

A step-by-step guide to planning, implementing and evaluating education initiatives on corporate lands





### About this guide

Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) helps corporations around the world develop robust formal learning, training, awareness, and community engagement projects. By helping learners worldwide gain an appreciation for nature and providing them with technical knowledge needed to protect it, these programs have made invaluable contributions to the natural world and their communities.

To help companies through this process, WHC developed this step-by-step guide, sponsored by Shell, to lead site teams through the planning, implementation and maintenance of new and existing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Environmental Education (EE) projects.

This guide has been informed by WHC's extensive experience with community-minded education efforts and first-hand insights from member organizations who have implemented impactful education projects.

For more information, visit www.wildlifehc.org or contact whcconsulting@wildlifehc.org.

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## STEM AND EE WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT

STEM refers to the learning areas of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math, and may also incorporate the arts (STEAM) and environmental studies (ESTEAM).

STEM has emerged as a focal point of many education approaches and initiatives, and with good reason: the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that through 2029, STEMrelated occupations are projected to grow at more than twice the rate of other fields while offering more competitive salaries. Providing STEM education familiarizes students with these rewarding fields and prepares them for a skills-based job market.

In the U.S., many children receive minimal instruction in these areas, as little as 1-3 hours per week. Much of the STEM education that does take place happens in a classroom. These sporadic, hands-off experiences can give students the impression that these fields are uninteresting or intimidating and deter them from further exploration. There is, then, a strong case for in-field instruction. Outdoor lessons have been shown to increase learning retention and lead to greater success back in the classroom. These experiences also show students that STEM can be approachable, exciting and relevant.

Environmental Education — the approach of learning about STEM topics in nature through hands-on, applied lessons supplements classroom lessons with immersive, inclusive experiences.

In addition to improving learning outcomes, time outdoors helps children's mental and physical health and ability to focus, and builds observation skills, independence and confidence. Instruction outside of the classroom often resonates with students with alternative learning styles and helps those struggling academically to feel confident. EE also provides positive outdoor experiences, which can catalyze a passion for science and nature and a lifetime of environmental stewardship.



## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR STEM AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Corporate education initiatives offer meaningful, equitable and accessible opportunities for learners of all ages to develop environmental knowledge and problem-solving skills needed to address local and global environmental issues.

With an awareness of company resources and community needs, site teams of all sizes can engage in education activities that create positive community and conservation impacts and cultivate the next generation of scientists, mathematicians and engineers.

Fostering an appreciation of the environment within youth is important to ensuring a sustainable future. Moreover, children must be equipped with the ability to apply technology and deploy scientific thinking to solve complex, multidisciplinary issues.

#### The Challenges Corporate Involvement Can Address

Many schools lack the equipment, outdoor venues, time and resources needed to provide hands-on, student-directed experiences in which to impart knowledge. Teachers are often required to employ traditional and mandatory approaches (e.g., lectures, assigned readings from textbooks) and to focus on preparing students for standardized tests. Many children have limited interaction with adults in technical fields, further preventing them from seeing how scientific concepts can be applied to realworld settings.



#### Benefits to Companies and Communities

Corporate teams with green space and access to resources can empower community members through invaluable outdoor experiences. These actions also benefit companies in the following ways:

- Enhanced social license to operate
- Improved physical wellness of employees, through opportunities to go outside and get active
- Improved mental wellness of employees, by providing them with outdoor time and opportunities to address eco-anxiety through environmental action
- Increased awareness of, and participation in, on-site conservation work
- Stronger interdepartmental relationships through collaborative event planning



#### STEM & EE are for kids of all ages

While many education initiatives focus on preparing youth for future challenges, given the time-sensitive nature of many environmental issues, engaging adults in STEM and EE lessons can inspire immediate action, while providing audience-specific benefits:

- Showcasing on-site habitats to employees is an effective way to increase engagement.
- Providing older community members with outdoor experiences has been shown to increase their well-being and sense of independence.
- Events that target families can encourage parents to replicate pro-environmental behaviors at home.





## 11 STEPS TO CREATING A STEM/EE PROJECT

Implementing an education initiative requires extensive planning, teamwork and a willingness to continually evaluate and improve efforts.

