

# INTRODUCTION

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The ultimate goal of environmental education is the development of an environmentally literate citizenry. Environmentally literate individuals understand environmental issues and how environmental quality is impacted by human decisions. In addition, they use this knowledge to make informed, well-reasoned choices that also take social and political considerations into account.

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* comprises a set of recommendations for developing and administering high quality nonformal environmental education programs. These recommendations provide a tool that can be used to ensure a firm foundation for new programs or to trigger improvements in existing ones. The overall goal of these guidelines is to facilitate a superior educational process leading to the environmental quality that people desire. This overall goal is shared with the other guidelines produced by the North American Association for Environmental Education's National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education.

The term "environmental education program" is used in these guidelines to mean an integrated sequence of planned educational experiences and materials intended to reach a particular set of objectives. Programs, taken together, are the methods by which an organization's education goals are accomplished. Programs can be small or large and can range from short-term, one-time events to long-term, community capacity-building efforts.

Nonformal environmental education programs can be extremely diverse in their settings and in their target audiences. Community-based groups, service organizations, government agencies, boys and girls clubs, Elderhostels, parks and

reserves, state and national forests, residential centers, nature centers, zoos, museums, 4-H clubs, scouting organizations, etc., all may be involved in nonformal environmental education. (See the glossary for definitions of terms such as "environmental justice," "environmental social marketing," "informal environmental education," and "environmental interpretation," which are often considered to be part of or related to "nonformal environmental education.")

## HOW TO USE THESE GUIDELINES

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* points out six key characteristics of high quality nonformal environmental education programs. For each characteristic, guidelines are listed for nonformal program developers or educators to consider. Finally, each guideline is accompanied by several indicators listed under the heading, "**What to look for:**" These indicators are simply clusters of attributes you might look for to help gauge whether the characteristic is embodied in the nonformal program you are reviewing or developing.

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* can help the educator, administrator, or program developer who is concerned about the quality of nonformal environmental education programs. It provides direction while allowing flexibility in shaping content, technique, and other aspects of program delivery. These guidelines offer a way of judging the relative merit of different programs, a standard to aim for in developing new programs, and a set of ideas about what a well-rounded nonformal environmental education program might be like.

It is not reasonable to expect that every nonformal environmental education program

will follow all of the guidelines. For example, a nonformal program might not have a structured evaluation plan in place. This shortcoming does not necessarily mean that the program is fatally flawed. In cases such as this one, *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* can point out areas for improvement.

Similarly, it is likely that specific indicators for one or more of the key characteristics may not apply to a particular program. For instance, planners for a series of evening community forums would likely not have to concern themselves with the indicator that states, “The program’s goals and objectives ... are consistent with applicable national, state, and local educational goals and objectives.” Users of these *Guidelines* will need to determine which key characteristics, guidelines, and indicators are relevant in their particular situation. (See table entitled “A Step-by-Step Guide to the Flow of Program Development” on the next page.)

No set of guidelines could contain every possible detail of what constitutes a quality program. However, *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* provides a foundation on which to build programs that work. As a tool to inform judgment, these *Guidelines* can contribute to more effective environmental education.

## HOW WERE THE GUIDELINES DEVELOPED?

In an effort to assure that *Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* reflects a widely shared understanding of environmental education, a writing team comprised of environmental education professionals from a variety of backgrounds and organizational affiliations developed the document. This team took on the challenge of turning ideas about quality into usable guidelines. In addition, drafts of these guidelines were circulated widely to practitioners and scholars in the field (e.g., zoo and museum educators, community educators, administrators, environmental scientists, and youth leaders), and their comments were incorporated into successive revisions of the document.

Sample format for the guidelines:

