

Understanding the National Environmental Education Advisory Council (NEEAC) 2015 Report to the EPA Administrator

What is the NEEAC?

The NEEAC is a group of professionals representing various stakeholder perspectives, who provide EPA with advice on the state of environmental education (EE). The NEEAC provides EPA with a better understanding of the EE needs of schools, universities, state departments of education and natural resources, NGOs, the private sector, regional leadership, and educational organizations. <http://www2.epa.gov/education/national-environmental-education-advisory-council>

What is EE?

EE refers to the use of a diverse range of approaches to teach individuals of all ages and backgrounds to explore their environments, engage in critical thinking and problem solving, and make informed decisions. EE programming covers a multitude of environmental and human health issues ranging in scope from extremely local to broadly global perspectives. The term *environment* is inclusive of both the natural and built environment.

Engagement in EE can take place in multiple settings including through formal education (i.e. school based), non-formal education (e.g. scout meetings, nature centers, and senior centers) and informal education, as part of day-to-day activities.

Environmental literacy--defined as *"the extent to which a person is concerned about the environment, equipped to make informed decisions about it, and has the skills and motivation to take environmentally responsible actions"*¹--is the intended outcome of EE. EE fosters environmental literacy by cultivating an understanding of the human world's inextricable relationship with the natural world through active and experiential engagement in real-world environmental problems.

Who is involved in EE?

EE practitioners range from individual educators, educator communities, county, state, regional, and federal agencies to private companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and Tribal nations. Individuals of all cultural backgrounds comprise the EE audience, which includes preschool children, school-age children, university students, parents, grandparents, policymakers, voters, business owners, and corporations.

¹ Ardoin, N. and C. Merrick. 2013. *Environmental Education: A Brief Guide for U.S. Grantmakers*: p. 2. Available: <https://people.stanford.edu/nmardoin/sites/default/files/Grantmakers%2010.6.pdf>.

What are the opportunities for advancing the field of EE?

Opportunities for advancing the field of EE exist in the following areas, among others: research and evaluation, equity and diversity, green schools, cross-sector partnerships and the involvement of business and industry in EE, and the growing number of state environmental literacy plans.

What is included within the 2015 Report?

The report highlights the current status of the field of EE, challenges and opportunities for the EE community, ways in which EPA supports EE, and recommendations to the EPA Administrator for future action.

What are the primary recommendations from the NEEAC?

The Council's recommendations focus on three key action areas for EPA: engagement, leadership, and funding. These areas are supported by the work of EPA's Office of Environmental Education (OEE) to champion, collaborate, and communicate about EE. The recommendations highlight:

- 1) The need for more consistent leadership for EE within EPA and across the federal government
- 2) Opportunities to increase and leverage federal funding for EE activities
- 3) The need to re-envision the legislation (National Environment Education Act)
- 4) The need for an updated strategic plan for OEE
- 5) Opportunities and needs related to engagement and operation of the NEEAC

In the report, the Council highlights the complex factors that influence human health and the environment. The key to resolving current challenges and preventing future ones lies in supporting an educated population that understands the interconnectedness of human and natural systems. EE provides a path to this vision for the future.