



naaee

North American Association
for Environmental Education

2020-2023 Strategic Framework

Education We Need for the World We Want



About Our Strategy

This framework outlines an ambitious strategy to advance our goals over the next three years. However, we know that in our rapidly-changing field, no plan is ever static. The world is in constant flux and we must be focused, but nimble, in response. As we make strides in building a more just and inclusive movement, new ideas, people, and issues will impact the way we approach our work and shape this strategy in the coming years. We are committed to being flexible and understanding that there are many approaches to solving the environmental and social issues we face—and what we consider today will continue to evolve in the coming years.



From the Executive Director and Board Chair

Imagine a future...

- ... where environmental education is celebrated as a catalytic force in the pursuit of a sustainable world.
- ... where NAAEE is widely recognized and supported as a force multiplier in the field of environmental education.
- ... where policymakers, philanthropists, corporations, and civil society readily connect the dots between environmental education, social responsibility, and citizen well-being.
- ... where every job is a green job, every school is a green school, and every home is a green home.
- ... where everyone everywhere understands the inseparable bond between a healthy environment and the quality of human life.
- ... where environmental and social responsibility drive individual and institutional choices.

This is the world we want to live in—one that optimizes human potential and propels us to a healthier, more equitable future.

It's impossible not to be deeply concerned about the unprecedented environmental, social, and economic challenges we face as a global society—from climate change and loss of species and habitats, to declines in civic engagement, decreasing access to nature, a growing gap between the haves and have-nots, and other threats to our health, security, and future survival. The need for environmental education has never been greater—and the opportunities never so clear. The work of NAAEE has the potential to transform lives and society by addressing these challenges and helping to create a motivated citizenry.

Environmental education informs, inspires, and enlightens. It builds human capacity, influences attitudes, and galvanizes actions. And most importantly, it can help people make informed decisions about the environment that lead to stewardship and a more sustainable society.

This strategy lays out a path forward for the next three years that works to build our core—to create a stronger, more vibrant organization that can serve as a backbone for the field we call environmental education. It also creates the foundation that will allow us to realize our larger vision of integrating environmental learning and civic engagement into all aspects of society to create a healthier and more robust environment and thriving communities everywhere.

Judy Braus
Executive Director

Charlotte Clark
Board Chair



Equity and Inclusion: Mission Critical

NAAEE embraces the principles and practices of equity and inclusion for reasons beyond the underlying moral imperatives. Equity and inclusion are mission-critical drivers of our strategy and our collective identity. A sustainable future depends on respecting the differences among people of all backgrounds and beliefs, but respect alone is insufficient. A sustainable future demands that we leverage population diversity to accelerate environmental literacy and civic engagement. Large-scale environmental stewardship goals are achievable if environmental education programs are designed to appeal to the widest possible audience. Inclusion is a strategic imperative—a matter of relevance, responsibility, and respect. So whether promoting promising or proven practices, cultivating collective action, building leadership, or mobilizing multi-sector support for environmental education, NAAEE's unique responsibility as a force multiplier in the field will be fueled by equity and inclusion considerations.

Looking Forward

As we strengthen our organization overall, we will focus on four key areas to advance our equity and inclusion efforts:

- **Making the Case:** More effectively articulate and demonstrate the business case for why equity and inclusion are imperative for our success
- **Integrating Equity and Inclusion into the Fabric of Our Work:** Align inclusion and equity into our strategy and all aspects of NAAEE work
- **Building Cultural Competence:** Provide support for NAAEE staff, board, volunteer leaders, members, and partners to take part in learning and sharing opportunities to increase cultural competency throughout the organization and field
- **Diversifying Our Membership and Building a Pipeline:** To grow and diversify our membership, we need to increase our reach and relevance among all aspects of society in key identity groups (LGBTQ+, disabilities, people of color, young professionals, and more)

We are working to identify additional resources and partnerships that will help us implement our work in this area, including support for training and outreach activities to build our cultural competency as an organization. As we work to strengthen our core systems and capacity, we will be better equipped to advance our work in this area. Our goal is to create an environment that is inclusive, respectful, and equitable, and to employ the talents of people with different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to accomplish the mission of NAAEE.



