



# ARIZONA ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## 2022 - 2026 STRATEGIC PLAN



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# ARIZONA ASSOCIATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

## Strategic Plan January 2022 - December 2026

### Summary

#### *Who we are*

The Arizona Association for Environmental Education (AAEE; [arizonaee.org](http://arizonaee.org)), and Affiliate of the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE; [naaee.org](http://naaee.org)) is a “professional association and network” designed to support anyone in the state of Arizona who teaches within and about the environment and natural world. Our focus is on:

1. Inspiring and helping young and upcoming EE providers to listen to Arizona community members, use best practice, and create inclusive and empathic programs in service to environmental literacy and future ecological sustainability.
2. Building community relationships and understanding the interconnectedness of environmental science, environmental justice, and other ways of knowing about and engaging in the natural world.
3. Understanding the human role as part of the earth’s systems and systemic failures
4. Recognizing and respecting alternative environmental viewpoints, cultures, and historical relationships to land and place.

#### *What we do - Our Programs*

1. Professional Development and Mentoring
  - Certification in Environmental Education
    - Two levels of Certification, both NAAEE approved
  - Annual Conference in September - **including research and practitioner perspectives**
  - Monthly open space discussions
  - Workshops for Guidelines for Excellence in EE
  - Equity and Inclusion Working Group and periodic workshops
  - Mentoring and learning from our communities and responding to the changing needs of the field
2. Resource Sharing and Promotion
  - Google group for community communication and collaboration

- Website forum
  - Blog posts by the community
  - Landscape analysis of ee Programs statewide
  - Resource archive on the website
  - eeJOBS board and biweekly email
3. Career Building and Recognition of Excellence
- eeFellows program for young educators
  - eeExcellence Awards
  - eeJOBS board and biweekly email
  - Advocacy for environmental education

## Vision

Environmental educators in Arizona are connected to each other and have the skills, knowledge, and resources to work collaboratively toward a vibrant, equitable, and socially just future.

## Mission

Connect and equip environmental education (EE) providers, new and seasoned, with their community and their place. We provide training, mentoring, and resources, to actively and equitably grow a healthy, environmentally sustainable, and just Arizona for all.

## Core Values

### *Stewardship*

- Maintain a healthy planet
- Use sustainable practices based on resourceful and responsible interactions
- Embody environmental, economic, civic, and social responsibility

### *Critical thinking, problem solving, and evidence-based decision making*

- Use reflective practice, advocacy through education, and an understanding of the influence of bias
- Rely on evidence-based and repeatable content
- Embrace understanding of the natural world from perspectives other than western science
- Link research and practice to bring new ideas and perspectives to the field; encourage researchers and western scientists to see environmental education as a way to reach new audiences and better communicate their research findings

### *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ)*

- Allow underrepresented voices to lead in environmental education
- Respect the contributions, worldviews, and opinions of everyone
- Acknowledge the harm white-centric and colonial history have caused

- Understand and communicate a multifaceted history of ee; not only created by white people, for white people
- Share the voices of the diverse cultures and populations of Arizona
- Understand the intersection between environmental education and environmental justice, knowing we can't move forward without considering both
- Strengthen the field with diversity by honoring social, cultural, economic, vocational, physical, linguistic, and other differences that are essential for our community to flourish
- Foster equitable access to environmental education for all Arizonans, removing barriers to access

### *Community Engagement & Collaboration*

- Utilize collective action to achieve effective outcomes and greater impacts
- Utilize place-based education and cultural humility to create relevant content for all

### *Innovation and Life-long learning*

- Value people of all ages, affirming that people are never too young or too old to become environmentally literate
- Continuously explore advancements in EE to evolve our strategies and more effectively fulfill our mission

## **What is Environmental Education?**

**We are all EE!** Environmental Education is a collective movement to empower ourselves and our communities to cultivate a healthy, environmentally sustainable, and just world through all types of learning and educational experiences. EE provides us with the knowledge, skills, and agency to inclusively address past, present, and future interconnected and systemic environmental & social issues in our communities and world.