To ensure the project's success, divide the process into these 11 steps and approach them individually.

- 1 Choose an Activity Type and Teaching Approaches
- 2 Assess Internal Roles and Resources
- **3** Set Project Goals
- 4 Conduct Audience Outreach
- **5** Form Partnerships
- 6 Develop Content
- 7 Train Educators
- 8 Purchase or Create Supplies
- 9 Evaluate the Project
- (1) Conduct Project Maintenance
- 1 Publicize the Project's Success



# **O** Choosing an Activity Type and Teaching Approaches

From on-site lessons to open houses, education can take many forms. Classroom-style instruction, including lectures, quizzes and tests, should be used sparingly so as not to replicate the experiences offered in schools. Instead, select immersive activities that take advantage of the outdoor setting and use engaging approaches. These techniques are ideal for student engagement, knowledge retention and forging connections to nature. Some of the most popular types of activities include:

Activity Type	Description	Time Commitment
Field Trips	During the school year, students from a specific class, grade or school partake in on-site education activities that often align with state learning standards. Elementary/ primary school students can learn about habitats and species; upper grades can perform monitoring and data collection. Chaperones and one-time volunteers can lead activities; set-up/debriefing should be performed by frequent volunteers.	Trips typically last ~90 minutes; set-up and debriefing can take an additional two hours.
Tours and Open Houses	Tours and open houses demonstrate an organization's commitment to conservation by highlighting eco-friendly features of the location, both indoors and outdoors, e.g. attendees can observe a building's green design elements or explore on-site nature areas, learning about the habitats and species present. Tours can be structured and led by a guide, or visitors can travel freely between information stations. Employees can help lead tours or work the stations.	Flexible — can range from hour-long events to full day; can be offered quarterly/ yearly or more frequently.
Group Events	Group events can be catered to the interests or personal goals of a group (e.g., Scouts, youth groups, senior centers and garden clubs). Depending on what attendees wish to learn, can entail tours, station visits or hands-on activities.	Can be one-time events, conducted with limited employee availability.
Celebrations and Awareness Days	Celebration events are one-day occurrences that are scheduled around observances (e.g., Pollinator Week, Earth Day, Arbor Day, Take Your Child to Work Day) and often take place annually. A typical event includes information stations that offer hands-on, educational activities, and can involve group activities like planting or building birdhouses. Local organizations can be invited to set up stations of their own.	Good fit for sites where there is high employee interest, but limited employee availability.
Trainings	Training events target site employees and other volunteers who participate in on-site conservation or education work. These events teach participants how to monitor or manage a site's target habitats or species, or train educators to lead activities.	Can be conducted on an as-needed basis.
Outreach Events	Outreach events entail employees traveling off-site to teach about environmental topics. Lessons can take place in classrooms or schools' outdoor spaces, or at an information booth set up at a local event.	In-school events: regularly available employees. Community events: limited availability.
Virtual Events	Lessons and site tours can be adapted to a virtual environment by streaming live or prerecorded videos. Many virtual event platforms feature chat or Q&A functions so that educators can interact with attendees. Virtual events offer attendees convenience and can give organizers a sense of certainty, as they are less prone to weather or public health related cancelations.	Flexible — livestreamed events can be scheduled as the need arises. Prerecorded content can be repurposed for multiple events.



Regardless of event format, organizers should employ engaging, experiential teaching approaches to create memorable, positive and unique experiences. These approaches encourage self-guided learning and demonstrate connections between classroom lessons and real-world situations, showing learners that STEM topics can be dynamic, relevant and meaningful. The <u>Develop Content (page 13)</u> section of this guide provides examples of how some of these approaches can translate into lessons. Some of the most impactful experiential teaching approaches include:

