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HABITAT
COUNCILSM**

EDUCATION & AWARENESS



Awareness and Community Engagement Project Guidance

Stakeholder Informed



Introduction

Awareness and community engagement projects target a wide variety of learners who attend conservation-themed events and tours involving the corporate habitat. Awareness and community engagement projects are extremely important as gateway experiences for diverse audiences to gain knowledge of an important conservation topic or first-hand experience with their local habitat. These events can start a life-long interest in nature, inspire a pursuit of a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) career, and encourage increased participation in conservation actions in their communities.

Building Your Program

Projects are divided into four categories: **Habitat**, **Species Management**, **Education and Awareness** and **Other Options**. You can build a program with more than one of each category but you must associate your program with at least one habitat. This Awareness and Community Engagement Project Guidance is in the **Education and Awareness** category. You must associate your awareness and community engagement project with your habitat, and you may also associate it with a **Species Management** project.



Habitat – Projects that focus on conservation actions to protect, restore and manage different habitats.



Species Management – Projects addressing the conservation needs of targeted wildlife species or groups of species.



Education and Awareness – Projects to improve awareness, understanding and skills relating to conservation and the environment.



Other Options – Specialized projects that add value to your conservation efforts.

Browse the Project Guidance library at wildlifehc.org/pg.

What Do Awareness and Community Engagement Projects Look Like?

As with all WHC Conservation Certification education-focused projects, awareness and community engagement projects are firmly rooted in using the outdoor environment—in this case the corporate habitat—as the vehicle for teaching. The habitat may be all or part of the focus of an event, tour or festival. In some instances, the habitat may inspire participants to take outreach activities to other events or habitat areas in the community in order to share knowledge and raise awareness.

Awareness and community engagement projects may take the form of annual events such as Earth Day celebrations or tree planting festivals. Projects may also occur as part of a corporate open house or tour of a corporate facility that includes an activity in the habitat to highlight how biodiversity conservation fits with the company's overall sustainability objectives. Awareness and community engagement projects include inviting employees, their families or the general public to join monitoring events such as annual bird counts, and taking photographs of the habitat for monitoring logs. The corporate habitat

may be used to connect youth to nature where they learn to appreciate natural resources and master basic outdoor skills.

Whenever possible, awareness and community engagement projects focused on corporate habitats should highlight the vision that nature and business can coexist when thoughtful conservation practices are employed.

Additional features that can be incorporated into an awareness and community engagement project to further increase its value to learners and educators include:

- A nature trail with interpretive signs or other materials such as guides, brochures and information on available tours to promote learning.
- Equipment or tools to facilitate engagement with the habitat, such as gardening tools for restoration, hand lenses for study, and field guides
- Topics developed with input from local conservation experts and interested community members
- Events designed to meet an identified community need or desire
- A clear learning goal that establishes an awareness level to be achieved, and an objective for engaging the community in initial acts of conservation
- Involvement of outside presenters and partners to increase expertise and further diversify the resulting experiences and outlooks
- Looking within your company to identify individuals with expertise or interest in topic areas, further increasing their involvement in the conservation program
- Aligning the focus of an event with national, state or local conservation priorities
- Gathering spaces for discussions and sharing of findings
- Access to shelter or a plan for alternative indoor activity in case of inclement weather
- Access to basic sanitary facilities and potable water

Considerations for Corporate Lands

Projects implemented on corporate-owned lands have different circumstances and challenges to those on public lands, protected lands or wild lands.

Which types of corporate lands are best suited for awareness and community engagement projects?

Awareness and community engagement programs can be conducted on corporate habitats of all types and sizes. Awareness and community engagement projects can be mutually beneficial to the corporate host site and the surrounding community for three primary reasons:

- Awareness and community engagement projects allow companies to share their knowledge of conservation topics in order to **encourage community members to participate** in local, regional and national conservation initiatives
- Awareness and community engagement projects allow companies to **build relationships with their employees or the local community** by inviting these individuals to share experiences in the corporate habitat or with conservation partners, and offering access to greenspace to which they may not otherwise have access
- Awareness and community engagement projects can have **environmental justice and socioeconomic benefits**. For example, awareness and community engagement projects can provide recreational and outdoor education opportunities to communities without easy access to open space.

Addressing challenges

The corporate context presents certain challenges for implementing awareness and community engagement projects. Understanding these concerns and potential ways to overcome them can help your project succeed in the long term.