## **Environmental Literacy Statement**

An environmentally literate person is someone who has the knowledge, skills, and agency to:

1. Understand processes for both environmental and social systems and the connection between the two
2. Uses questioning, analysis, critical thinking, problem solving, and interpretation skills
3. Using a sense of place, positively addresses environmental & social issues, individually and collectively, through informed decision making, civic engagement, and equitable action for the wellbeing of our local and global communities

To read more about the Guidelines for Excellence, the Definition of EE, and Environmental Literacy, please see the [North American Association for Environmental Education, Guidelines for Excellence - EE Materials Manual](#).

## Summary of Organizational Goals for 2021-2026

**Goal 1:** Build a community network that provides quality EE relevant to all

**Goal 2:** Demonstrate culturally responsive practice and cultural humility

**Goal 3:** Teach best practice in EE

**Goal 4:** Inspire collective advocacy to expand the reach of EE programs and organizations

**Goal 5:** Elevate the profession and legitimacy of EE across all sectors

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## Organizational Goals, Outcomes, and Strategies

**Goal 1:** Build a community network that provides EE relevant to all

*Outcomes:*

1. An annual conference is held each September with at least 150 people attending; 750 total by December 2026
2. By January 2022 launch a revised membership program designed to meet the needs of potential participants from every economic level. Membership increases by 25 people per year, with 300 paying members by December 2026
3. Host and maintain online at least three interactive platforms for members to share ideas, jobs, professional development opportunities and more.
4. Three social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn) engage 1500 of followers by December 2026
5. Send monthly communications from the director with announcements and research from the field; total of 60 by December 2026
6. The eeFellowship program, for upcoming professionals aged 18-23, has 20 candidates successfully completing the program by December 2026

*Strategies:*

1. Utilize marketing principles and relationship building strategies to advertise our programs and their benefits
2. Conduct focus groups to learn more about how young people wish to teach within and about the environment; understand and respond to their needs as upcoming professionals
3. Maintain robust social media presence with weekly interactions
4. Maintain AAEE Website functionality and respond to changing technology
5. Research eePractice and content to share; promote other organizations doing this work

## **Goal 2: Demonstrate culturally responsive practice and cultural humility**

### *Outcomes:*

1. Offer eight equity and inclusion working group meetings per year; total 36 by December 2026, each with results driven improvements by participant organization
2. Offer six professional development opportunities related to equity and inclusion by December 2026
3. The eeFellowship program engages 20 young people and 10 partner organizations by December 2026
4. Both levels of the eeCertification course include one DEIJ Module and discussions requiring participants to demonstrate application, implemented by January 2022
5. The AAEE Educator Code of Ethics is revised to include cultural humility and culturally responsive practice by January 2022
6. Host 6 annual affinity group mixers by 2026. Ensure there are leads for a variety of affinity groups (LGBTQ, Black, Latino, Young Professionals, Older Professionals, etc)
7. Donate annually to organizations led by communities of color in service to nature and culture
8. Board leadership includes members from each of the affinity groups, if AAEE service is relevant to individuals, by December 2026

### *Strategies:*

1. Facilitate monthly equity and inclusion working group for members and partner organizations with deliverables designed to make recommendations for best practice in designing more inclusive programs
2. Build relationships with board members and other affinity groups in our communities; each board member is required to identify and maintain relationship with members of underrepresented communities
3. Recruit and maintain board members from underrepresented audiences (in EE); provide opportunities for leadership for each.
4. Research and design the eeFellowship to be inclusive and learn more about interests of young environmental educators
5. Embed DEIJ module and content in the eeCertification Course with requirements that each participant demonstrate how they will deliver culturally responsive and relevant materials in their action research project
6. Recruit new leadership from affinity group participation, ensuring they understand their values and needs are seen and heard.

