

The Ocean Literacy Institute Education Fellows Program

A white paper on building a community of educators, innovators, and ocean advocates

Oct 18, 2026 · @Mike

Executive summary

The Ocean Literacy Institute is assembling 15 to 25 Founding Education Fellows to help build ocean education for young people ages 3 to 18. Fellows are educators, scientists, technologists, divers, writers, parents, retired professionals, and anyone else willing to put their experience to work.

We are not recruiting volunteers to fill shifts. We are inviting people to help build something from the ground up: books, curriculum, digital learning, and real ocean experiences grounded in true expedition stories.

Students, parents, and ocean organizations like dive shops, aquariums, and museums have their own ways to join. The only qualification is a willingness to contribute. Participation is flexible, recognition is real, and paid work follows as funding arrives. The first project is already on the table: the *Move Toward the Shark* book series.

Why the ocean, why now

The ocean is the greatest classroom on Earth, and most kids never get to sit in it.

I've spent more than 40 years in the water. Diving with sharks. Navigating underwater caves. Pulling people out as a rescue diver. Every one of those moments taught me something about the ocean and something about myself. The biggest lesson: fear shrinks when understanding grows.

The ocean teaches biology, chemistry, physics, technology, systems thinking, and risk. It also teaches courage, preparation, and calm under pressure. Those are the lessons young people need most right now, and almost nobody is teaching them through real stories from real water.

That's why I founded the Ocean Literacy Institute. And that's why I can't build it alone.

— Mike Hawkins, Founder

What an Education Fellow is

An OLI Education Fellow contributes knowledge, experience, creativity, or professional skill to help young people understand the ocean and what it can teach them.

Fellows form a working community. Together they build learning experiences that connect ocean science, technology, systems thinking, stewardship, exploration, and personal growth.

The qualification isn't a degree or a title. It's a willingness to show up and contribute. That matters for retired professionals, parents, and people with deep real-world experience who never held a teaching credential. They belong here too.

Who we're looking for

The ocean touches nearly every field of knowledge, so the Fellows Program does too. We want a deliberately mixed group.

Background	What they bring
Current educators	Curriculum design, classroom activities, teaching strategy
Retired educators	Mentoring, curriculum development, school relationships
University professors	Research, standards, subject expertise
School administrators	District partnerships, program adoption
Technologists	Digital platforms, apps, AI, interactive experiences
Scientists and marine biologists	Ocean science, ecosystems, research
Engineers	Systems thinking, ocean technology, problem-solving activities
Divers and ocean explorers	Real-world experience, storytelling, field programs
Writers and authors	Books, stories, learning materials
Artists and designers	Illustration, graphics, creative learning
Videographers and media pros	Educational video and documentary work
Business professionals	Partnerships, fundraising, operations
Environmental advocates	Conservation education, stewardship projects
Parents and grandparents	Family learning, community outreach
College students	Research, mentoring, creative projects
Community leaders	Local partnerships, events, student opportunities

The second chapter: retired professionals

Retired educators and professionals may be our greatest asset. They carry decades of experience and relationships. Many don't want a full-time job, but they still want to stay sharp, work with interesting people, and make a difference.

The Fellows Program gives them that. We'll recruit them directly through retired teacher associations, universities, professional organizations, and community groups.

Your career may have changed. Your ability to make a difference hasn't.

Six areas of contribution

Fellows choose where they want to work. Every area produces something real that reaches students.

1. **Education and curriculum.** Books, lesson plans, classroom activities, and teacher guides for ages 3 to 18, aligned to learning standards. The *Move Toward the Shark* series is the natural place to start.
2. **Ocean science and exploration.** Science content, field experience, and conservation activities from people who have been in the water.
3. **Technology and innovation.** Interactive platforms, learning apps, AI-supported tools, simulations, virtual ocean experiences, and data visualization.
4. **Media and storytelling.** Video, interviews, photography, and animation for *Of the Ocean*, our educational media initiative.
5. **School and community engagement.** Relationships with teachers, districts, homeschool networks, youth organizations, dive centers, and local partners.
6. **Student experiences and mentorship.** Snorkeling, introductory diving, marine science fieldwork, conservation projects, technology demos, and career exploration.