Approach	Description	Benefits
Hands-on Learning	Learners participate in tactile activities (e.g., planting vegetation, collecting data, or cleaning up green spaces or waterbodies) or take part in engaging, interactive lessons.	By giving learners a task, they become active participants in the lessons. This makes the subject matter more relevant, interesting and memorable.
Direct Observation	Learners make connections to the subject matter by silently watching their surroundings.	Learners make connections on their own, discovering details that they didn't see previously while exploring their own interests.
Applied Learning	Learners have educational experiences in real-world settings.	Providing in-field context makes subject matter more real, relevant and approachable.
Social Learning	Learners discuss ideas, ask questions and form answers with one another.	Facilitating student-led lessons helps students take ownership of their learning and process an experience together, leading to greater retention of material.
Kinesthetic Learning	Learners explore the subject matter through active, movement-based activities.	Physical action helps students understand the subject matter in a holistic way that involves both mind and body.
Sensory-based Learning	Learners are immersed in subject matter by employing some, or all, of the five senses.	Allows learners to make tangible connections between classroom lessons and real-world phenomena.
Inquiry-based Learning	Learners are encouraged to pose questions and find their own answers. Educators act more as facilitators than lecturers.	Learners are prompted to think for themselves, making discoveries about the subject matter and taking ownership of the experience.
Reflection	Learners independently think about the activities and experiences they have participated in.	Helps learners process their experience and review, in their own terms, what they have learned, leading to increased retention.



### 2 Assess Internal Roles and Resources

Before starting an education initiative, key participants from the company should be identified, and their roles clearly delineated. When forming a company-wide strategy, ask the following questions:

### Why does the comapny want to start an education initiative?

Consideration:

 Education projects should align with corporate-level missions and goals. A corporate commitment to education will strengthen any efforts.

#### What resources are needed to implement the project? (Funding, staffing needs, spatial requirements, communications)

Considerations:

- Create a project budget and identify funding sources (e.g., community relations, social responsibility or groundskeeping budgets). Differentiate between one-time (e.g., reusable field guides) and recurring (e.g., wildflower seeds) costs.
- Most education initiatives require support from multiple departments or units. Identify what needs will be met by which departments (e.g., operations, groundskeeping, marketing/ communications).
- How will staff balance the project's time commitment with everyday job duties?
   Some companies offer paid volunteer days, or supervisors may allow their teams to allocate working hours to the project.
   If not, gauge how much time employees are willing to contribute during breaks or outside of working hours.

#### What amenities are available for visitors?

Considerations:

- Identify where on-site activities will take place and, if applicable, how attendees will travel between stations.
- If any parts of the site are closed to the public, determine how to restrict access.
- In case of inclement weather, locate indoor or covered alternative spaces.
- Determine if on-site restrooms are available to visitors. If not, consider renting portable toilets.
- If attendees are eating food on-site, create access to sinks/handwashing stations, tables and trash cans.

#### Who at the company will lead the effort?

Designate a point person for the following important tasks:

- Organizing and facilitating meetings
- Conducting partner and community outreach and maintaining communication
- Handling logistics and scheduling (e.g., dates/times, transportation/parking, booking confirmations)
- Creating and facilitating activities (e.g., writing or sourcing lesson plans, securing materials, training educators, leading lessons if not using external educators)

### Should external partners be involved? If so, how?

#### Consideration:

 Partners can address gaps in resources, staffing or knowledge. See <u>Forming</u> <u>Partnerships (page 12)</u> for more guidance.





## After roles have been delegated and resources evaluated, state the STEM/EE project's goals.

The goals and approaches defined in this phase are essential to guide the project through the remaining phases of planning, implementation and evaluation. Establishing a common set of goals will also create consistency and clarity between all parties involved.

Goals are what an organization hopes learners will gain from their educational experiences.

#### EXAMPLE OF A PROJECT GOAL

Our goals are to teach students about the forest restoration work that we are doing, including why invasive species are harmful and native plants beneficial. We also seek to show students how pollinators use our meadow and the importance of pollination.

#### Once goals have been established, state the reasons for the project and the strategies and tactics that will be implemented by answering the following questions:

- What is the importance of this project, and why is it being initiated?
- What community need (e.g., lack of green space, limited STEM opportunities for youth) is being addressed?
- How will learners and the company each benefit?
- How will events be executed?

Remember the many teaching approaches (described on <u>page 8</u>) that can be used. Intentionally incorporating as many as possible will ensure that lessons resonate with a wide audience.