## **Goal 3: Teach best practice in EE**

### *Outcomes:*

1. The eeCertification Program certifies 10-20 people annually; 100 additional people certified by 2026
2. The eeCertification program receives NAAEE accreditation September 2023

3. Eight Guidelines for Excellence workshops are hosted by December 2026, with 80 participants total

*Strategies:*

1. The eeCertification Committee designs and facilitates an eeCertification program for people wishing to become certified environmental educators. Continually research and refine content to be responsive to evolving understanding of concepts and themes related to ee and DEIJ
2. The eeCertification Committee recruits an advisory board to help with feedback and research related to submission of the NAAEE Accreditation package

**Goal 4:** Inspire collective advocacy to expand the reach of EE programs and organizations

*Outcomes:*

1. One to three board or community members participate in the monthly NAAEE Advocacy Calls.
2. Quarterly communications sent to members about eeAdvocacy and how they can assist.
3. One collaborative online tool which documents each EE and outdoor learning program available in Arizona.
4. One to three board members participate in NAAEE committees each year.

*Strategies:*

1. Create and maintain a relationship with AZ Department of Education
2. Create and maintain a relationship with NAAEE.
3. Work with USFS Partners and NM Affiliate to design, implement, and maintain the SOEL database which allows reporting on statistics related to EE and outdoor learning in both states. Use the information contained therein to advocate for more resources for EE providers.

**Goal 5:** Elevate the profession and legitimacy of EE

*Outcomes:*

1. The annual eeExcellence awards program recognizes 66 people by December 2026
2. The eeFellowship program graduates 10 eeFellows gaining early career experiences by 2026.
3. One collaborative online tool which documents each EE and outdoor learning program available in Arizona.
4. The eeCertification Program certifies 10-20 people annually; 100 additional people certified by 2026

### Strategies:

1. Use marketing strategies to maintain an active network of AAEE Members who attend annual conferences, professional development opportunities, and eeAwards and utilize shared online resources
2. Board members advocate for EE in professional and work settings
3. Maintain an active eeCertification program, with basic and advanced opportunities, designed to be responsive to ee provider needs and best practices in the field
4. Advertise the benefits of EE to all Arizona Communities, in various media, in service to a sustainable and just world

## Glossary

- **Affinity groups** - Group of people sharing a common interest, characteristic, trait, or challenge working together to support one another in service to bettering the system.
- **Agency** - (according to Merriam-Webster) - the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power.
- **Collective advocacy** - Groups of people, who have experienced a problem or issue work together to amplify their voices and advocate for change.
- **Communities** (biological, ecological, cultural, political, etc.) - a group of people (or other living organisms) living in the same place or having similar interests or affinity.
- **Cultural humility** - ([American Psychological Association](#)) a process and life-long commitment to understanding and critiquing yourself and being open and empathetic to other viewpoints, cultures, worldviews in service to fixing power imbalances within a system.
- **Culturally responsive** - (from the [Latino Family Literacy Project](#)) - cultural responsiveness is the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures. It involves empathy and understanding that not all people relate to, consume information about, understand or feel comfortable with the mainstream culture.
- **DEIJ** - Stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice and is relevant to the work we do in the field of ee because there has traditionally been a disconnect between environmental education and the needs of other than white, cisgendered, and able participants. We seek to change that through cultural humility work and understanding challenges and lack of resources and access from all perspectives.
- **Environmental Sustainability** - the process by which humans ensure the long-term health and vitality of the natural world including the human systems contained within. Environmental sustainability is linked to both natural resources and social systems.



- **Interconnected** - joined or related, having influence upon each other.
- **Place-based** - grounded in a local community or geographic area
- **Systemic** - of or part of a system; demonstrating interconnectedness between elements and outcomes tied to multiple aspects of the whole.
- **Underrepresented** - those groups which have been left out of conversations communities, programs, schools, and access to resources.