### KEY CHARACTERISTIC #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Description of Key Characteristic

#### 1.1) Guideline

##### *What to look for:*

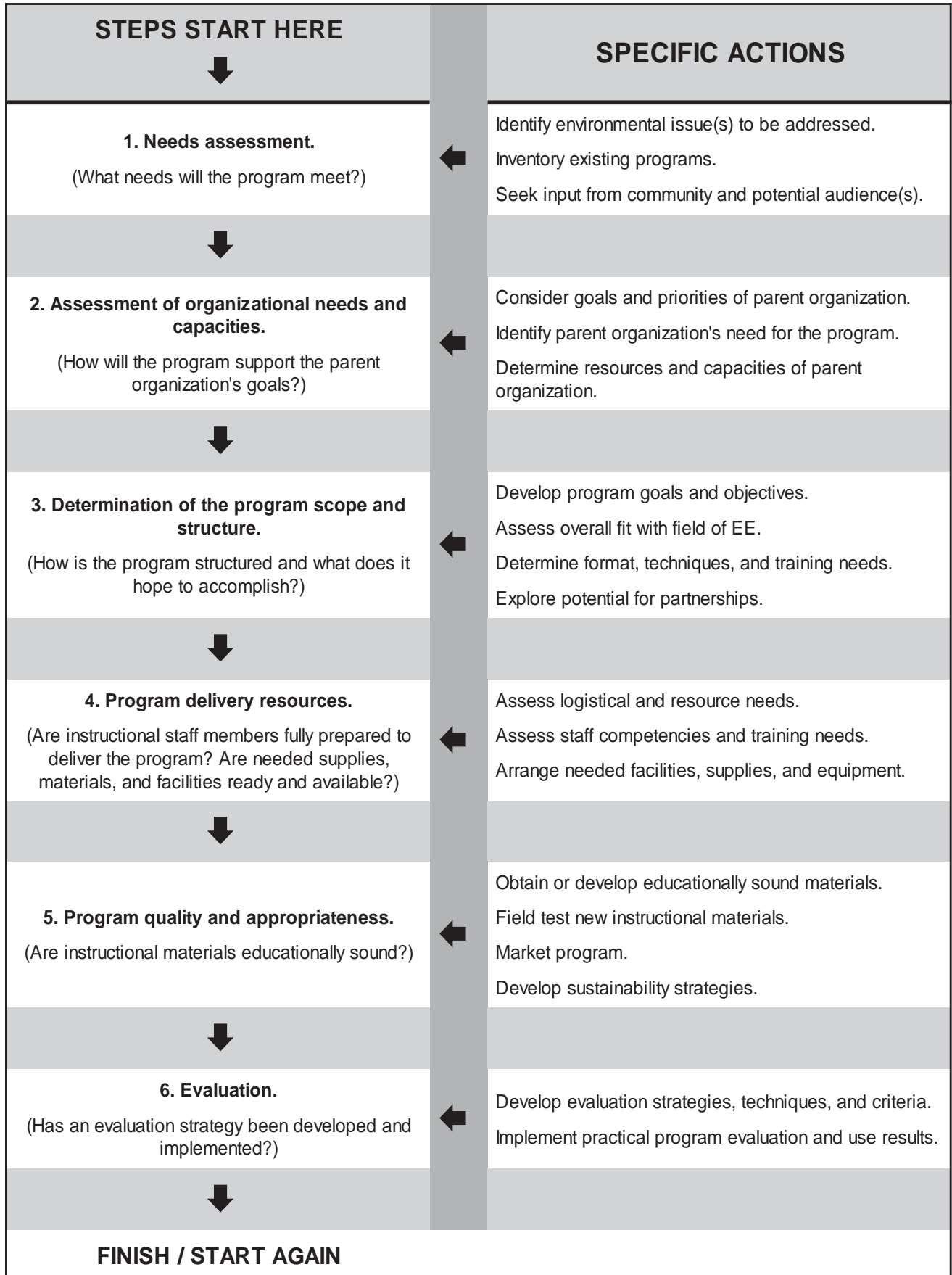
- Indicator
- Indicator

#### 1.2) Guideline

##### *What to look for:*

- Indicator
- Indicator

## A Step-by-Step Guide to the Flow of Program Development



## **HOW DO THESE GUIDELINES LINK TO OTHER GUIDELINES IN THIS SERIES?**

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* is one in an ongoing series of guidelines being developed as part of NAAEE's National Project for Excellence in Environmental Education (NPEEE). Taken together, the comprehensive set of guidelines constitutes a collection of tools that can provide practitioners with a firm grounding in the theory and practice of environmental education and can help elevate their work to the highest level of quality. (To learn more about NPEEE and the guidelines, visit [www.naaee.org/npeee](http://www.naaee.org/npeee).)

Each resource in the series has been developed to respond to specific needs that the environmental education community identified. As with this publication, each resource in the series was developed with an intensive research-based and peer-review process. Particularly relevant *Guidelines* documents are detailed below, and the entire series is described inside the back cover of this publication.

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* is designed to integrate synergistically with other publications in the *Guidelines* series:

*Excellence in Environmental Education: Guidelines for Learning (K-12)* details the understandings and skills needed for students' environmental literacy;

*Environmental Education Materials: Guidelines for Excellence* provides criteria for the selection or development of quality environmental education instructional materials; and,

*Guidelines for the Initial Preparation of Environmental Educators* specifies the competencies that instructors need in order to use educational materials and other resources to successfully teach towards the goal of environmental literacy.

*Nonformal Environmental Education Programs: Guidelines for Excellence* builds on the other *Guidelines* publications. It delineates ways to think about programmatic structure, goals and objectives, and logistical considerations to help environmental educators develop and implement effective programs that promote environmental literacy.

## **WHY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION?**

For many, environmental education is rooted in the belief that humans can live compatibly with nature and act equitably toward each other. Another fundamental belief is that people can make informed decisions that consider future generations. Environmental education aims for an effective, environmentally literate citizenry able to participate with creativity and responsibility in a democratic society.

Environmental education often begins close to home, encouraging learners to understand and forge connections with their immediate surroundings. The environmental awareness, knowledge, and skills needed for this localized learning provide a basis for moving out into larger systems, broader issues, and a more sophisticated comprehension of causes, connections, and consequences.

Whether working with adults or children, environmental education is learner-centered and provides participants with opportunities to construct their own understanding through hands-on, minds-on investigations. Engaged in direct experiences, learners are challenged to use higher order thinking skills. Environmental education provides real-world contexts and issues from which concepts and skills can be learned.

## **THE ROOTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

The Belgrade Charter was adopted by a United Nations conference in 1976 and provides a widely accepted goal statement for environmental education: “The goal of environmental education is to develop a world population that is aware of, and concerned about, the environment and its associated problems, and which has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivations, and commitment to work individually and collectively toward the solutions of current problems and the prevention of new ones.”

A few years later, the world’s first intergovernmental conference on environmental education adopted the Tbilisi Declaration. This declaration built on the Belgrade Charter and established three broad objectives for environmental education. These objectives, which follow, provide the foundation for much of what has been done in the field since 1978:

- To foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political, and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;

- To provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment, and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- To create new patterns of behavior of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.

As the field has evolved, these objectives have been researched, critiqued, revisited, and expanded. They still stand as a strong foundation for an internationally shared view of the core concepts and skills that environmentally literate citizens need. Since 1978, bodies such as the Brundtland Commission (Brundtland, 1987), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio (UNCED, 1992), the International Conference on Environment and Society in Thessaloniki (UNESCO, 1997) and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg have influenced the work of many environmental educators. By highlighting the importance of viewing the environment within the context of human influences, these perspectives have expanded the emphasis of environmental education to focus more attention on social equity, economics, culture, and political structure.