NAAEE Values

Optimistic

We are unabashedly hopeful about the possibilities for lasting change.

Impact-oriented

We focus relentlessly on the essential outcomes and impact of our work.

Inclusive

We embrace the diversity of people, ideas, and cultures as essential to our success and celebrate our differences to drive excellence and social progress.

Transformative

We embrace change and inspire new and creative ways to scale solutions and adapt to a changing world.

Collaborative

We know that creating a more sustainable world is a team sport—that we're stronger together than apart.

Respectful

We hold ourselves to the highest standards of integrity and respect for communities, people, and cultures. We are trusted as the reputable source for all things EE.



Our Vision

A just and sustainable world where environmental and social responsibility drive individual, institutional, and community choices.

The changes we want to see in the world include:

- Environmental education is valued as an essential strategy to create the world we want
- Greater use of, and access to, research and evaluation to create higher-quality environmental education programs and measurable impact
- More effective coalitions and partnerships that advance the field
- Access to nature and high-quality environmental education for all
- More informed, motivated, and innovative leaders in the field who reflect the world's demographics and are leading our efforts
- Environmental education is systematically integrated into formal and nonformal education systems, including preschool, K–12, and higher education
- Increased multi-sector support for using environmental education to address environmental and social issues and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals
- A more educated and engaged populace that is actively involved in civic life and understands the roles and responsibilities of protecting the environment and supporting our democracy

With our success, these efforts will lead us to a more just and sustainable future.

Our Mission

To use the power of education to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement to create a more equitable and sustainable future. We work with educators, policymakers, and partners throughout the world.

Strategic Goals



Goal 1. Drive Excellence and Spark Field-Wide Innovation

NAAEE sets the standards in the field—answering the questions, “What does effective practice look like?” and “What could the field be doing to scale up and achieve greater impact?” We lead the Guidelines for Excellence project, as well as advance research and professional learning, working with our affiliate network and partners to promote quality, creativity, cultural relevance, and impact in the field. We invest in innovation and capacity building to spark new ideas, professionalize the field, and stretch the boundaries of what’s possible.

Objectives

1. Lead the “Guidelines for Excellence” project to set standards for the field, build global capacity, and propel the field to deliver high-quality programming that achieves the greatest impact and touches every community.
2. Champion access to research and evaluation to increase quality and impact, and drive innovation.
3. Elevate our role as a trusted provider of resources, content, and professional learning to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement.
4. Recognize talent and expertise in the field (through NAAEE awards, certification, accreditation, and small grants).
5. Invest in creative, engaging, and effective professional learning that brings new ideas and thinking to the field.

Strategic Goals



Goal 2. Invest in Leadership for a Stronger and More Inclusive Movement

NAAEE is committed to building leadership skills and providing opportunities for a diverse cadre of multi-generational learners to grow, share, and innovate. As the champion and backbone organization for the field, we have a responsibility to build a leadership pipeline and to support new, emerging, mid-career, and seasoned leaders to advance environmental literacy and civic engagement. In addition, a leadership strategy can help make the field relevant to a broader audience and create an equitable and inclusive movement that attracts and retains new talent.

Objectives

1. Recognize and build the capacity of the diverse talent that exists in every community around the globe.
2. Provide professional learning opportunities for fellows and EE 30 Under 30 Honorees, and emerging EE professionals (focused on environmental education, civic engagement, equity and inclusion, leadership, and other key issues).
3. Grow and strengthen the Affiliate Network to build leadership at the state, regional, and provincial levels.
4. Grow and strengthen the network of EE researchers.
5. Build leadership capacity to promote collaboration between civic engagement and environmental education to advance both fields.

