the whole community.

In a very different setting in an industrial area of Chicago, elementary students at another Eco-School, the Academy for Global Citizenship, attend class in a green oasis in their underserved community. Raised bed gardens, a green-roofed chicken coop, nutritious meals, and an experiential, project-based curriculum serve the school’s mission to “empower all students to positively impact the community and world beyond.” This school, too, is preparing for the future as they search for a permanent campus. The process provides students with exciting real-world learning opportunities, such as working with an architectural firm to design model “classrooms of the future.” They hold a vision of the school as a learning laboratory that will address the needs and broaden the horizons of students, parents, and the whole community.
Key Theme 4: Social Learning Methodologies

The core of a Community EE program is that the participants are the ones who design and create the process, and they do so by taking their needs into account as well as the degree to which their individual capacities can contribute and sustain the project. With this in mind, educational methodologies should be consistent with participatory action models that help foster interactive, social learning.

What to look for:

4.1 Experiential Learning
Does the program offer the opportunity for learners to “touch all the bases” as described in Kolb’s four stage learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation?

4.2 Project-Based Learning
Do the participants engage in a series of structured tasks that involve investigative skills, problem solving, decision making, and evaluation? Are they directly involved in the construction of their own learning experience and do they seek out resources that will help them achieve their goals?

4.3 Place-Based Learning
Do the participants use the community as one of the primary resources for learning, and as such, has the program become rooted in the local culture, history, and environment of the place where they live?

4.4 Collaborative Learning
Do the participants engage in cooperative efforts to understand each other, explore common concerns, and generate new ideas for agreed upon joint action? Do they question, explore, and share their understandings about the problem they want to solve as well as their underlying assumptions? Is there a process in place for conflict resolution?

4.5 Critical Thinking
Do the participants examine the reasons for their own thinking and question what others are thinking as well? Do they discuss these thoughts openly with each other?

4.6 Reflective Thinking
Do participants engage in regular individual and collective reflection activities that focus on how their environmental program is proceeding and what might be done to improve the process? Does this reflective process take place throughout the creation, implementation, and conclusion of any and all environmental programming created by the community?

Sources


Guidelines for Excellence: Environmental Education in Urban Communities

Emily Alderman, Stephanie DeMatte, Pam Hosimer, Caitlin MacDonald, Kristen Mueller and Gardiner Platt

About the Guidelines

This set of guidelines serves as a framework for teaching environmental education in urban communities. Urban environmental education promotes both social and environmental change within cities. It aims to create an informed citizenry by increasing communities’ environmental literacy and stewardship efforts. The guidelines are based on innovative research that shows great value in connecting urban communities to their surrounding built and natural environments.

Key Terms and Definitions:

Environmental Education builds on a core of essential themes that define its approach to education. Some of these key concepts are:

**Systems and Interdependence:** Systems help make sense of a large and complex world. A system is made up of parts. Each part can be understood separately. The whole, however, is understood only by understanding the relationships and interactions among the parts. The human body can be understood as a system; so can galaxies. Organizations, individual cells, communities of animals and plants, and families can all be understood as systems. And systems can be nested within other systems. Human well being is inextricably bound with environmental quality. Humans are a part of the natural order. We and the systems we create—our societies, political systems, economies, religions, cultures, technologies—impact the total environment. Since we are a part of nature rather than outside it, we are challenged to recognize the ramifications of our interdependence.

**Sense of Place:** The importance of where one lives; Beginning close to home, learners forge connections with, explore, and understand their immediate surroundings. The sensitivity, knowledge, and skills needed for this local connection provides a base for moving out into larger systems, broader issues, and an expanding understanding of causes, connections, and consequences. Personal identification with place is encouraged.

**Integration:** Disciplines from the natural sciences to the social sciences to the humanities are connected through the medium of the environment and environmental issues. Environmental education offers opportunities for integration and works best when infused across the curriculum, rather than being treated as a separate discipline or subject area.

**Roots in the real world:** Learners develop knowledge and skills through direct experience with the environment, environmental issues, and society. Investigation, analysis, and problem solving are essential activities and are most effective when relevant to the real world.

**Lifelong Learning:** Critical and creative thinking, autonomous decision making, communication, and collaborative learning are emphasized. These skills are essential for active and meaningful learning, both in school and over a lifetime.