Every in-water program runs with qualified partners and clear student safety requirements. Preparation comes first. That's one of the lessons.

Participation levels

Talented people have different amounts of time. We don't ask everyone for a big commitment. Fellows pick one of three levels and can move between them.

Level	What it looks like	Commitment
Contributing Fellow	Occasional projects, reviewing materials, sharing expertise	Flexible
Project Fellow	Owning part of a specific project and its deliverables	Per project
Lead Fellow	Coordinating an initiative or working group	Ongoing, agreed together

These are roles, not pay grades. A Project or Lead Fellow may serve as a volunteer or under a separate, approved paid agreement.

Students, families, and ocean partners

The Fellows Program isn't only for adults with résumés. Students, parents, and ocean organizations each have their own way in.

Student Fellows

High school and college students can join as Student Fellows. They don't just learn about the ocean. They build things for it, and for the kids coming up behind them. Every project is real work with a real audience.

Project ideas:

- **Build an underwater ROV** or ocean sensor and use it in the field
- **Run citizen science:** water quality testing, beach and reef surveys, plastic counts, sargassum tracking
- **Teach younger kids:** read *Move Toward the Shark* to elementary classes and lead the activities
- **Write or illustrate** stories and activity pages for younger readers
- **Make media** for *Of the Ocean*: short videos, podcasts, photo essays
- **Interview ocean professionals** about their careers and publish the series
- **Design an app, game, or data visualization** that teaches an ocean concept
- **Lead a conservation campaign** in their school or town
- **Pilot our materials** and tell us honestly what works

Student Fellows earn recognition, published credit, mentorship from adult Fellows, service hours, and portfolio work for college and career applications. Projects with minors run under parental consent and our safeguarding policies.

Parents and families

Parents don't need a teaching background to make a difference. They know what keeps their kids curious.

- Read the books with their kids and tell us what landed
- Host an Ocean Explorer Club at home, school, or the library
- Bring OLI to their school, PTA, scout troop, or homeschool co-op
- Share their own careers in a classroom visit or video
- Chaperone and support student ocean experiences
- Pilot family learning activities and take-home kits

Ocean partners

We want every organization that lives near, on, or under the water at the table.

Partner	What they can offer
Dive shops	Try-dives, snorkel programs, instructors, equipment know-how
Aquariums	Exhibits, educator staff, field trips, behind-the-scenes learning
Museums and science centers	Venues, exhibits, family events, education expertise
Marine labs and universities	Researchers, field sites, student research opportunities
Surf, sailing, and paddle schools	First experiences on the water, safety training
Marinas, yacht clubs, and charter operators	Boats, access, volunteer captains

Partner	What they can offer
Conservation groups	Stewardship projects, beach cleanups, restoration
Ocean technology companies	Engineers, demos, career pathways, sponsorship
Libraries and youth organizations	Reading programs, clubs, community reach

Partners receive recognition as OLI Ocean Partners (Founding Partners in our first year), co-branded programs, a place on our website and materials, and a direct line to the next generation of divers, scientists, customers, and employees. Every in-water partnership runs with qualified staff and clear safety standards.

What Fellows receive

People commit when they see both the mission and what's in it for them. Fellows receive:

Benefit	What it means
Recognition	Official title of OLI Education Fellow
Founding recognition	Founding Fellow designation for those who join during formation
Visibility	Features on the OLI website, in publications, and in media
Affiliation	The right to list OLI Education Fellow while active
Influence	A real say in what gets built and how
Collaboration	Work alongside educators, scientists, technologists, and ocean professionals
Growth	New skills through education and innovation projects
Publishing credit	Authorship or contributor credit on books, materials, and media
Leadership	The chance to lead projects and working groups
Stipends	Support for designated Fellow work when funding allows
Paid projects	Consideration for compensated curriculum, consulting, teaching, technology, and media work
Ocean experiences	Invitations to appropriate field and ocean activities

How compensation works

We're straight about this from day one. Becoming a Fellow is not employment, and it doesn't guarantee pay. Many early Fellows will contribute as volunteers.