Concern	Response
Some teams may encounter resistance to providing non-employees with access to corporate landscapes.	<i>Teams should work with event organizers, youth group leaders or festival representatives to ensure that outdoor lessons or experiences demonstrate the project's relevance, value of the relationship to the company and the region's conservation needs.</i>
Identifying, approaching and establishing relationships with appropriate partners may be challenging.	<i>Teams can talk to employees within the company to utilize existing relationships and interests to establish initial events. WHC can also help teams connect with potential local partners.</i>
Opening the habitat to a large number of community members may be perceived as a daunting task for a newly-established team.	<i>Teams can start with hosting a small group for a short event, and then evaluate the event's success and discuss if growth is an option. It may be best for your site to host small groups from the community, or perhaps employees and their families only.</i>

Concern	Response
<p>Employees who can act as guides to the habitat may be reluctant to lead a public event or a group of people in a lesson or tour because they are not trained.</p>	<p><i>Conservation partners such as youth group leaders and local ecology experts can lead events, with employees acting as hosts in the habitat; environmental consultants who work at the site may also be invited to participate.</i></p> <p><i>Employees may attend a pre-event training led by local conservation partners or WHC staff in order to familiarize themselves with the content to be explored in order to lead conservation education events.</i></p>

Getting Started with Awareness and Community Engagement Projects

For a project to qualify toward Conservation Certification, you must be able to answer “yes” to five questions.

1. Is the project locally appropriate?
2. Does it have a stated conservation or education objective?
3. Does it provide value or benefit to the natural community?
4. Have outcomes been measured and is there supporting documentation?
5. Does it exceed any pertinent regulatory requirements?

Conservation and education objectives

It is a requirement of Conservation Certification that formal learning projects be designed to meet one or more conservation objectives. Objectives can guide the direction of the project, help motivate others to participate and provide a basis for evaluation.

The following are suggested objectives for awareness and community engagement projects. Your team may choose one or more of these objectives, or develop your own relevant objectives.

- Raising awareness about environmental issues
- Engaging the community on environmental concerns that affect the region
- Familiarizing citizens with appropriate conservation actions that they can apply to their own lives
- Instilling an appreciation for the natural world
- Building an understanding that business and nature can coexist
- Giving the audience an opportunity to sample engagement in a conservation project
- Providing the opportunity for community members to take part in a larger conservation initiative

The following strategies are recommended to strengthen the conservation impact of your project:

- Address an identified need in the community or for the employees
 - Incorporate input from employees or volunteers who know the habitat, educators, or local conservation experts
 - In addition to access to green space, provide the community with resources such the chance to use scientific equipment, or access to expertise on a specific subject matter
 - Instill participants with appreciation and awareness of an issue, concept or skill
 - Introduce a new skill, awareness or behavior through contact with the natural world or contact with others who have expertise in a topic
 - Assess the project process with an evaluation to help improve the project's effectiveness over the long term
- Assess the project's results through an evaluation of the impact on participants' attitudes, understanding and conservation actions taken outside of the project
 - Address a socio-economic need by providing underserved communities with access to green space, equipment, or expertise.
 - Produce educational materials in a common language for the community, other than English or the official state language
 - Connect to larger local, regional and national initiatives for conservation education
 - Be implemented as part of a multi-site initiative for awareness and community engagement that creates connectivity between informal learners in a landscape-scale context

Partnerships

There are typically two types of participants in an awareness and community engagement project: the host company, and outside experts from local conservation or education organizations.

In any company, there are often many resources to be found within the employee base that can contribute to the planning of events. By creating a survey that explores the interests and community connections of interested employees, teams may find that some of its members have connections to local conservation groups, or have expertise in birding, native plants, watershed monitoring or other topics of interest.

Outside experts are extremely valuable partners who may provide technical advice, guidance or training for employees when planning events, or when developing a tour of the facility that includes the site's habitat as part of the tour experience. Outside partners may also be able to assist the team with leveraging funds for implementing and maintaining the project, and can help create links between the on-site project and other awareness and community engagement projects or conservation or education priorities in the region.

Resources

Your project may benefit from online or printed resources available for your region to support the design, delivery, maintenance, and monitoring of awareness and community engagement projects.

A search with phrases such as "site tour," "open house" and "community event" in the Conservation Registry returns a list of approximately 300 projects implemented through WHC's certification program. This is a great place to find inspiration for your project and see what others are doing in and around your location.

The following terms, in any combination, may be useful when searching online for items related to this theme:

environmental education	educational signage	World Water Day
conservation education	environmental festival	International Migratory Bird Day
experiential education	Earth Day	bird counts
teaching outdoors	World Environment Day	tree planting projects
hands-on lessons	Take Your Child to Work Day	live animal demonstrations
nature trail	International Day of Forests	
interpretive signs		

Understanding the Application Process

Documentation

When applying for Conservation Certification, you will provide documentation of the planning, implementation, maintenance, and monitoring of your awareness and community engagement project. The following are required forms of documentation for awareness and community engagement projects; however, you may submit additional supporting materials.

Photographs or videos that depict the progress of the project implementation and management.

Project Management Plan/Project Design, which should describe the following:

- How the project addresses a specific need in the community or brings attention to a conservation issue
- How the project was developed
- How the project was implemented
- Resources provided for the project
- How the project was evaluated

Samples of materials used as part of the awareness and community engagement activity. If specific activities were implemented by partners, copies of those presentations or lessons should be included. If your team designs its own activities and presentations, or adapts activities from other sources, you should provide information about how the curriculum was developed and assessments that demonstrate the activity's proven impact. Outlines and scripts for habitat tours are acceptable, as are talking points for walks along a nature trail.

