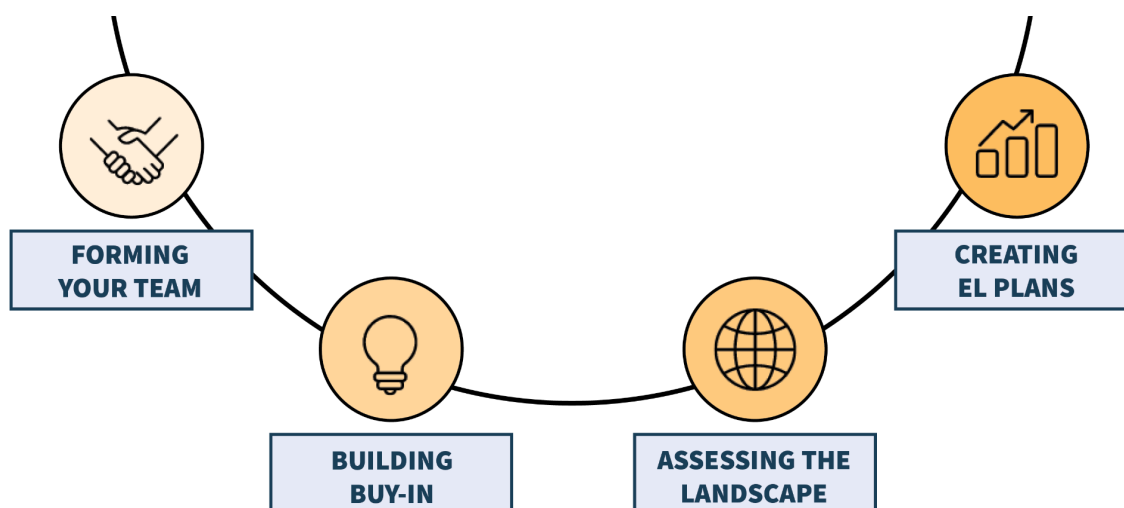


District Environmental Literacy Planning Toolkit

This Toolkit provides some waypoints and important considerations for building systemic, equitable, and sustainable environmental literacy within a school district by developing and implementing an environmental literacy plan.

District environmental literacy plans can be transformational for school districts when they consider the many aspects of school life, particularly campuses (facilities and operations), curriculum, community, and culture. These efforts generally happen in a series of phases which we are calling the “phases of change”, which starts with forming a team and comes to fruition when a district has systemic, equitable, and sustainable implementation of their plan.



We encourage you to consider where along the journey you believe your school district is and which tools and ideas compiled here could support you best right now. If you are new to this work we recommend you start at the beginning. It should be noted that the phases of change outlined can be non-linear and may be more iterative in nature.

All district environmental literacy plans should include:

- A matrix that shows where environmental literacy opportunities occur for students across disciplines throughout their K-12 career. This should include at least one [MWEE](#) in each grade band (elementary, middle, high).
- Sustainable schools efforts in each school building (i.e. Green Ribbon Schools, EcoSchools, etc).
- Nonformal education and community partners and what environmental education efforts they support.
- Long-term professional development opportunities for teachers around environmental education, project-based learning, and other related content and pedagogy.

- Financial, staff, and other resources that are available and/or needed to support the plan.
- Connections to state and/or district priorities (i.e. where environmental literacy has been identified in a strategic plan or how it ties to district core values).
- A plan to assess progress towards increased environmental literacy on a regular basis.
- A description of how the district is ensuring that environmental education experiences are equitable, relevant, and accessible for all students.

You may want to also consider how workforce development, career and technology education (CTE), STEM, education for climate action, and other key priorities are integrated into the plan.

The [Chesapeake Bay Program Education Workgroup](#) operates under the guiding belief that in order to ensure that every student graduates environmentally literate, planning must occur at the school district level due to the local-control nature of schools related to curriculum development, administration, funding, and other priorities. **We recognize that school districts are a fundamental unit of change that can help us to take this work to scale.** With that, this toolkit is designed primarily for school district administrators and the partners who work directly with them.

The Big Vision: Systemic, Equitable, and Sustainable Environmental Literacy

Systemic, Equitable, and Sustainable are three essential goals you want to have in mind when starting to think about your district's environmental literacy plan.

Systemic programs are ones that reach the entire student population in one or more grades within a school district. They also ensure that the teachers of these students receive high quality professional development to give them the content knowledge and pedagogical skills for implementing that program.