How to Use Guidelines:

Beneath each guideline you will find direct actions that practitioners of urban EE can apply to their programs, practice, and pedagogy. Each guideline also includes a tool, resource, or example to help illustrate these values and actions in the field.
Our defined community is:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Guideline</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
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| **SYSTEMS AND INTERDEPENDENCE** | • Learn the community dynamics and demographics  
• Practice openness and Embrace Diversity  
• Listen to the community  
• Increase community awareness  
• Community Participation and Stewardship | ⇒ Developed awareness of the community culture.  
⇒ Identify how you will step out of your norm to embrace their community dynamics.  
⇒ Identify the needs/wants of the community.  
⇒ Inform the community on how your will address those needs/wants.  
⇒ Develop sustainable community participation for now and in the future. |
| **SENSE OF PLACE** | • Incorporate place-based programming  
• Incorporate experiential learning  
• Evaluate fully  
• Focus on solutions  
• Find common ground | ⇒ Create environment for identifying a sense of place.  
⇒ Create environment for exploratory learning.  
⇒ Develop methodology to track your successes and failures.  
⇒ Ensure solutions within programs.  
⇒ Create environment to develop connections. |
| **INTEGRATION** | • Develop thoughtful relationships and partnerships with community members/organizations  
• Define the common goals of the partnership  
• Establish individual expectations for each partner  
• Create space to celebrate partnerships | ⇒ Identify partners, stakeholders and relationships within the community.  
⇒ Develop common goal of project from all stakeholders.  
⇒ Identification of individual group roles.  
⇒ Created environment for sharing successes and failures. |
| **ROOTS IN THE REAL WORLD** | • Identify the expertise and assets of the community  
• Support community needs  
• Tailor programs to different backgrounds  
• Create availability and relevance to all ages | ⇒ Identify community assets.  
⇒ Identify how your organization can meet community needs.  
⇒ Change your previous approach to meet the needs of the community.  
⇒ Identify implementation strategy. |
| **LIFELONG LEARNING** | • Develop Action Strategy  
• Foster Inquiry and Leadership | ⇒ Identify how to build on the strengths of the community.  
⇒ Create environment for community feedback and improvement. |
**Guideline 1: Systems and Interdependence**

Community EE openly acknowledges, values and celebrates all forms of human diversity, including but not limited to racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic. Inclusiveness engenders the best in all community members.

**Actions:**

**Learn the community dynamics**: Awareness of who is in your community is the first step in defining the goals and objectives of your education plan. For whom, how, where, and why are your programs needed?

**Embrace diversity**: Resist staying in your comfort zone even if it feels uncomfortable. Incorporating diversity into programs means acknowledging different ages, cultures, values, and perspectives and understanding how our own backgrounds influence our interpretations.

**Listen to the community**: Identification of the wellness issues by hearing what people say, rather than imposing preconceived, good intentioned wellness concepts, will be critical for success.

**Increase community awareness**: Educate about potentially relevant community health (physical, mental, emotional, environmental) issues in preparation for asking for the community’s participation and input in the identification of the wellness issues process.

**Foster community participation**: Encourage community members to participate in identification of the wellness issues.

**Get everyone involved**: Community participation in how these wellness needs will be addressed will be essential.

**Tools/Example(s):**

“Principles for cross-cultural communication”

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**Guideline 2: Sense of Place**

Community EE is built on a foundation of high quality programs designed with articulated goals and objectives that reflect and are relevant to the community’s interests and capacities.

**Actions:**

**Incorporate place-based programming**: Ensure that your programs allow participants to define and explore the space for themselves. Support and encourage self-identification and personal connections with the space whether that is a particular tree, park, neighborhood, or city.

**Incorporate experiential learning**: Give participants access to experiential learning and allows learning to occur anywhere. Incorporate sensory-based activities and/or unstructured explorations into your programs.

**Evaluate fully**: measure impact using participatory techniques in order to improve programs, ensure accountability, maximize the effects of future efforts, and understand the effects of EE on other issues and efforts in the community.

**Focus on solutions**: avoid presenting problems without presenting or creating a process to develop solutions. Urban EE should inspire hope and motivation to act.