#### EXAMPLE OF PROJECT NEED, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Many children in our area have limited access to outdoor spaces. To address this issue, our field trips will provide local third grade classes with a unique, hands-on opportunity to learn about our site's forest and meadow habitats. Through exploration and observation of these habitats, along with games and opportunities for social learning and reflection, students will make connections between their classroom learning and our site's outdoor spaces.



## **4** Conduct Audience Outreach

#### With goals and resources in mind, begin to identify and reach out to potential audience members and schedule events.

The activity types being offered will determine how to order these tasks:

- For large community events, first select an event date and time, and then publicize it.
- If hosting field trips or small group events, start by contacting potential audience members and informing them of the types of activities offered on-site. From there, work with the group to choose a date.

#### Utilize the following tactics for outreach:

- Use company newsletters, bulletin boards or intranet systems to reach employees.
- Advertise public events in local newspapers or through local sustainability and environmental groups.
- Use the resources and contacts of the marketing or community relations staff to reach general audiences.
- Reach out to school principals, science teachers or event coordinators.
- Contact local Scout troop or youth group leaders.
- Research local senior centers and contact their event coordinators.
- Contact county and municipal government officials.

- Engage employees who are parents, caregivers or youth group leaders; they can often facilitate direct contact with groups.
- Invite teachers or groups to use the site for their own activities. Use the event to promote the company's education offerings.

When interacting with potential audience members, remember the following:

- Listen to their needs and incorporate them into the project design. (For example: Teachers may want to align field trips with state standards. Scout leaders may want activities that can earn badges.)
- Discuss logistics/resources. Can the group provide their own transportation? Should participants bring their own food/drinks?

### When scheduling events, consider the following:

- In regions with four distinct seasons, spring and fall are ideal for outdoor activities.
- Ensure that school events are planned in tandem with the academic calendar.
   Typically, schools prefer to schedule field trips far in advance. Scout troops or youth groups may also follow school calendars.
- Establish an inclement weather policy. Most outdoor programs can still occur in light rain or drizzle. In the event of thunderstorms, high winds or extreme temperatures, reschedule the event. Consider a pre-established rain date.





While some companies are fortunate to have dedicated environmental staff, many education initiatives are organized and implemented by employees in unrelated roles, with backgrounds in a different field. Local partners can supplement employee contributions, bringing environmental expertise and extra help to an education project.

Partners can include:

#### **Colleges and Universities**

- Professors and researchers can act as subject matter experts and assist in the development of activities, lessons and curricula.
- Faculty and student volunteers can lead events and teach lessons.
- Students may also be interested in completing an EE internship with the company.

#### Local Gardening and Environmental Groups

- Hobby gardeners or environmental advocates may be interested in volunteering with educational projects that align with their interests.
- Many states have Master Gardener or Master Naturalist programs, whose trainees or graduates can provide expertise on educational content or lead lessons.



#### **County/Municipal Government Offices**

 Government officials can provide insights on local environmental challenges and needs, serving as experts on the region.

#### Wildlife Habitat Council

WHC Consulting can help design siteappropriate, community-minded education projects through program mapping, activity creation and trainings.





Well-crafted, audience-aware content is the keystone of any education project. With the audience's needs and company's resources in mind, start to develop lessons, activities and curricula.

- Explore resources that can guide content development, such as the materials and trainings offered by <u>Project WET</u>, <u>Project</u>
   <u>WILD</u> and <u>Project Learning Tree</u>. <u>WHC</u>
   <u>Consulting</u> offers project design services, such as curricula and educator trainings, and can help connect companies with additional resources and knowledge partners.
- Consider how to integrate immersive teaching approaches into the activities.

Identify any unique features or operations that can be showcased. Are there are onsite waterbodies, forests or gardens that can be incorporated into lessons? Does the site have the only sand dunes or gorges in the region? Can guests safely view exciting operations like mine blasts or excavation?

Depending on the audience and its interests, there are many lessons that can be incorporated into education experiences. The table below lists suggestions that convey the wide possibilities that exist for education projects. For more in-depth guidance on these and other lessons, contact WHC Consulting.