Systemic implementation can be a good way of ensuring **equity** in that these experiences are accessible to all students in a grade level no matter what school they attend or what teacher they have in a given year. Even within this framework there should be opportunities for differentiation in the actual experiences that occur. For example, individual schools may select different partners or field sites to provide more culturally and locally relevant opportunities for learning. Programs should be accessible to all students and accommodations should be made to support students with a range of physical, cognitive, emotional, and social abilities.

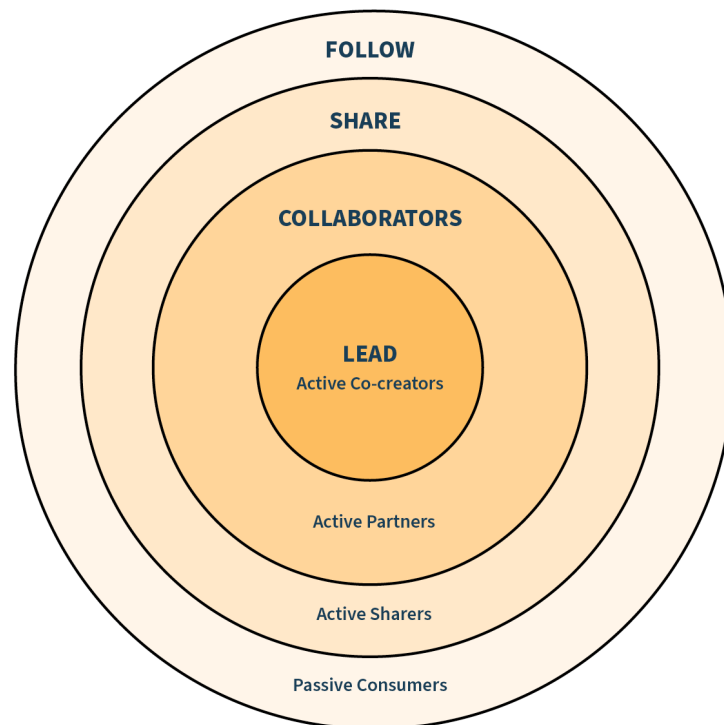
Environmental literacy programs are the most **sustainable** when they are embedded into school curriculum and supported with school district resources, rather than when they are “add on” experiences that require scrambling for short-term funding each year. There are many angles to consider when thinking about sustainability, including but not limited to: location of field experience and potential transportation costs, facility and personnel costs, use of building or campus assets, community partnerships, supplies and equipment, and teacher turnover.

No matter where you are starting, these three goals – systemic, equitable, and sustainable – are important to integrate as you build programs and draft a plan that articulates these efforts.

Forming a Team

Behind most successful efforts there is a small but mighty team of people. This core group labeled “lead” in the graphic below and often known as a backbone team, are the behind the scenes coordinators who ensure strategic coherence over time and that communication and collaboration persists.

In local environmental literacy networks, typically that backbone team is composed of leaders (administrators, staff, and/or coordinators of curriculum) from one or more school districts and community organizations (environmental education directors, park staff, and/or local business leaders) who are committed to a shared vision for environmental literacy in the school system. Ideally, this team strives to be representative of the community by including members with diverse perspectives and experiences. While that might not initially be possible, know that teams change over time and that there are opportunities for people to move up or back over time when they see the value and opportunity.



In addition to the backbone team, there are often other layers of partners who are engaged to varying degrees – as indicated in the graphic, people participate in networks in one of four ways: they lead, collaborate, share or follow.

Developing a Process

Once the backbone team is formed, a natural first step is identifying how the group will communicate and function internally. How often will the group meet? Are there points where virtual meetings can suffice or are in-person meetings the way to go? Is there a shared folder or platform where documents and notes are stored?

In these initial meetings, creating a timeline can be especially helpful for laying out what each member of the team will do, as well as to develop a shared understanding of what the actual process could look like. In this toolkit you'll find some of the big components that will likely be worked into your timeline but it will likely be more practical to break these down even further and get specific.

