

NEE-AC Meeting Summary October 24, 2024

Overview

The National Environmental Education Advisory Council (NEE-AC) held a virtual meeting on October 24, 2024. Mr. Javier Araujo, NEE-AC Designated Federal Officer (DFO), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), led the meeting. Seven NEE-AC members participated in the meeting. Representatives from EPA's Office of Public Engagement and Environmental Education (OPEEE) and members of the public also attended. A list of participants is provided at the end of the meeting summary.

The purpose of the meeting was to make decisions about charge topics that will be highlighted in the Report to Congress on the Status of Environmental Education in the United States for the EPA Administrator. Additionally, the meeting featured presentations from two speakers to provide valuable insights into environmental education.

Meeting Minutes:

Convening of Meeting

Mr. Araujo began the meeting by welcoming the NEE-AC members and EPA participants to the meeting. He thanked the members for their participation and introduced Ms. Clare Trinity, contractor to EPA, to review the Microsoft Teams meeting logistics.

Welcome Remarks

Ms. Jessica Loya, Deputy Associate Administrator, EPA OPEEE, introduced herself to the group, sharing the personal journey that fueled her passion for environmental education. Growing up in Los Angeles, California, she was deeply inspired by an influential teacher, sparking her commitment to this field. Ms. Loya emphasized the vital role environmental educators play in empowering communities. She highlighted that EPA Administrator Michael Regan had recently joined a meeting with the National Environmental Youth Advisory Council, underscoring the critical value of environmental education not only in schools but also in communities and workplaces. Administrator Regan conveyed to Ms. Loya the importance of the NEE-AC's goal to advocate for a thorough understanding of the current state of environmental education and identifying areas for improvement.

Agenda Overview

Ms. Tanya Poole, NEE-AC Chair, NC Wildlife Resources Commission, briefly reviewed the agenda and outlined the meeting's objective of identifying three charge topics for the report on the status of environmental education in the United States.

NEE-AC Members Vote on 3 Focus Areas for NEE-AC Report

At 10:37 AM, a quorum was announced with six NEE-AC members present. A Microsoft Form was shared to allow members to vote on three key focus areas for their upcoming report. The options included:

- Environmental Justice
- Climate Change
- Building Resilience
- Clean Energy
- Clean Transportation
- Clean Water and Related Topics

Members were asked to submit their votes by the end of the presentations.

Presentation 1: Sustainable Schools and Climate Corps Efforts

Presenter: Andrea Falken, Senior Advisor Federal Coordination, American Climate Corps

Overview

Ms. Falken provided a presentation on the Green Ribbon Schools Award, as well as American Climate Corps (ACC) and its initiatives. She highlighted key programs and frameworks aimed at enhancing environmental education and creating pathways for young people interested in climate and sustainability careers.

U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools Recognition Award

This award recognizes schools for excellence in three main areas: reducing environmental impact, improving health and wellness, and enhancing environmental and sustainability education. Schools are nominated by states, and awardees are announced on Earth Day. Selected schools are invited to Washington, D.C., to celebrate.

The American Climate Corps

The ACC focuses on giving young people the tools to fight the impact of climate change, while also learning occupational skills to contribute to the climate-resilience workforce.

ACC Implementation Framework

The ACC leverages three core pillars:

- Establish an American Climate Corps hub at AmeriCorps to facilitate cohesion
- Unite implementing partners across federal programs, grantees, and state climate corps programs
- Build new partnerships and funding opportunities across interagency, labor, and employers

Implementing partners of the ACC include federal agencies, state governments, Tribal entities, and non-profit organizations.

Structure and Requirements for ACC Positions

- ACC roles are term-limited and must provide occupational skills training, including on-the-job training. Job opportunities are available for various demographics, including recent high school graduates.

- Compensation is required, with options for additional in-kind benefits like housing and transportation support.
- At least 60% of ACC roles must be directly climate related.

Program Benefits and Accomplishments

The key benefits include enhanced collaboration, improved recruitment, higher compensation, expanded training opportunities, and pathways into civil service. The accomplishments include a fall tour to promote new partnerships, along with interagency agreements to foster collaboration across sectors.

Q&A Discussion Highlights

Public Service Loan Forgiveness

Dr. Said Sewell asked if the American Climate Corps would link to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program. Ms. Falken responded that while some roles offer noncompetitive eligibility and education awards (up to \$7,000) that can go toward educational expenses or loan repayments, she is uncertain if there is a direct link to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program.

Application Barriers for Green Ribbon Schools

Dr. Rachael Arens raised concerns about the lengthy application process, which could be a barrier for some schools in Nebraska. Ms. Falken explained that states design their applications individually, and some states, like California, require more detail due to high application volumes. To support applicant rates post-COVID, the federal government encourages states to streamline applications where possible. Ms. Falken encouraged Dr. Arens to discuss potential process improvements with Nebraska's Department of Education.

Regional Environmental Education Initiatives

Dr. Arline Bronzaft shared that GrowNYC will be hosting a gardening workshop, with an upcoming event on Governor's Island. Ms. Falken remarked on the positive trend of nominations highlighting gardening, health, and nutrition programs.