Lesson Title	Description	Length	Age Group(s)	Learning approach(es)
Be a Seed	Learners act out the stages of the plant life cycle, observe living plants (e.g., grasses, trees, flowers) and plant a seed to take home and observe.	20 minutes	Early childhood	Hands-on, direct observation, sensory-based
Pollinator Tag	This physical game allows learners to act out the roles of pollinators and plants. Through play and movement, learners come to understand the plant life cycle and the role that pollination plays in the process.	15 minutes of active play; 15 minutes of introduction and discussion	Elementary/ Primary School	Kinesthetic
Leaf Pack Water Quality Assessment	Learners obtain preprepared leaf packs, submerged in a local waterway, and open them into shallow buckets of water to look for aquatic macroinvertebrates. Using a key, the learners identify any creatures found and perform species counts. Based on their findings, students assess the quality of the waterway.	15-25 minutes of observation and identification; 20 minutes of introduction, assessment and discussion	Upper Grades	Hands-on, applied learning, direct observation
Nature Hike	Learners embark on a hike together, using orienteering skills, maps and their senses to observe plants, animals, weather and landforms. Can take place at night for a novel experience.	60-90 minutes	Multi- generational	Sensory-based, direct observation, applied learning, social learning





Many programs use employees or community volunteers as lesson leaders. With the right training, anyone interested in environmental education can lead lessons, even with minimal knowledge on the subject matter.

Through these trainings, an education project not only teaches the target audience about the environment, but also informs leaders about environmental topics, learning styles and teaching approaches, compounding the project's educational reach.

Depending on the level of involvement that lesson leaders have, select one of two training strategies:

#### Strategy 1

Employees and volunteers that plan to participate regularly should be given thorough trainings ahead of the event. These trainings should involve an explanation of the subject matter and a run-through of event logistics. Subject matter experts from partner organizations can help develop or lead these training sessions.

#### Strategy 2

For volunteers participating in one-time events (e.g., field trip chaperones, substitute teachers, employees leading celebration event stations), prior trainings are often not realistic. Upon arrival, these participants should be given a brief, verbal overview of the event along with written, step-by-step instructions detailing their duties.





### 8 Purchase or Create Supplies

#### The use of supplies encourages handson learning and can make lessons more engaging. When creating or purchasing supplies, consider the following:

- Supplies used must be appropriate to the audience and subject matter. Suitable tools may include:
  - » Shovels, seedlings and watering cans for planting and restoration events
  - » Lab equipment (e.g., microscopes, water quality kits) for data collection
  - » Maps or species identification guides for hikes
  - » Worksheets or notebooks and writing implements for observation-based activities
- Conducting lessons in outdoor settings can make it difficult to transport, distribute and keep track of supplies. Limit supplies to those that are essential to the activities.
  - » It is not always necessary to include supplies, as the outdoor setting already makes for a unique experience.
  - » Simple supplies such as egg cartons, ID guides and samples of local leaves can provide high levels of engagement without being cumbersome or costly.
- Designate an employee to order, inventory and maintain any supplies used.

- If performing recurring activities, consider the ways that supplies can be reused.
   Doing so will save the project money in the long term, while ensuring that the company is practicing its own message of environmental stewardship.
  - » Worksheets and handouts can be laminated and wiped down at the end of any events.
  - » If students are collecting samples or specimens, avoid single-use containers.
- Wind, rain and bright sunshine can impact the use of supplies. Consider alternate ways of conducting lessons in case of inclement weather.







Once an education project is on-the-ground, it is important to evaluate its outcomes to ensure that the selected activity format, teaching approaches and learning goals are effective, and to determine if any adjustments are needed. Depending on the nature of the programming and the age of participants, there are multiple ways to evaluate a project. In some cases, employing more than one method can be beneficial.