It's important to recognize that this entire process is iterative and that the backbone team will likely serve the role of developing initial ideas and materials, creating surveys and engaging stakeholders in conversations, putting drafts out for review, and incorporating feedback. An example of this is how the team will need to develop an understanding of the priorities of the school district. Given that the backbone team is composed of people representing different areas of expertise, some of these priorities will be known already. In some cases, conversations with other leaders could be helpful in developing a more comprehensive understanding. Once the team understands the district's priorities, they will develop effective messaging about how environmental literacy will support those priorities in order to build more general support for creating an environmental literacy plan. As the stakeholder engagement process continues, additional district priorities will emerge and can be woven into the messaging.

Building Buy-In & Support

If you've found yourself on this page, there's a good chance that you already see some of the benefits that environmental literacy programming can bring to students, classrooms, and school culture. There is strong evidence that environmental education has positive impacts on improving academic performance, enhancing critical thinking skills, and developing life-building skills like confidence, autonomy, and leadership. Environmental education also increases civic engagement and positive environmental behaviors. Integrating environmental learning with core subjects helps to meet standards and creates opportunities for all students to have meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to their lives, communities, and the world around them.

When making the case for environmental literacy with our stakeholders, it's critical that we not only articulate these benefits but also strategically align them with both existing school priorities and stakeholder values. Sometimes champions within the school district can be particularly effective at garnering support. Here are some preliminary questions to consider.

Questions to Consider:

- Who are your [key stakeholders](#)? What level of involvement do they have?
- What are the school district's long-term and short-term priorities?
- How can climate change, sustainability, and civic engagement content and practices be taught or enriched through the individual disciplines or in a cross curricular approach to develop environmental literacy?
- Is there emphasis on [college and career readiness](#) or the development of 21st century skills? Is there a gap in opportunities for students to authentically engage in the [Science and Engineering Practices](#)? Or is there an immediate need to address learning loss from the pandemic or support students' social and emotional well-being?
- What specific identities or values do your stakeholders hold? Which do you share?
- What are your stakeholders' needs and priorities?
- How can you appeal to those values and priorities early and often?

Research for Supporting Environmental Literacy

One of the most comprehensive and systematic literature reviews of impacts of environmental education for K-12 students was conducted by experts at Stanford University under the leadership of Dr. Nicole Ardoin. The North American Association for Environmental Education houses a [series of webpages dedicated to this on the eeWorks site](#) which includes an executive summary and key findings, academic benefits, selected study summaries, and a messaging guide, among other resources.

Key findings from The Benefits of Environmental Education for K-12 Students

In studies reviewed, environmental education was shown to improve:

- Knowledge in science, mathematics, reading, writing, and more
- Emotional and social skills, such as self-esteem, character development, team work, and leadership skills
- Environmentally friendly behavior, such as reducing water use, increasing recycling, and participating in community cleanups
- Academic skills (21st Century skills), such as critical thinking, oral communication, analytical skills, problem solving, and higher-order thinking
- Motivation to learn, including enthusiasm for and interest in school
- Civic interest and engagement, including feelings of civic responsibility, feelings of empowerment, and ability to take action

A [separate analysis](#) was conducted by researchers at Stanford University on the benefits of environmental education and nature connections in early childhood.

Key findings from The Benefits of Environmental Education and Nature Connections in Early Childhood

In studies reviewed, early childhood environmental education was shown to:

- Increase learning in a range of areas including mathematics, science, language, and literacy
- Enhance social and emotional skills
- Better physical development
- Improve environmental cognition, attitudes, and behavior
- Building knowledge and skills that lay the foundation for more environmentally responsible and engaged adults

In addition to these two substantial research-based analyses, more research about environmental literacy can be found on [NAAEE's eeResearch Library](#), [NAAEE's eeWorks page](#), and on the [Children & Nature Networks Research Library](#).

Research Supporting MWEEs As a Powerful Educational Tool

Environmental literacy plans should include opportunities for students to engage in MWEEs at least once in elementary, middle, and high school. Specific [MWEE Benefits](#) that you might consider lifting up include:

- Increased Student Interest and Engagement
- Support Student Achievement
- Advance 21st Century Skills
- Advance Environmental Stewardship and Civic Responsibility
- Promote Equity and Environmental Justice

Additional research citations and references supporting MWEEs can be found on the [B-WET National MWEE Resources webpage](#).