**Find common ground**: help participants find common interests and creates connections to one another to strengthen group identity among participants.
Guideline 2: Sense of Place (continued)

Tools/Example(s):
Teach for America - an organization dedicated to investing in teachers as a tool to bridge the education gap. [http://www.teachforamerica.org/](http://www.teachforamerica.org/)

The Laboratory School at the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study has exceptional resources like “Tried and true examples of direct experience” to support place based learning. [http://www.naturalcuriosity.ca/environmental.php?pgcat=branch2&sfield=four](http://www.naturalcuriosity.ca/environmental.php?pgcat=branch2&sfield=four)

Guideline 3: Integration

Community EE involves the formation or development of sustainable partnerships with other groups.

Actions:

Develop thoughtful relationships and partnerships with community members/organizations: Invest the time, energy and resources into getting to know the community

Define the common goals of the partnership: Ensure that all partners involved in a particular agreement are working towards a common goal and understand the roles of other partners.

Establish individual expectations for each partner: To ensure partnerships function cohesively, establish individual expectations for each partner, preferably with a MOU. Each partner should be held accountable for these expectations as the partnership evolves.

Create space to celebrate partnerships: Create a space where partners can be recognized for their contributions to the work.

Tools/Example(s):

The Global Rivers Environmental Education Network program (GREEN) schools and youth are connected to mentors at local General Motors planets who provide opportunities for young people to learn more about the watersheds they live in and to use their findings to create lasting solutions for pressing water quality issues. Youth are not only connected to their local watershed, but they learn from community stakeholders who are in professions that use the real life application of the science they learn in the classroom.

[http://www.earthforce.org/GREEN](http://www.earthforce.org/GREEN)

The Children & Nature Network - an extensive resource supporting families

Guideline 4: Roots in the Real World

Community EE identifies and draws on resources in the community that could help the effort, and celebrates the positive aspects of a community.

Actions:

Identify the expertise and assets of the community: Consider existing assets and the spectrum of capacity among diverse community members. Focus on the assets of the community rather than the weaknesses.

Support community needs: Reflect the priorities and values as defined by the community. Examine the values and goals of your organization in relation to the community’s project or wellness issue: Analyze your organization’s values and capacity to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.
Guideline 4: Roots in the Real World (continued)

**Tailor programs to different backgrounds:** In order for urban EE programs to be effective, they must take into account the background of different individuals. Programs and activities should be tailored depending on the educational, cultural and/or economic background of participants.

**Create availability and relevance to all ages:** Community EE includes engagement opportunities for intergenerational learning, emphasizing how connections to nature can facilitate connections with family and the wider community.

**Measure impacts:** Develop ways to evaluate the short term and long term impacts of your urban EE programs. Ensure they are relevant to the audience, and allow room for them to evolve.

**Tools/Example(s):**

“Green is for everyone”

“Measuring the success of environmental education programs”
http://www.sierraclub.bc.ca/education/resources-tools/measure-success-of-environmental-education-programs_educators

Guideline 5: Lifelong Learning

Community EE encourages critical thinking, autonomous decision making, long-term sustainability and stewardship, and the ability to translate motivation into action.

**Actions:**

**Develop an action strategy** that builds on the strengths of the community and ongoing involvement and accountability. Incorporate future impacts into your program objectives.

**Foster inquiry and leadership.** The more active participants are in the learning process, the deeper their understanding.

**Allow for self-directed learning.** Fostering environmentally literacy means allowing individuals to identify their own role and relationship to nature and the community, not defining it for them.

**Create opportunities for reflection.** During the process of inquiry-based, action-oriented learning, all for opportunities of reflection to ensure youth are considering what is working, what isn’t, and how change will be sustained.

**Tools/Example(s):**

Green Corps at Cleveland Botanical Garden - a youth focused urban garden program immersing participants in a STEM based 12 month program.

http://www.cbgarden.org/lets-learn/green-corps.aspx
Conclusion

These Community Guidelines are based on a core of essential themes that define urban environmental education. Urban environmental education is inextricably connected to community wellness. Successful environmental education and community wellness result in positive social and environmental change within communities. These Guidelines serve as a framework for teaching environmental education and addressing community wellness in urban communities. In the end, the Guidelines aim to enhance environmental literacy and stewardship efforts and to create an informed, active citizenry.

References


