



## **Environmental Educator Certification Program (EECP) Overview & Operations Manual**

While environmental educators come with a variety of backgrounds and work in a variety of settings, there is a core set of characteristics that all qualified environmental educators should possess. The tasks and requirements of the certification process are designed to assess and ensure that all candidates demonstrate aptitude in the areas outlined in this document.

### **Table of Contents**

- I. Introduction
  - A. The Environmentally Literate Louisianan
  - B. Who should get certified?
  - C. Should I get certified?
  - D. How is the EECP good for Louisiana?
  - E. Description of an environmental educator in Louisiana
- II. Requirements for Certification
- III. Fees, Timeline, and Administration
- IV. Program Content
- V. Recertification Process
- VI. Reciprocity

## **Introduction**

The Environmental Educator Certification Program (EECP) draws together stewards and educators of the environment into a structured and effective initiative.

Certification is a public declaration that a certain individual meets a stringent level of requirements and has a specific set of skills. People we rely upon for their knowledge – such as medical assistants, plumbers, firefighters, legal aides – have certification processes within their respective fields. The benefit of an established certification process extends to the individual, the public, and the field itself. Having the EECP enhances the legitimacy of the profession by building a uniform foundation in effectively teaching about the environment. Additionally, through participation in the certification program, educators will expand their professional networks, make important connections across the state, and better understand the full spectrum of environmental education careers available.

### **The environmentally literate Louisiana**

The air, water, land, and organisms of this planet make human life possible. It is imperative that society works toward growing a citizenry of environmentally literate individuals. Louisianans who are thoughtful, critical, and interested in learning about nature and how it functions can make informed decisions that improve the quality of life in their communities. They can assess values, evaluate issues, predict consequences, and make positive changes in the world around them.

**An environmentally literate person** understands ecological systems and how natural processes are interconnected and actively works for sustainable outcomes, considering the impact of their actions today and in the future, and expresses themselves as citizens of their community, country, and planet through voting, civic action, service, and conscientious choices. A world full of environmentally literate individuals can ultimately lead to healthy communities and societies committed to sustainable habits fueled by creative alternatives and a common respect for the resources that sustain us.

In the high tech, fast-paced world in which we live, the role of the environmental educator is increasingly important. The role of an environmental educator is to support the development of environmentally literate citizens. Environmental educators do not tell their audience what to think, but rather guide them in understanding the world around them. They reveal the wonders of this planet and the processes behind it to their students. Environmental educators share the joy of nature, and humanity's place in it. An environmental educator demonstrates place-based best practices in teaching about the environment in an inclusive, experiential, and engaging manner. While we commend and celebrate environmental education in all formats, LAEE believes that environmental education is best optimized in outdoor settings, where students can experience natural systems firsthand. This program has been designed to reflect our commitment to outdoor learning.

### **Who should get certified?**

Anyone who currently teaches about the environment could benefit from becoming a certified environmental educator. You may consider yourself a formal, non-formal, or informal educator. You may teach or want to teach in public or private sectors of education. Examples of professions that may be interested in the certification include, but are not limited to, PreK-12<sup>th</sup> grade schoolteachers, nature center employees, state park interpreters, naturalists, community educators, college professors, and instructors of residential environmental or outdoor science education.

This program has been designed with experienced educators in mind; that is, the EECF should not be your first foray into environmental education, nor do we expect that you are a seasoned veteran. Program participants will need to have completed at least two years (or equivalent) of relevant teaching experience prior to starting the program and are eager to enhance their professional experience and refine their craft.

With such a diverse field, how can we categorize environmental educators into one group, and why would we want to? The answer lies in the benefits that come through certification.

### **Should I get certified?**

The process of certification allows the individual environmental educator to further their understanding of key environmental topics and improve their craft. As candidates go through the certification process, they will find opportunities for personal growth and learning while building professional contacts through shared experiences. Stretching into new comfort zones, learning new skills, developing interdisciplinary thinking, and learning with others will inherently transition to becoming a better educator in whatever role a candidate holds or aspires to achieve. As part of a group of motivated individuals, networking with other environmental educators around the state can also lead to new and exciting employment opportunities. Upon certification, candidates will be recognized for their accomplishments and hence, will experience increased marketability. Certified environmental educators will be viewed as rising leaders in the profession and will be better equipped to make a positive impact in their communities.