Research Supporting Sustainable Schools

Sustainable Schools efforts should also be embedded in district environmental literacy plans. Green schoolyards foster students' social, physical, and intellectual growth and health by providing settings for curiosity, collaboration, and exploration. When students learn and grow in a school environment that actually models the practices that they are learning about, they are more likely to see themselves in these environmental solutions. Specific benefits of schools that use these practices are highlighted in two papers authored by the Green Schoolyard America, [The Power and Potential of Green Schoolyards](#) and [The Green Schoolyard Movement](#). Benefits include:

- Educational Attainment
- Improved Teacher Satisfaction
- Healthier Lifestyles
- Improved Wellbeing
- Empowerment
- Stewardship

Messaging about Environmental Literacy

Once you have gathered information about the school district and community priorities, you are ready to craft a compelling message about why this work is important. Two ways to do this are through storytelling and calls to action.

You might also consider how the use of media (video, photos, infographics, etc) can support you in crafting a message that will resonate most with your stakeholders.

Storytelling

In 2020, the Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education partnered with FrameWorks to create a framing guide for advocates, educators, program leaders, and other communicators called [How to Tell a More Effective Story about Environmental Education](#). This resource equips advocates of environmental literacy with an empirically proven strategy for sharing a clear and compelling story about the value of environmental literacy.

- It is not enough to assert that environmental education delivers significant benefits. We must demonstrate how those benefits are delivered through evidence-based framing
- We can use evidence-based tools to connect with the values of our stakeholders and use metaphors to better communicate
- There are five framing recommendations:
 - Set the scene - provide a clear definition of environmental education
 - Invite people to the story - paint a big picture of why environmental education matters to all of us
 - Reveal the plot - explain key processes and cause-effect relationships
 - Feature the full cast of characters - use inclusive language to place disparate outcomes in the context of universal needs and shared responsibilities
 - Offer a compelling conclusion - provide concrete solutions that we can implement together to strengthen environmental education and become the global society we want to be

Within [the document](#) you can find specific tools and examples that can be used or built upon in your own messaging.

Calls to Action

Another way to spark enthusiasm and share information is to create a call to action that speaks specifically to the priorities and values of the audiences that you aim to reach. You might consider including a call to action at the end of your story or perhaps they are differentiated messaging strategies for separate audiences. A call to action creates a sense of urgency for the audience and provides a specific benefit-oriented outcome. A few examples are as follows:

- [The Center for Sustainable and Climate Resilient Schools](#) has created a number of resources including the [Sustainability Imperative for Educators](#), which outlines the essential case for why educators should integrate environmental literacy and sustainability into all aspects of school life, including foundational frameworks and philosophies.
- The California Environmental Literacy Initiative developed [A Teacher Call to Action for Environmental Literacy](#), which contextualizes both the imperatives for environmental literacy as well as a roadmap for instruction.
- The United Nations's Greening Education Partnership has a call to action around [Transforming Education to Transform the World](#), calling on countries to commit to a series of targets in a set period of time, including a process for monitoring and tracking.

Environmental Literacy Champions

Champions of environmental literacy can be instrumental in this first phase of building buy-in and support but they are not essential. Efforts are more likely to gain momentum when there are advocates who have sufficient influence and standing in the community to generate high-level interest and support and to bring together the necessary stakeholders around a specific idea. Champions tap into their existing personal relationships and networks and are well-poised to leverage their social capital to motivate others to join an initiative or try something new. They are passionate about solving the problem but provide the space for the community to work through it collaboratively. Who has the capacity to inspire and motivate others in the school district that you work in? Perhaps it's a superintendent or an influential board member? Maybe it is an elected official or business leader? Or maybe it's you?

Thinking back to how we message about environmental literacy, environmental literacy champions may be helpful in both crafting and delivering the story. Champions might have access to certain groups of people who may not otherwise be available or open to receiving the information.

While you may only need one or two champions to kickstart an effort, it's important to consider how a shared and distributed model of leadership is necessary for scaling up environmental literacy efforts. When it comes to shifting the culture in a school district, there is an opportunity for every person to lead from the role that they hold.

Questions to Consider:

- Who in your school district has substantial influence over the following areas: curriculum, professional development, school grounds, school culture, and/or long-term planning?
- Who is considered a [trusted messenger](#) in the school district?
- Is anyone on the school board supportive of environmental literacy or similar efforts?
- Has anyone successfully advocated for change with the school district or school board? Who led that effort?
- Are there other potential champions from outside the school (non-profit partners, businesses, elected officials, etc)?

Assessing the Landscape: How Do I Understand Where My District is with Environmental Literacy?