Evaluation materials that measure the impact of the activities, including evaluation of the education process or the learning impact of education activities. Materials may include surveys, pre- and post-testing results, post-project interviews, participant testimonials or letters from participants discussing how the knowledge or skills helped raise their awareness of a conservation topic or engage in a conservation topic, annual reviews of the team or project, and a summary/assessment of the project's progress and success in achieving desired outcomes over time.

Application questions

As you complete the application online, you will be asked the following questions about your awareness and community engagement project. These questions will help us understand and evaluate your project.

	Question	Why this question is important
Overview	Is your project associated with a habitat or species project?	<i>Projects must be related to an outdoor habitat or species project to be considered for WHC Conservation Certification.</i>
	How does the project relate to the chosen habitat or species project?	
	What is the target audience for this project?	
	How many people are reached through this project?	
	How many hours are audience members engaged in this project annually?	
	Briefly describe activities taking place as part of the project.	
	Provide photos showing the education project.	
Objective	What are the goals of this project?	<i>Awareness and engagement projects based on identified community needs have a greater value for community members.</i>
	Does the project address a specific need in the community?	
	Please describe the community need and how it was identified.	
	Upload any documentation showing the community need.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Planning	Is there a plan guiding the activities?	<i>We would like to know how long the project has been underway and the steps taken to implement it.</i>
	Provide a timeline of the project plan including planning, implementation and evaluation.	
	Upload the plan.	
	When did the first activity for your target audience take place?	
Materials	Does the project use materials that are both age- and topic-appropriate?	<i>This question helps us assess the design of the project.</i>
	Upload samples of the materials used.	
	Does the project incorporate equipment to facilitate engagement of the learning audience?	
	Describe how these tools or equipment are used.	
Conservation Impact	Does the project support a conservation project?	<i>Engaging employees and community members in an existing conservation project strengthens both the education and conservation outcomes.</i>
	How does this project support a conservation project?	

	Question	Why this question is important
Evaluation	Do you evaluate the project?	<i>We are looking for two types of evaluation. We want to know if the audience learned something. We also want to know if you assessed the overall event – how it was planned, carried out, etc., and if you used your evaluation to improve your program.</i>
	Do you evaluate changes in the learners' knowledge and behavior?	
	Describe the evaluation process.	
	Upload documentation of the evaluation.	
	Summarize the results of the evaluation.	
	Do you evaluate the overall learning experience?	
	Describe the evaluation.	
	Summarize the results of the evaluation.	
	Describe how you use the evaluation to improve your project.	
Employee Participation	Do any employees lead or facilitate the project?	<i>Employees can bring different skills and knowledge to strengthen a program.</i>
	How many employees lead or facilitate this education project?	
	Describe how employees are involved in this project.	
	How many employee hours were spent on the following activities each year? Implementation and Planning	

	Question	Why this question is important
Other Participants	Do any groups or individuals outside of your company actively contribute to the project on a regular basis?	<i>We recognize that it is not always possible to recruit outside groups to your project but we value conservation and education partners as well as community volunteers.</i>
	Select the types of groups - community members, consultants and contractors, government agencies, NGO partners, schools and universities, youth organizations, other companies.	
	List the names of the groups you work with.	
	Describe their involvement in this project.	
	How many hours were spent by the groups on the following activities each year? Implementation and Planning	
	If you work with a specialist for your project and have a current letter of support from them, upload it here.	
	List additional sources of technical advice (e.g. website, guidebook, etc.) and describe how they were used.	
Regulatory Requirements	Are any aspects of the project done in relation to regulatory requirements?	<i>We recognize this is highly unlikely for an awareness and community engagement project, but this is a required question for all our applicants.</i>
	Explain how the project exceeds requirements.	

	Question	Why this question is important
Alignments	Does the project align with any larger scale initiatives? (e.g. STEM, regional/local initiatives, corporate strategy, etc.)	<i>We believe alignments with large-scale initiatives and appropriately-scaled regional conservation or education plans make projects stronger and more meaningful</i>
	Is the project part of a corporate level commitment to commitment to education or community?	
	Upload documentation of your corporate commitment to education or community.	
	Does the project align with an existing conservation or education plan or other large scale initiative?	
	List the plans or other large scale initiative the project aligns with and provide website links if available.	
	Briefly describe the alignments.	

Content development for Conservation Certification

To inform the development of Conservation Certification, WHC analyzed the projects it was recognizing through its certification program to assess whether they were aligned with contemporary conservation and education priorities.

Following this assessment and using information from it, WHC convened Advisory Committees around conservation and education themes to develop the content that would guide practitioners and applicants in the future. This content is the basis for the Project Guidance and the online application process.

The following provided feedback on the initial draft of the Awareness and Community Engagement Project Guidance.

Joshua Falk, National Environmental Education Foundation
Jeff Chandler, National Environmental Education Foundation

More information can be found about this process in the “Our Impact” section of wildlifehc.org under “Commitment to Transparency.”

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The WHC Strategy and Planning team can help you build a successful project by identifying needs, making connections with partners and resources, and providing strategies that meet business and conservation goals. Contact us today.

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Every act of conservation matters.