As grants, donations, sponsorships, and program revenue come in, we'll open paid work:

- Project-based stipends

- Curriculum development
- Educational consulting
- Technology development
- Teaching and workshop fees
- Content and media production
- Research and program evaluation

Pay depends on available funding, defined deliverables, qualifications, and our nonprofit financial and conflict-of-interest policies. We won't promise money we haven't raised.

The Founding Education Fellows

In our first year we're forming a single cohort of 15 to 25 Founding Education Fellows. That's big enough for real range of expertise and small enough that everyone knows each other.

Founding Fellows will shape:

- The first curriculum and learning resources
- The *Move Toward the Shark* series and its activities
- The Ocean IQ educational framework
- School and community partnerships
- Student ocean experiences
- Educational technology and media
- How the Fellows Program itself grows

Founding Fellows receive a digital certificate, the permanent Founding designation, recognition on the OLI website, a seat in program-development discussions, and credit in the publications they help create. It costs us little. It means a lot to the people who were there first.

How we recruit, and how to join

We recruit in person first: networking events, school visits, talks, and personal introductions. The goal of a first conversation isn't to explain everything. It's to spark curiosity and get a name and an email.

The conversation

We open with a question, not a pitch: *What if we could use the ocean to teach kids science, technology, critical thinking, courage, and life itself?*

We never close with "Would you like to volunteer?" That sounds like another obligation. Instead we ask, **"Do you know someone who'd enjoy helping build something like this?"** It's easy to answer. And often the reply is, "Actually, that sounds like me."

For specific audiences:

- **Educators:** What would make ocean education more engaging and useful in today's classrooms?
- **Retired professionals:** Do you know retired educators who'd enjoy putting their experience to work on something meaningful?
- **Technologists:** How would you use technology to help kids experience the ocean?

- **Ocean people:** Wouldn't it be great to give a kid an ocean experience they'd never otherwise have?

Joining

Interested people go to the Become an Education Fellow page at OceanLiteracyInstitute.org, reachable by QR code on our handout and business cards. The interest form is short on purpose:

Field	Why we ask
Name and email	So we can follow up
Professional background	To understand your expertise
Areas of interest	To match you with projects
Preferred involvement	Contributing, Project, or Lead
Experience with education or youth	To understand your background with young people
Why are you interested?	To understand what drives you

Formal selection, onboarding, safeguarding requirements, and project assignments come after. First we build the community.

What we do first

Picture a retired fourth-grade teacher, a marine biologist, a software developer, an underwater photographer, and a college student building one ocean lesson together. Or a retired engineer designing an interactive lesson on currents, energy, and systems. Or a veteran diver and a classroom teacher creating a student's first look beneath the surface.

People who would never otherwise work together, building one thing. That mix is what makes OLI different, and it mirrors how the ocean itself works: everything connected.

Our three immediate priorities:

1. **Launch the Founding Education Fellows Program.** Publish the program description, participation expectations, recognition structure, and interest form. State clearly that stipends and paid work depend on funding.
2. **Recruit the first 15 to 25 Fellows.** Balance educators, retired professionals, technologists, scientists, creatives, and ocean people. Look for contributors, not résumés.
3. **Hand them something real to build.** Fellows review the *Move Toward the Shark* books, write teaching guides, design classroom activities, and shape school pilots. People stay when they can see their work becoming real.

The invitation

We're not just building programs. We're bringing together people who want to use what they know to change a young person's life.

We're looking for our first Founding Education Fellows. Maybe that's you, or someone you know.

Bring what you know. Move toward the shark.

Ocean Literacy Institute · [OceanLiteracyInstitute.org](https://oceanliteracyinstitute.org) · info@oceanliteracyinstitute.org

Understand the Ocean. Understand Our World.