No matter how much or how little you know about what your school district is already doing related to environmental literacy, conducting an inventory with multiple stakeholders can be a helpful way of gathering information and ground truthing your knowledge. A great place to start is to review your district's response to the [Environmental Literacy Indicator Tool](#) (ELIT) Survey. This is administered by the Education Workgroup of the Chesapeake Bay Program on an every-other-year basis to all school districts in the Mid-Atlantic region to monitor the status of environmental literacy efforts at a district level.

There are many ways to conduct an inventory from individual conversations to surveys to focus groups but there are some things to keep in mind regardless of your chosen method.

Who

- Involve stakeholders from a variety of levels within the system and those who have different perspectives and interests. Engaging multiple stakeholders can provide a more balanced and nuanced picture of what is happening in your school district.
- Some individuals, like those in charge of instruction and curriculum, or teachers from multiple grades and disciplines, are integral in assessing what environmental literacy programming is occurring.
- Nonformal and community education partners who may support schoolyard-based and offsite-based field experiences can provide a unique external perspective.
- Principals and facilities managers often have important information related to rules and restrictions around using different areas of the schoolyard for outdoor learning.
- Involving the wider community, including students and their families, can uncover where there are additional opportunities to build on.

What

- The questions used in the assessment phase should be customized to each stakeholder group. For example, there may be a few questions that are applicable to all stakeholders while there are others that are more specific and can only be answered by a particular group of people.
- Be clear about the kinds of programs and initiatives that fall under “environmental literacy” by including examples that can jog your stakeholders minds without influencing the results too much.
- One of the most important parts of the environmental literacy plan will be articulating where things like MWEs and outdoor experiences are occurring over a student's academic career. Include questions that uncover the extent to which these experiences are occurring for all students in a grade.
- In addition to asking about what programming and learning opportunities are in place, include open-ended questions that provide stakeholders the opportunity to describe areas of opportunity to include environmental literacy activities or programs or where capacity is needed

in order to enhance an element (for example: professional development, supplies, partnership, etc).

How

- Just as you customize questions, you may consider adjusting the format of how you learn about where your district is with environmental literacy depending on your stakeholders. This could look like focus groups, interviews, surveys, other methods, or a combination of these.

Questions to Consider:

- Are there existing data collection methods or forums in which you could solicit information related to environmental literacy in your district?
- What keywords related to environmental literacy might resonate most with your stakeholders when working to understand what is currently going on?

Examples of Assessment Resources

[Digital Promise's Asset Mapping: A Guide for Education Innovation Clusters](#)

This guide presents a process for identifying existing strengths within a school district or community. Questions can be adapted for your context.

[Prince William County Public School's Environmental Literacy Partner Asset Mapping Survey](#)

This is an example of a survey that PWCPSS used to better understand the kinds of community partners that already are or could be supporting environmental literacy.

[Arlington Public Schools 2018-19 Sustainability Inventory Results](#)

The results of this sustainability inventory provides ideas of what kinds of data you might be able to gather through an assessment process.

[Richmond City Public Schools Environmental Literacy Survey](#)

This community-needs survey aimed to gather information from parents, students, and community members at large about the gaps and opportunities for environmental literacy in Richmond.

Creating District Environmental Literacy Plans

Environmental Literacy Plans (ELPs) at the school district level are roadmaps that lay a foundation for district-wide implementation, integration, connectedness, and coherence of environmental literacy programming into the K-12 curriculum and beyond (like afterschool or sustainable schools programs). ELPs typically lay out a framework for the following elements, among others as determined by the school district itself, and ensure that they are done strategically, efficiently, and effectively:

- Relevant teaching and learning standards adopted by the State Board of Education;
- A vision for environmental literacy within the school district (integrated across disciplines, applicable to students lives, school culture, community priorities);
- Professional development opportunities for teachers;
- Metrics for measuring environmental literacy and accountability;
- Methods to increase environmental literacy;
- Community partners that can assist schools; and
- A proposed implementation method for the Plan.

Why District EL Plans

You might be wondering, why are ELPs important? Many strategic plans and action plans just sit on the shelf - how is this different? Because environmental literacy is something that should be embedded across disciplines and involves a variety of school and community partners, it's important to take the time to chart out how all of the experiences and opportunities connect and build on each other across a student's K-12 career. The very process of creating these plans encourages participants to consider the "why" and "how" of each experience, and to consider how to sustain these experiences year after year. With limited time and funding, every field experience, MWEE, or teacher workshop needs to be intentionally considered.