Presentation 2: Climate Literacy for All: Looking Back and Forward to the Next Decade of Accelerating Climate Action through Climate Literacy

Presenter: Mr. Frank Niepold, Senior Climate Education and Capacity Building Interagency Working Group Co-Chair, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Overview

Mr. Niepold began his presentation by reflecting on his two decades of work with the Climate Literacy Guide and discussed future strategies to enhance climate action through education. He emphasized the need for comprehensive climate literacy that goes beyond scientific understanding to include actionable skills, hope, and resilience across communities.

History of the Climate Literacy Guide

The Climate Literacy Guide was originally inspired by the Ocean Literacy Guide, published in 2005. The first edition of the Climate Literacy Guide was released in 2007, followed by an update in 2009. It has served as a foundational resource for educators, policymakers, scientists, organizations, and other entities in the U.S. and internationally, shaping climate-related education programs and policies worldwide.

Definition and Scope of Climate Literacy

Mr. Niepold described climate literacy as encompassing an understanding of Earth's systems and the human influence on climate, although he noted that knowledge alone is insufficient for meaningful action. The updated guide aims to expand the definition of climate literacy to include "Transformation Skills," focused on actionable skills and community resilience.

2024 Climate Literacy Document and Transformation Skills Guide

- The upcoming 2024 Climate Literacy Guide and the complementary document, *Transformation Skills Guide*, aim to address climate change through both scientific understanding and practical skills
- These guides have a diverse authorship, including federal agencies, and international programs and organizations, and emphasize the interconnected nature of climate issues across various fields and sectors

Key Changes in Climate Literacy Approach

- A shift from "Climate Science Literacy" to "Climate Literacy," with broader integration of:
 - Local and indigenous knowledge
 - Social and cultural contexts
 - Social sciences
 - Climate justice concepts
 - Climate solutions
- The new framework includes eight focal areas: understanding climate change, causes, impacts, equity, adaptation, mitigation, hope, and urgency.

Listening Sessions for the Update

- More than 21 virtual listening sessions were conducted with diverse participants from different regions, communities, and age groups who provided input.
- Feedback from youth emphasized the need to balance information on climate challenges with actionable solutions, as well as the importance of hope and resilience skills. Mr. Niepold supported this approach, noting research shows that fear-based messaging can lead to inaction, whereas focusing on hope and achievable steps is more effective in motivating climate action.

Skills and Abilities for Climate Literacy

- Key abilities identified include the capacity to access credible information, develop hope and perseverance, foster confidence, and maintain mental wellness in facing climate challenges.
- Collective literacy within communities was highlighted, recognizing that not every individual needs to know everything, but communities can build broad, comprehensive knowledge together.

Q&A Discussion Highlights

Scope of Climate Literacy Content

Dr. Laura Schifter raised concerns about whether the extensive content could overwhelm educators and learners. In response, Mr. Niepold emphasized the need to balance depth with accessibility. He advocated for fostering a collective understanding and collaboration within communities, where individuals can contribute diverse skills. He highlighted that it is unrealistic for anyone to know everything, making collaboration essential for effective climate literacy.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Niepold concluded by stressing that climate literacy is for everyone—not just younger generations. He emphasized the importance of alignment across all age groups to address climate change collectively and effectively.

NEE-AC Members Vote on 3 Focus Areas for NEE-AC Report

The NEE-AC member votes were finalized and the three focus areas are as follows:

- Building Resilience, Environmental Justice, and Addressing Climate Change

Public Comment Period

Ms. Poole opened the public comment period. No comments from the public were made.

Summary and Next Steps

Ms. Poole reopened the discussion, stating that she and Mr. Araujo will send a poll to determine dates for the next meeting, likely to be held in February 2025. She noted that there is consideration of the possibility of meeting in person. The poll will also request that the members choose which topic they would like to focus on.

Adjournment

Mr. Araujo thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.

NEE-AC Meeting Participants

Javier Araujo, NEE-AC DFO, EPA OPEEE

Rachael Arens, NEE-AC Member, Omaha Public Schools

Arline Bronzaft, NEE-AC Member, Quiet Communities Inc.

Victoria Eng, Tetra Tech

Andrea Falken, Senior Advisor Federal Coordination, American Climate Corps

NEE-AC Meeting Summary, October 2024

Rashida Ferdinand, NEE-AC Vice-Chair, Sankofa Community Development Corporation
Avivah Jakob, Director, EPA OPEEE

Jessica Loya, Deputy Associate Administrator, EPA OPEEE

Frank Niepold, Senior Climate Education and Workforce Program Manager and U.S. Global
Change Research Program Climate Engagement and Capacity Building Interagency Working
Group Co-Chair, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration

Kim Noble, Senior Advisor for Environmental Education, EPA OPEEE

Tanya Poole, NEE-AC Chair, NC Wildlife Resources Commission

Marc Rogoff, NEE-AC Member, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Laura Schifter, NEE-AC Member, The Aspen Institute

Said Sewell, NEE-AC Member, Atlanta University Center Consortium, Inc.

Justin Smith, Member of the Public, Maryland Department of the Environment

Clare Trinity, Tetra Tech

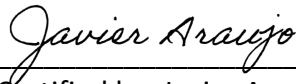
Marissa Wesley, Member of the Public, Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group (IERG)



Certified by: Tanya Poole, NEE-AC Chair

11-5-24

Date



Certified by: Javier Araujo, NEE-AC Designated Federal Official

11-5-2024

Date