### **Description of a Certified Environmental Educator in Louisiana**

While environmental educators come with a variety of backgrounds and work in a variety of settings, there is a core set of characteristics that all environmental educators should possess. The tasks and requirements of the certification process are designed to assess and ensure that all candidates demonstrate aptitude in the following areas:

#### ***A Certified Environmental Educator in Louisiana...***

- Continually strives to improve their skills and knowledge

- Has an awareness of significant events in EE history, current and historical environmental issues, and EE resources within the state of Louisiana
- Teaches and communicates effectively (using research-based best practices) with a diverse audience – for example, with participants who: come from a variety of socio-economic and racial/ethnic backgrounds, have a range of experience and comfort in the outdoors, are of varying ages and developmental levels, etc.
- Exhibits the skills and ability to critically analyze current environmental issues.
- Distinguishes between education and advocacy.
- Demonstrates leadership, professionalism, and collaboration in the EE community.
- Take actionable steps to improve their community.

The characteristics of a certified environmental educator were formulated by the EECF Steering Committee and derived in part from the Core Competencies published by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE) <https://naaee.org/eeepro/resources/certification-based-individuals>

## **Requirements for Certification**

To obtain EE certification, candidates must successfully participate in all program elements and demonstrate competency in the themes outlined below, in addition to completion of a Final Action Project to be presented at LAEE's spring statewide conference.

### Candidate criteria

To be accepted into the program, EECF candidates must meet the following criteria:

- Have completed at least two years of relevant teaching experience.
- Live and work in Louisiana
- Have reliable internet access and access to a computer/tablet.
- Ability to devote an average of 2-4 hours/week to online meetings and program requirements.
- Actively working (or volunteering) in the field of EE

Prior to beginning the EECF program, candidates must:

- complete an application.
- pay the \$25 application fee.

If accepted, candidates must:

- complete a self-assessment.
- agree to and sign an ethics statement, and
- pay the required program fee (self-selected based on need: \$350/\$400/\$450)

### Program Elements:

- **Cohort Participation:** Each participant will select the Monday (3rd Monday of the month from 7-8:30 PM) or Tuesday (3rd Tuesday of the month from 4:30 PM) cohort, comprising approximately 25 members. Meetings will occur once/month over Zoom.
- **Engagement in Online Learning Community:** Group discussions, chat, and digital submission of assignments.
- **Completion of Online Independent Learning:** Examples of assignments include reflections on articles and videos; evidence of completion of learning modules (e.g. online learning modules developed by NAAEE); an exploration of your bioregion; personal reflection on your practices related to social and emotional learning (SEL) and equitable and inclusive teaching practices; lesson plan review and submission; final action project presentation planning, presentation, and report.
- **Professional Development:** For the 2024-2025 program year, LAEE is partnering with UCANR Louisiana Naturalist to offer an asynchronous, condensed version of their Climate Stewards Program to EECP participants. We are also hoping to partner with Project WET to offer a professional development workshop for course participants.
- **Final Community Action Project:** The program will culminate with a project that provides a summary of the skills and knowledge gained and positively impacts the candidate's community. These projects will be presented at or around the spring statewide conference or in an online alternate format.
- **Community Action Project Presentation:** Attendance at the spring statewide conference attendance – at which community action projects are presented – is strongly encouraged; an online presentation alternative will be available. Conference scholarships are available for those who need tuition assistance.
- **Mentorship:** Each participant will be matched with a mentor in the field of EE with whom they will meet monthly virtually (or face-to-face if feasible) in small groups to set professional learning goals and discuss the culminating final project.

## **Fees, Timeline, and Administration**

**Fees:** A \$25 nonrefundable application fee is required. If the applicant is not accepted or misses the enrollment deadline, the application fee may be extended for one year. The cost, or tuition, of participating in the EECP is \$400 on average, with an equity-based scale built in that allows people to pay based on need (chosen voluntarily: \$350 at assisted level, \$400 standard fee, or \$450 as a contributor to help offset costs of those needing financial assistance). The certification includes one year of LAEE membership; conference attendance paid separately.

## Refunds & Incomplete Programs

Incompletes: Candidates that do not complete the certification requirements within the program year are considered “incomplete” and may request an extension for an additional administrative fee to complete the requirements to a satisfactory degree. There is a \$50 administrative fee associated with program extension. Candidates who wish to appeal an incomplete ruling must submit the request in writing. The appeal will then be brought to the steering committee. A refund will not be given to a participant who fails to complete the program.

Refunds: If an enrolled participant withdraws from the program by the refund deadline (September 1st in 2024) with a written request, they can receive a refund of 50% of the enrollment fee. If an organization or agency pays for an employee to participate in the EE Certification Program, and the employee withdraws from the program by the refund deadline, the refund will be applied to the employer, which can be applied to a future program credit. The credit may be used within two years by the employer to pay for another employee to complete the EE Certification Program in Louisiana.