For community partners, being involved in the development of the ELP can help identify how they are meeting formal goals for learning beyond the standards themselves and identify new areas where they have expertise and might be able to support. Similarly, they can see where other community partners are already engaged which can prevent competition for external funding like grants.

Finally, ELPs are critical for ensuring continuity when there is a change in leadership or administration. Turnover among staff at the school and school districts is one of the biggest challenges in sustaining environmental literacy programs. When there is a plan in place that clearly articulates the "why" and "how" it's less likely that environmental literacy programs will be eliminated.

Like with other strategic plans, regularly revisiting and updating the plan (every 3-5 years) is essential to ensuring the long term relevance and sustainability of the plan.

ELP Templates

States including [Pennsylvania](#) and [Virginia](#) have developed templates that can be used as a springboard for district environmental literacy plans. These templates can be useful in that they provide consistency but also that they identify the key areas for alignment with state priorities. Below are some examples of school district environmental literacy plans that you can draw on for inspiration, too.

Examples of District EL Plans

[Intermediate Unit 13 Environmental Literacy Plan](#)

Arlington County Public Schools Environmental Literacy Plan

Clarke County Public Schools Environmental Literacy Plan

Systemic, Equitable, and Sustainable Planning

Building an environmental literacy plan or program intentionally with a **systemic**, **equitable**, and **sustainable** approach will set you up to make the most impactful change in your school district. When these goals are centered from the very beginning, you won't jeopardize wasting already limited resources like time, money and partnerships. This approach will also ensure the continued buy-in and support that you've developed with your key stakeholders. As you begin to plan, here are some preliminary questions to consider:

Systemic:

- Where specifically are you looking to embed MWEEs and/or environmental literacy elements (grade, unit)?
- Where are the most notable and exciting opportunities in the standards to use environmental literacy?
- Are there opportunities to train all involved teachers or are resources needed (funding, partners, etc)?
- Is there a curriculum revision occurring in the near future where this could be written in?

Equitable:

- What partners could help to ensure that students learn in the context of their lived experiences, family histories, and cultural identities?
- What sort of professional development is available for teachers and community partners to reflect on their unconscious biases and how they impact how they design learning experiences and interact with learners?
- How are you building and nurturing authentic community partnerships? (Additional resources on community engagement <insert link to Community Engagement page>)

Sustainable:

- What assets or learning spaces already exist at the schools in our district that can minimize the need for off-site transportation?
- Are there small improvements that can be made to schoolyards to make them more usable for outdoor learning?
- Are there existing field trips that are already planned and budgeted for that can be woven into the MWEE?
- If an offsite field experience is a priority, is there space in the operating budget to sustain this?

The Power of Local Networks

Network Composition

There is no “one-size-fits-all” for what a local environmental literacy network should look like but most networks include people and organizations that are engaged to varying degrees. The Levels of Participation figure below suggests that people participate in networks in one of four ways: they lead, collaborate, share, or follow.

5 Levels of Network Participation					
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
	Lead	Collaborate	Share	Follow	Not Engaged
Role	Active Designers	Active Partners	Active Sharers	Passive Consumer	Not yet involved
Stakeholder Experience	"Your leadership is critical. Together, we determined the vision & goals."	"My interests are shaping the solutions"	"I shared my experiences with the problem."	"I was updated on the decision."	
Examples of Participation	Co-design "How can I help create?"	Topical-based design "How can I serve?"	Two-way communication "How can I contribute?"	Receiving information "How can benefit?"	
Community Engagement Goals	Foster democratic participation and equity in identifying and advancing priorities.	Ensure capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions.	Gather input from the community.	Provide the community with relevant information.	Finding motivations for participation and meaningful ways to engage.
Challenges	Getting people to work together efficiently and effectively.	Ensuring the analysis draws in enough diversity of experience.	Getting people to embrace the problem and see it as their problem too.	Making sure communications are impactful.	Continually assessing who should be engaged.