Strategic Goals



Goal 3. Cultivate Collaboration and Strengthen Networks for Change

NAAEE plays a unique role as a catalyst to build and strengthen networks and collaborations that magnify the reach and impact of our work. NAAEE convenes thought leaders to generate new ideas, address challenges, and seek opportunities to create positive societal change through EE. In addition, NAAEE is a “network of networks,” from our Affiliate Network to the Natural Start Alliance to the Global EE Partnership. By helping to strengthen existing networks and demonstrating how networks can create change, we advance our mission and support the work of our members and partners.

Objectives

1. Convene thought leaders to address key issues in the field, encompassing inclusion and equity, STEM, civic engagement, green jobs, green schools, professional learning, research and evaluation, advocacy, and other issues.
2. Conduct an annual best-in-class international conference and research symposium for the field of EE to promote networking, sharing, and leadership opportunities for expanding our collective impact.
3. Lead the Natural Start Alliance to connect educators, parents, administrators, and funders working to advance early childhood environmental education.
4. Partner with the Affiliate Network to strengthen capacity for EE and magnify the reach and impact of our collective work.
5. Strengthen environmental education around the world through the Global Environmental Education Partnership (GEEP) and other alliances.
6. Continue to grow the reach and influence of the Superintendents’ EE Collaborative.
7. Invigorate a thriving online EE learning community.

Strategic Goals



Goal 4. Champion Environmental Education Through Policy, Communication, and Outreach

NAAEE advocates for the field of environmental education and builds the capacity of others to be effective advocates. Working in the United States and internationally, we champion policies that advance our mission and provide universal access to high-quality environmental education. NAAEE is a trusted source of information about the environmental education field and plays a critical role in communicating the value and impact of EE, while getting key messages out about the work of NAAEE and the Affiliate Network. With our North American footprint and our global reach, we are uniquely positioned to collaborate with partners around the world to advance our collective work for greater impact.

Objectives

1. Amplify our niche as a trusted source for information about the field of environmental education.
2. Lead EE advocacy efforts for the field.
3. Provide professional development opportunities and tools to build advocates for the field.
4. Collaborate with the civic engagement education community to advance our collective work to build a civically engaged and environmentally literate citizenry.
5. Build support for the field through social media, op-eds, feature stories, special events, online portals, and other communication strategies.
6. Provide resources to educators, policy makers, the media, and others that demonstrate the value and impact of environmental education.

Strategic Goals



Goal 5. Sustain a Thriving Organization

By strengthening our staff, board, advisory council, and financial health, and focusing on creating a relevant, inclusive, and welcoming movement, we will be positioned to achieve our goals and sustain the organization.

Objectives

1. Attract, support, retain, and inspire a talented and diverse staff to implement the work of NAAEE and serve as ambassadors for the organization.
2. Create an equitable and inclusive work environment.
3. Attract a talented, legally responsible, and effective board, representing a variety of backgrounds, disciplines, and cultures.
4. Support a council of expert practitioners in the field to provide input to the organization.
5. Practice transparent, accountable, and fiscally responsible governance.
6. Secure the needed financial resources to sustain the organization.



The Power of Partnerships

We believe in the power of partnerships to create durable change. We work with individuals and institutions where we can have the most impact: linking early childhood education and environmental education; influencing K–12 systems through policy and programs for teachers, administrators, and superintendents; partnering with higher education institutions, including universities, community colleges, and vocational schools; and aligning with the wealth of nonformal educational institutions and nonprofits (zoos, aquariums, museums, nature centers, community centers, faith groups, and conservation organizations), as well as our Affiliates across North America. We also work globally to share effective practice and strive for collective impact. And finally, we work with leaders in diverse sectors—including government, philanthropy, business, health, communication, science, and environmental justice—to help reach people where they live, work, play, worship, and dream about the world we want.

Conclusion

According to children’s advocate Marian Wright Edelman, “Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.” This strategy sets a path forward for NAAEE to achieve our mission of advancing environmental literacy and civic engagement to leave the world a better place and create a more equitable and sustainable future. It reflects a greater alignment of work towards that mission. We know that in the coming months and years, we will need to be flexible, adapting to ongoing changes in society and the landscape and context of our work. We look forward to using this plan as a guide, but to revise as needed to accomplish our mission, support our partners, and achieve maximum impact.



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