**EECP Timeline:** The program follows the school year, starting in mid-August and concluding in early June.

- **May:** Applications open
- **June:** Applications due along with application fee
- **July:** Applications reviewed, and applicants notified of acceptance; remainder of program enrollment fee due.
- **August:** Cohorts convene virtually.
- **September:** Small mentor groups formed.
- **April/May (date and location TBD):** Culminating community action projects presented at spring statewide conference or in alternate online format; promotion of EECP for future cohort(s).
- **June:** Program concludes; post-program self-assessment and program evaluation completed; certificate of program completion issued.

## Program Content

The EECP content is based on NAAEE’s Guidelines for Excellence, with supplementary components based on Louisiana’s ecology and the diverse needs of our state. Based on [NAAEE’s Guidelines for the Preparation and Professional Development of Environmental Educators](#), candidates will demonstrate proficiency in the following areas:

### Theme 1: Environmental Literacy

Description: Candidates demonstrate skills and understanding outlined in *Excellence in Environmental Education-Guidelines for Learning (K-12)*. 1.1 Questioning, analysis, and interpretation skills

1.2 Knowledge of environmental processes and systems

- 1.3 Skills for understanding and addressing environmental issues.
- 1.4 Personal and civic responsibility

## **Theme 2: Foundations of Environmental Education**

Description: Candidates demonstrate a basic understanding of the goals, theory, practice, and history of the field of environmental education.

- 2.1 Fundamental characteristics and goals of environmental education
- 2.2 How environmental education is implemented.
- 2.3 The evolution of the field

## **Theme 3: Professional Responsibilities of the Environmental Educator**

Description: Candidates demonstrate an understanding of the responsibilities associated with practicing environmental education.

- 3.1 Exemplary environmental education practice
- 3.2 Emphasis on education, not advocacy
- 3.3 Ongoing learning and professional development

## **Theme 4: Planning and Implementing Environmental Education**

Description: Candidates demonstrate the ability to combine the fundamentals of high-quality education with the unique features of environmental education to design and implement effective instruction.

- 4.1 Knowledge of learners
- 4.2 Knowledge of instructional methodologies
- 4.3 Planning for instruction
- 4.4 Knowledge of environmental education materials and resources
- 4.5 Technologies that assisted learning.
- 4.6 Settings for instruction
- 4.7 Curriculum planning

## **Theme 5: Foster Learning & Promoting Inclusivity**

Description: Candidates demonstrate the ability to engage learners in culturally relevant open inquiry and investigation, especially when considering environmental issues that are controversial and require students to seriously reflect on their own and others' perspectives.

- 5.1 A climate for learning about and exploring the environment.
- 5.2 An inclusive and collaborative learning environment
- 5.3 Flexible and responsive instruction

## **Theme 6: Assessment & Evaluation**

Description: Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, abilities, and commitment to make assessment and evaluation integral to instruction and programs.

- 6.1 Learners outcomes
- 6.2 Assessment that is part of instruction.
- 6.3 Improving instruction.
- 6.4 Evaluating programs.

Proficiency will be demonstrated through a combination of:

- Short answer written responses.
- Evidence of course/workshop/module completion
- Letter of recommendation from a supervisor • Final action project: report and presentation
- Participation in monthly full cohort and small group discussions

Course work will vary but expect to spend an average of 4 hours/month on program requirements in addition to the final action project and monthly meetings (one full cohort and one small group).

## **Recertification**

*Recertification is required every five years. For your certification to remain current, you must complete at least two of the following requirements, along with a \$25 administrative fee:*

- ☐ Demonstration of EE best practices in a professional setting such as presenting at an LAEE conference, speaking to a community group, leading a workshop, or training, or formal classroom instruction. Evidence required (such as a training schedule with applicant's name noted, conference schedule, etc.).
- ☐ Documentation of 8 hours or equivalent of additional coursework, certification, or professional development (e.g., additional curricula certification, conference attendance, formal coursework/credit hours).
- ☐ Article published in the LAEE Newsletter or other related publication.

*To ensure recertification, it is encouraged to work toward and document the requirements as an ongoing process during your career as an environmental educator.*

## **Reciprocity**

Louisiana's EE Certification Program is accredited through NAAEE. Reciprocity between other states that are accredited by NAAEE is supported by Louisiana's EECF. To transfer your certificate from an accredited state, you must do the following:

- Provide evidence of current certification
- Complete an assignment on the natural history of Louisiana or submit evidence of competency in this area.
- Sign the Code of Ethics

Once your certification has been transferred to Louisiana, your name will be listed on our website of certified environmental educators and the same recertification requirements apply.