Evaluation Method	Description	Pros	Cons
Open-Ended Journaling/ Reflection	Through writing, drawing or group discussion, participants reflect on what they learned, observations they made and what questions they still have.	Accessible and creative method, particularly for young learners who lack strong reading skills.	Can produce non-standardized results with insights of varying quality, so more effort needed to compare outcomes over time.
Survey	Attendees complete a survey, focused on learning and the event format. Can be given before attendees leave the site or sent to them afterward.	Produces standardized data that can be compared over time. Can concisely cover many aspects of programming.	Participants may feel that taking a survey is an uninteresting end to an experience. May be difficult to receive responses if surveys are completed off-site.
Pre- and Post- assessments	Before and after the event, learners are asked the same set of questions about the subject matter. The questions can solicit opinions or facts and can be asked in writing or verbally. Pre- and post-event responses are then compared.	Produces standardized data that can be compared over time. Directly documents changes in knowledge or opinion that occur as a result of education efforts.	Participants may find written questions unengaging. Verbally asking questions may only elicit responses from the most confident or extroverted learners.
Facilitator Observations	Employees and volunteers make observations about the event's success. They can take notes during/after the event or can meet afterward to debrief together.	Saves participants the time/ effort of providing feedback in potentially tedious ways. Debrief sessions can be a good way to increase team communication.	Does not result in learner feedback. Observations may become less astute as volunteers become more familiar with the project over time. Can be time intensive for volunteers.



### Onduct Ongoing Project Maintenance

#### Continue Learning to Maintain Relevance

Environmental concerns, scientific knowledge and human viewpoints change over time. Once a project has been implemented, the team should stay informed about the subject matter and audience. Regularly review lesson content and delivery with audience members and update activities accordingly. Note any changes in weather patterns, to local habitats or to the population/distribution of species and incorporate that information into lessons.

#### **Assess Attendance Trends**

It is important to keep records of event attendance (e.g., the number of schools hosted per year or quarter; number of individuals that attended each event; hours of learning taking place each year). Over time, look for patterns or trends in participation.

If a **decline** in participation is observed, identify and address the reason(s).

- This may include changing the format/ approach of existing activities, selecting new activities, or holding events during a different time of day or year.
- Speak with any external contacts or former participants and solicit their feedback on how to improve.
- If other companies in the area hold educational events, contact them to determine if they are also seeing lower numbers, or if there is too much overlap

between each organization's offerings.

Consider changes in the community that may have precipitated the decline.
Perhaps a new school was built on a larger property, and access to green space is now less of a concern. If a storm recently came through the area, residents' priorities may have shifted to climate resiliency.
Demographic changes may prompt a move from youth activities to senior-oriented events or call for bilingual programming.
Partners can help identify community changes and ways to adapt.

It is advisable to start an education initiative with a smaller audience and allow it to grow. Then, if there is an **increase** in interest:

- Determine if it is realistic to add more programming, or to welcome larger groups to events. If this is not possible, work with partners to hold activities in other locations. Perhaps a planting event can be moved off-site to a local park.
- A neighboring organization may be interested in holding a joint event across two properties.
- As projects grow in popularity, teams often find it harder to accommodate all interested parties. Strong partnerships are key to expanding and increasing the company's presence within the community.



## Publicize the Project's Success

Communicating the project successes both internally and external increases recognition for the initiative, the company and its employees.

#### **Internal Communications**

Promoting educational programming to other employees attracts new volunteers and can increase overall employee pride in the company. Utilize company newsletters, blogs, intranet, etc.

#### **External Communications**

To improve community relations, an attract attendees for future events, education initiatives should also be : with local media, government offices and environmental groups.

External publicity also enhances a company's reputation and can serve as an extension of corporate biodiversity and sustainability goals.

Tactics can include:

- Contact local newspapers, TV and radio stations and invite them to document the event live, or interview employees and community participants.
- Create an event hashtag and post photos on social media, and ask participants to do the same.



want to learn and what they did learn at the event.

 Submit information for quarterly or annual reports, corporate sustainability reports, biodiversity reporting, etc.





## We know business & biodiversity

## WE'VE BEEN WORKING IN THIS SPACE

### FOR 30+ YEARS

For over three decades, WHC has partnered with corporations, fellow conservation organizations, government agencies and community members to empower and recognize conservation education programs.

Free WHC resources include webinars, blogs, white papers, guides and more.

#### <u>WHC Consulting</u> also offers a variety of services to help companies develop and implement successful STEM education projects, including:

- Recommendations for nature-based STEM activities
- Industry-specific STEM curricula that focus on nature
- Facilitation of collaborative relationships with local school districts and other partners
- Guidance on how to use existing conservation activities for STEM education
- Training for employees and volunteers on hosting and leading education events

### www.wildlifehc.org/consulting