Adapted from Converge's Spectrum of Participant Engagement, Co-Creative's 5 Levels of Engagement, and Facilitating Power's The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership

Leads are often called backbone, core, or design teams and they can also include a network coordinator. Leads generally serve the role of co-creating the network's strategic direction and coordinating efforts of those who fall into the active collaborator circle. Leads also develop effective ways to facilitate information sharing and communication with those in the share and follow circles. The collaborators are the people and groups who actively partner, contributing and participating as their mission and capacity allows. The outer circles (share and follow) are more passive and often engage in fewer activities but are regularly observing and popping in as they are able and interested. The outer circles are especially important for bringing a wider and more diverse set of views, skills, and abilities. All of these circles are fluid, where people and organizations may move between each of the circles over time.

Example of a local network:



The above graphic shows examples of different kinds of people and organizations that might be a part of a local environmental literacy network. California Environmental Literacy Initiative's [Community-Based Partner Network Toolkit](#) provides additional examples of what types of organizations might be included in a network, what these organizations can offer to schools and districts, and the benefits of such networks.

Why Local Networks

Local networks can be an important part of your environmental literacy efforts because they leverage the strengths and resources of multiple partners to realize a shared vision for environmental literacy. Especially in large districts, these networks can provide space for key partners to collaborate in a way that ensures alignment and avoids redundancy. In small districts, which may lack a coordinator for environmental literacy, the network approach can shore-up that capacity through more strategic collaborations.

Tips for Building a Local Network

There may already be a network of sorts in your community that serves this purpose, or perhaps you are endeavoring to build one into existence. Regardless, networks should consider the following in the start-up or refocusing process (adapted from Co-Creative's Network Design Framework):

1. Purpose - what is the network's reason for being?
2. Participation - who is involved in the network? What is required to be a part of the network? And how many members should there be?
3. Governance - how are decisions made related to network priorities and action? What guides the network's culture and membership?
4. Connections - how will the network share information, coordinate, and support collaborative action?
5. Resources - how is the network supported? Are financial resources needed?
6. Functions - what services are needed to best support the network's purpose (e.g. assessment, policy, advocacy)? How will the network add value to its participants?

Environmental Literacy Champions can serve as catalysts for these teams or networks. They bring together the right people to begin to work through those six elements together.

Advancing Equity in the Network

Centering perspectives of those affected most by systemic oppression is critical for advancing equity. Those with lived experiences of oppression, environmental injustice, and/or exclusion from environmental education are often best suited to identify solutions that can work. Strategies for cultivating the conditions for equitable, deep collaboration are available on Digital Promise's [Education Innovation Clusters page](#).

[Collective impact](#) or other social change frameworks may be used by these networks to create direction, alignment, and commitment among the partners. There is no "correct" way to do this work, rather school districts and their partners should be guided by the needs and capacities within their network.

Community Engagement

Whether you're starting to build a local network, developing an environmental literacy plan, creating a MWEE, or just interested in broadening community engagement generally, the North American Association for Environmental Education has a series of [Guidelines for Excellence in Community Engagement](#) that can be helpful to you. Specifically, the guidelines provide suggestions for working in collaborative and inclusive partnerships that root environmental education efforts in the community's interest, issues, and capacities and describe how to engage in long-term investments in community change.

These five videos explore each "characteristic" in collaboration with select B-WET grantees. The videos explore how grantees have actually implemented concepts from the guidelines, providing practical examples and tips for others.

- [Community Centered](#)
- [Based on Sound Environmental Education Principles](#)
- [Collaborative and Inclusive](#)
- [Oriented Toward Capacity Building and Civic Action](#)
- [A Long-Term Investment in Change](#)

Understanding Your Community

In order to ensure that equity is at the forefront of environmental literacy planning efforts, it's essential that you develop a deep understanding of your community – both on and off the school campus. Understanding community starts with building authentic relationships with community members and listening to uncover existing assets as well as their hopes for the future. [The Equity Inquiry for Education Networks - Understanding Your Community](#) was created by Digital Promise to walk users through examining demographics, identifying equity gaps and barriers, and surfacing and affirming community assets. This tool could be used at many points in the planning process including as a means to *inform* what kinds of people you want to bring into your environmental literacy team or local network or as a way to ground those folks early on in the planning process.

Spectrum of Community Engagement

Community engagement is an on-going and evolving process that is based in trust and relationships. [The Spectrum of Community Engagement](#), a tool developed by Facilitating Power, sets out developmental stages from "informing" to "defer to" that can help your team reflect on where you are along a spectrum and set goals through conscious and collective practice for where you want to be. Another version of the tool ([The Spectrum of Family & Community Engagement for Educational Equity](#)) is also available specifically integrating best practices for family and community involvement for educational equity.